

GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Lesson 29. (Gen chapter 40:1 – 41:56). For lesson copies, go to <http://www.montgomerychurch.org/resources8.html>

Introduction/Review: In Genesis, Scripture shows the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Genesis chapters 12-36) raise up a people (Israel), and empower the 3 Patriarchs to accomplish His Purpose. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all heed God’s Call; even though their responses were often by their own means and in their own way. The story continues through the life and (mis)fortunes of Jacob’s/Israel’s favorite son, Joseph. The initial picture of him is as a teenage spoiled brat who tattles on his brothers and has dreams picturing him as superior to both his elder siblings and his parents – character traits which annoy his brothers so much that they plot to kill him (37:18). They ultimately sell him into slavery after which they deceive their father about Joseph’s supposed “demise” and their part in it (37:25-36). Change begins. The Joseph who is a slave in Egypt differs greatly from the earlier picture. He no longer seems content to elevate himself. Now, he is concerned with the fortunes of others. His transformation is influenced partly by circumstance, but most importantly by God who is with him but never speaks directly to him.

Re-read 39:20-23 for context and then read chapter 40 completely through: Note particularly the relationship between Joseph and God, and how and why Joseph is regarded highly by others.

- **In 39:20-23**, what happens in and through Joseph as a consequence of God’s favor upon Joseph? Have similar transformations occurred in your family or among people you know? Discuss.
- **In 40:1-8**, Joseph, once a self-centered dreamer, is now pictured very differently. What difference, if any, do you discern in Joseph? Why do you think this is happening? Discuss.
- **In 40:9-23**, Joseph interprets two dreams. In the ancient world, it was often assumed that a key criterion to distinguish idle dreams from dreams with a larger significance was whether a dream came singly or in pairs. Only dreams that occurred in pairs were considered to carry a larger significance – a point reinforced by Joseph himself when he becomes an interpreter of Pharaoh’s dreams (read 41:32).
 - What evidence shows Joseph is capable of accurately interpreting dreams?
 - What does Joseph ask of the chief cupbearer (verses 14-15) and what does the cupbearer do (verse 23)?
 - What significance do you think these events have? Briefly discuss.

Read 41:1-13: Now Pharaoh has two dreams, somewhat bizarre but thematically consistent. In both the obviously weaker and inferior overcome and dominate the stronger and superior. What happens according to these verses?

Read 41:14 - 44: Joseph is called from prison to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams. Note that he goes beyond his call, even to be so bold as to offer advice to Pharaoh. Before, he interpreted the baker’s and cupbearer’s dreams and had issued a plea (40:14-15) which was forgotten (40:23).

- What does Joseph tell Pharaoh about the dreams and what advice does he give?
- As Joseph’s circumstances dramatically change, note the description in 41:42; compare it with the described return of the “prodigal son” in Luke 15:21-24. What strikes you about the comparison, and what, if anything, do you make of it for yourself? Discuss.
- Re-read 41:15-16, 25, 28, 32, 37-38. In the midst of dire circumstances, Joseph’s life is blessed and other blessings accrue as well. What strikes you about Joseph and his relationship to God now? How does any of this apply to your life, or does it? Discuss.

Read 41:45-56: Joseph rises to great power and Pharaoh (not God) renames Joseph with an Egyptian name and gives him an Egyptian bride. Joseph has two sons whom he gives *Hebrew* names to: Manasseh (*menashsheh* – “causing to forget”) and Ephraim (*ephraim* – “fruitful”).

- According to these verses, how does Joseph appear to view his life? What lesson can you draw for your own lives? Discuss.