

**Joseph. Adamsdown. 31 March 2009.**

**Read : Gen. 39. 7-10; 40. 20-41. 1a.**

Last week we briefly considered number six in the chain of ten links of divine providence which brought Joseph from the house of Jacob in Canaan to the very highest position open to him in all Egypt – and we left young Joseph in the house of Potiphar, having recently arrived there as a slave.

And so, to link number seven – namely ...

#### **7. The wickedness of Potiphar's wife, Gen. 39. 7-18.**

As a result, we are told, of the Lord's presence and blessing, over an unspecified period of time, Joseph rose from being one of Potiphar's household servants to being the 'overseer' – or chief steward – over the entire household. I say 'unspecified period of time' because we are not told how much time elapsed between the various events recorded in chapters 39 and 40.

We know only (i) that Joseph spent thirteen years in all either in Potiphar's house or in Potiphar's prison – for Joseph was, we are told, seventeen years of age when he was taken to Egypt, Gen. 37. 2, and thirty years of age when he stood before Pharaoh – that is, when he began to serve Pharaoh, Gen. 41. 46 – and we know also (ii) that, according to Gen. 41. 1, he interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's chief butler and chief baker two years before he appeared before Pharaoh.

In all likelihood, Joseph spent several years in Potiphar's house before he was made overseer, several years as overseer before Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce him – repeatedly attempted to seduce him – which attempts themselves covered an undefined period, v. 10 – and the remainder of the thirteen years in prison.

All went well, until the day came when, according to verse 7, Potiphar's wife 'cast her eyes on' Joseph – that is, until she 'looked with desire' on him.<sup>1</sup> And I note that the Holy Spirit links this attraction with two pieces of information. First, that of Joseph's physical appearance. For he was, we are told in the verse immediately before, 'a goodly person, and well favoured' – that is, he was well-built and good-looking.

And, second, that Potiphar's wife was first attracted to Joseph only 'after these things' – namely, after Joseph's rise to power and position. It is unlikely, I guess, that Potiphar's wife would have shown any interest in a common slave – in a mere household servant. But a man who had great leadership abilities and high position – and very good looks to boot ... well, that was something else!

Now, Mrs. Potiphar may have been the wife of one of the highest ranking officials in all Egypt, but I can tell you, she was certainly no lady!

Rather interestingly, this part of the story about Joseph throws into reverse stories earlier told of Abraham. For, according to chapters 12 and 20, previously it was the good looking wife of the patriarch who was sought by a foreign ruler – namely Sarah by both Pharaoh and Abimelech – whereas now it is Joseph – the good looking patriarch<sup>2</sup> – who is himself sought by the wife of a foreign high ranking official from the royal court.<sup>3</sup>

And so, in the case of Potiphar's wife – as with so many – sin attempted to let itself in through the windows of the eyes. As you will recall, the very same sin succeeded admirably with King David – when he was not 17 years of age as Joseph – but when he was about 50 years of age – in the sad Bathsheba-Uriah incident recorded in 2 Samuel 11 – when, in rapid succession, David looked at, lusted for, and lay with another man's wife – when he, metaphorically speaking, 'fell from the roof'.<sup>4</sup>

And Joseph's response to Mrs. Potiphar's overtures and offer of sharing her bed? 'He refused!' There was no hesitation – no dallying – no messing. And he resisted her temptation with even greater determination than she showed in tempting him. I note that the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus got carried away a little when writing up this story: 'When the woman had said this, with tears in her eyes', he wrote, 'neither did pity turn Joseph from his chastity (his purity and virtue), nor did fear compel him to comply with her ...'.<sup>5</sup> Now, the Bible says nothing of her tears or his pity. 'Fear'? No doubt, it was dangerous for any man to cross this particular female. But Joseph will not let any dread of offending her – nor will he allow any sense of flattery that she should find him attractive – move him. 'He refused'.

And the Holy Spirit shares with us in verses 8 and 9 the two principal – and, for Joseph, all-powerful – considerations which weighed heavily with him.

The first concerned his master – and the trust which he (Potiphar) placed in him – and the second concerned his God – against whom he saw such an action as 'sin'.<sup>6</sup>

First, as we read, Joseph made it clear to his temptress, 'Behold, my master ... has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife'.

First, then, Joseph felt indebted to his master for the unqualified confidence which he had placed in him. Joseph felt this keenly – and had no intention whatever of betraying Potiphar's trust in him.

I know that Potiphar was himself indebted to Joseph for a great deal. For I read back in verse 5 that 'the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in the house and in the field'. I have no idea how much Potiphar had paid the Arabian traders for young Joseph – although I guess rather more than the twenty pieces of silver they had paid for him – but I know that the payment – whatever it was – proved the best investment Potiphar ever made!

God had said to Abraham long before, 'in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed', Gen. 12. 3, and God's word received an early – though, of course, only a partial – fulfilment in Potiphar's family through Abraham's great-grandson.

