

Genesis

Creation, Covenants, All Grace — study 27



LOWLY to LORD

HOW TO IMPRESS EVEN A PAGAN (40:1-23)

40:1-8 How is Joseph's faith in prison?

(1) He was no sooner in prison than he discovered how interesting a place a prison could be. He quickly adapted himself to his new surroundings, and the same qualities which won for him the stewardship in the house of the captain of the guard, raised him as high in Pharaoh's state prison. All the prisoners were committed to his charge, and the keeper trusted him absolutely (vv.22,23). Joseph is the kind of youth who, as if by a law of nature, always seems to come out at the top. Submerge him, and he is soon on the crest of the wave again. His buoyancy seems almost miraculous; yet most of the qualities by which such a man rises and prospers in the world are perfectly imitable -- brave-heartedness, honesty, patience, the love of hard work, the abiding sense of responsibility to God, the unshakable conviction that life means something intense and something good. -- **James Strahan**, *Hebrew Ideals in Genesis* p.297

(2) ... that the keeper of the prison, having laid aside his cruelty, acted with kindness and gentleness, was a change which proceeded from God, who governs the hearts of men according to his own will. ... Joseph seemed to

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God "governs the hearts of men according to his own will ... he has wonderful methods of working hidden from our view."

When, then, do we fear men?



himself to be buried in perpetual oblivion, until the Lord again suddenly rekindles the light which had been smothered, and almost extinguished. Thus, when he might have delivered the holy man directly from prison, he chose to lead him around by circuitous paths, the better to prove his patience, and to manifest, by the mode of his deliverance, that he has wonderful methods of working hidden from our view. He does this that we may learn not to measure, by own sense, the salvation which he has promised us; but that we may suffer ourselves to be turned hither or thither by his hand, until he shall have performed his work. -- **John Calvin**, *Genesis Vol.2* p.303,305

40:9-23 How does Joseph compare to fortune-tellers? (Deut. 12:1-4 -- what is the TEST of a spirit; cf. Deut. 18:9-22; 1 John 4:1-3)

(3) That Joseph did not keep back so crushing an interpretation, is a proof on the one hand of his Divine certainty, and on the other of the courage which was combined with his truthfulness; in any case, he would feel that it was well for the unhappy man to be prepared for the worst. -- **Franz Delitzsch**, *New Commentary on Genesis* p.292

(4) Despite the fact that Israel shared with its pagan neighbours a belief in the reality of dreams as a medium of divine communication, it never developed, as in Egypt and Mesopotamia, a class of professional interpreters or a dream literature. In the entire Bible, only two Israelites engage in the interpretation of dreams -- Joseph and Daniel -- and significantly enough, each serves a pagan monarch, the one in Egypt, the other in Mesopotamia, precisely the lands in which oneiromancy flourished. Moreover, in each case, the Israelite is careful to disclaim any innate ability, attributing all to God. Nor does skill at dream interpretation play any part in the definition of biblical wisdom or the equipment of prophet and sage. -- **Nahum M. Sarna**, *Understanding Genesis* p.218

(5) See what a modest representation he makes of his own case. He does not reflect upon his brethren that sold him ... Nor does he reflect on the wrong done him in this imprisonment by his mistress that was his persecutor, and his master that was his judge ... when we are called to vindicate ourselves, we should carefully avoid as much as may be speaking ill of others, ... **John Wesley**, *Notes on the Bible* p.57

Among the people of God, dream interpretation never has the status of science, never does it become a profession

POWERS BEYOND EVEN A PHARAOH (41:1-32)

41:1-13 A true prophet does not necessarily profit as quickly as a false one. Can we detect God's providence even in the 2-year memory lapse of the chief butler?

(6) All history fulfills God's plans for His children. God is training those who are to be associated with His Son in the government of the universe. This is far

more important than the movements of armies and the rise and fall of civilizations. The life of every citizen of the world moves in a pattern which men call chance, or which they think is the result of their own choices. Actually, God is performing wonders on behalf of those who were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. The offenses of a butler and a baker were planned with the welfare of Joseph in view. -- **Donald Grey Barnhouse**, *Genesis Vol.2* p.173



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"God's time for the enlargement of his people will appear, at last, to be the fittest time."

(7) God's time for the enlargement of his people will appear, at last, to be the fittest time. If the chief butler had at first used his interest for Joseph's enlargement and had obtained, it is probable he would have gone back to the land of the Hebrews, and then he had neither been so blessed himself nor such a blessing to his family. But staying 2 years longer, and coming out upon this occasion to interpret the King's dreams, way was made for his preferment. -- **John Wesley**, *ibid*.

41:14-32 What attributes that belong only to the true God will be demonstrated if Joseph's predictions are vindicated? (cf. John 14:29;15:24)

(8) Osiris was to the Egyptians the God of the Nile, whose symbol was the bull ... and Isis-Hathor the goddess of the fertile and all-

nourishing earth, whose symbol, the cow, ... was also that of the moon and the lunar year -- hence the interpretation of the kine by fruitful and unfruitful years, according to the favour or disfavour of the Nile, was an obvious one; but it needed Joseph's divinely attested insight into the future, to answer not only for this apparently obvious and simple interpretation, but also for the results of fourteen years. -- **Franz Delitzsch**, *op. cit.*, p.298

FROM PIT TO PALACE (41:33-57)

41:33-39 Must one have the Spirit of God in order to recognize the hand of God? (A pertinent factor in considering systems of apologetics)

(9) Then, there are numerous titles that are well known in Egypt. Such titles as we find in Genesis 40:2, "the chief of the butlers" and "the chief of the bakers," are well known as the titles of certain palace officials in Egyptian writings. Joseph's designation as "overseer over his house" (Gen. 39:4) is also a title often used of officers in Egyptian noble houses. After Joseph's elevation to a place of real prominence in Pharaoh's court, the titles ascribed to him in the Bible are thoroughly Egyptian. Among these we may note "lord over my [Pharaoh's] house" (Gen. 41:40), "ruler throughout all the land of Egypt" (Gen. 45:8), "father to Pharaoh" (Gen. 45:8). ... Various items of court procedure give

us further evidence of an intimate knowledge of the Egyptian background. Joseph's elevation to an honoured position in Egypt as we have it in the Bible follows the pattern of procedure in the Egyptian court. -- **J.A. Thompson**, *The Bible and Archaeology* pp.44,45

41:40-45 Can Joseph's example justify marriage to non-believers?

(10) The naturalising was completed by his marriage to Asenath (supposed to mean 'One belonging to the goddess Neith'), a daughter of a high officer of state, Poti-phaera (meaning, like its shortened form, Potiphar, 'The gift of Ra' the sun-god). Such an alliance placed him at once in the very innermost circle of Egyptian aristocracy. ... But should not Joseph's religion have barred such a marriage? The narrator gives no judgment on the fact, and we have to form our own estimate. But it is not to be estimated as if it had occurred five or six centuries later. The family of Jacob was not so fenced off, nor was its treasure of revelation so complete, as afterwards. We may be fairly sure that Joseph felt no inconsistency between his ancestral faith, which had become his own in his trials, and this union. He was risking a great deal; that is certain. Whether the venture ended well or ill, we know not. Only we may be very sure that a marriage in which a common faith is not a strong bond of union lacks its highest sanctity, and is perilously apt to find that difference in religious convictions is a strong separator. -- **Alexander Maclaren**, *Expositions: Genesis* p.258

41:46-57 How does Joseph measure up as a Jehovah's Witness? (40:8; 41:16,25,28,32,38,39,51,52 -- why is this consistent pattern appropriate to the setting?)

(11) Already the former unwonted fertility, which showed Joseph to have been a true prophet, had procured for him a name and reputation; and in this way the Egyptians had been restrained from raising any tumult against him. -- **John Calvin**, *op. cit.*, p.333

Every great oak
begins life in
the dirt

(12) There is the very spirit of romance in the idea of the transformation of the dreamy Hebrew boy into the keen, bold Egyptian governor -- the greatest statesman of his time. So others have risen: David rose from the sheepcote to be the greatest king of his time, Elisha from the plough to be the greatest prophet of his time, Peter from the fishing boat to be the greatest apostle of his time. Luther from the miner's hut to be the greatest reformer of his time, Bunyan from the tinker's kitchen to be the greatest seer of his time, Livingstone from the weaver's loom to be the greatest missionary of his time, Lincoln from the tanner's yard to be the greatest statesman of his time. 'The age of romance has not ceased; it never ceases; it does not, if we think of it, so much as very sensibly decline.' But the noblest of those whose names have been inscribed on the temple of fame have not sought for fame; they have simply done the will of God and loved their fellow-men, and honour has been thrust upon them. --**James Strahan**, *op. cit.*, p.304