But Joseph would never have given a moment's thought to how much his master owed to *him* – what mattered to Joseph was how much he owed to *his master*.

And I guess that, were the whole story told, Joseph owed Potiphar more than his current high position of responsibility and trust. For, I think we must assume that it was in Potiphar's house that the young Hebrew slave first learnt the Egyptian language and culture, together with the elements of successful business administration – including that of agricultural management – I have my eye on the reference to 'the field' in verse 5.

And we can only imagine how far, in God's good providence, all of this served to fit and equip Joseph for his future role as 'governor over Egypt', Acts 7.10 – when he would be responsible for administering the agricultural policy for the whole empire.<sup>7</sup> Yes, the time Joseph spent in 'the Potiphar Prep. School' served him in very good stead later! Well did William Cowper write, 'God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform'.

But back to the ranch – or, more accurately, to Joseph's reaction to the immoral suggestion made by Potiphar's wife.

Joseph regarded any physical relationship with his master's wife as a breach of trust – as treachery against his master. As far as he was concerned, his business in life was to manage the affairs of Potiphar's *household* – not to have an affair with Potiphar's *wife*!

'He has not kept back anything from me', Joseph said, 'but you, because you are his wife'. She may esteem her marital status lightly. Joseph doesn't.

It seems that Potiphar's wife was one of only two things in Potiphar's whole house which Joseph was not allowed to touch. Verse 6 had spoken of the other – 'he (Potiphar) left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate' – probably meaning that Potiphar's food was the only area of household administration which was not entrusted to Joseph – and this, not because of any fear on Potiphar's part of being poisoned, but on account of Egypt's strict dietary rules – and I note the comment made later – in chapter 43 – that 'the Egyptians ate by themselves because the Egyptians could not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination', Gen. 43. 32.<sup>8</sup>

And I cannot help smiling when I read at the close of chapter 41 that, 'when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. And Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, 'Go to Joseph ...', Gen. 41. 55. Did Potiphar then remember how there had been a time he wouldn't trust the 'bread' in his house to Joseph!

But if disloyalty to his master was a factor in Joseph's resolute refusal to sleep with Potiphar's wife, another factor was of even greater importance to him. 'How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?', he wanted to know. And I note that he called her vile suggestion by its proper – and ugly – name – 'wickedness'.

Some may label it 'just a moment of *weakness*' – to Joseph it is an act of 'great *wickedness*'. And what is more, it would be a sin against God! Joseph recoils with horror at the very suggestion. Sometime later, he will say to his brothers, 'I fear God', Gen. 42. 18. And he did – Joseph didn't fear Potiphar's wife – but he did fear his God. Joseph may not have known Proverbs 8. 13, 'The fear of the Lord is to hate evil' – but he certainly lived his life on that principle. And speaking of 'principle', we note that, whereas Potiphar's *wife* was ruled by *passion*, Joseph's *life* was ruled by *principle*. To her, an illicit affair may be great fun – to him, it was great sin.

Maybe you sometimes struggle with knowing the will of God for your life. Well, I cannot help you with any of the details, but I *can* tell you, in the words of 1 Thessalonians 4. 3, that 'this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality'!

*Ethically*, then Joseph refuses to violate Potiphar's trust – and, *spiritually*, he refuses to violate God's standard.

And, in so doing, he stands in marked contrast to the other son of Jacob who dominates the previous chapter. I refer to Judah – who, as the euphemism runs, 'went in to' a foreign woman he believed at the time to be a prostitute, Gen. 38. 18 – in contrast to his young brother who steadfastly refused to 'go in to' a foreign woman who he knew to be married. And, although in both cases personal articles were left behind with the women – and were later produced as evidence to incriminate the brothers – there the similarity ended – for, while Judah was guilty as charged, Joseph was entirely innocent!<sup>9</sup>

But Joseph may as well have told the sun to stop shining as tell Mrs Potiphar that he wasn't interested. And she persisted – and did she! 'Day by day' is the language of verse 10.

But verse 10 speaks not only of the persistence showed by an evil woman, but of the precautions taken by a virtuous young man.<sup>10</sup> For 'he did not heed her', we read, 'to lie with her *or to be with her*'. And, as far as he was able, Joseph avoided not only her bed, but her company.<sup>11</sup> As one of the Puritans put it, 'he that would not hear the bell, must not meddle with the rope'!<sup>12</sup>

Our Lord Jesus made it clear on more than one occasion that, if we wish to avoid sin, we must, as far as in us lies, avoid temptation – no matter how costly that may prove! 'If your right eye causes you to stumble', He said, 'gouge it out and fling it from you' ... and so on!<sup>13</sup> Believe me, none of us are as strong as we think we are. 'Let him who thinks he stands ... ' and so on!<sup>14</sup>

But on one occasion Joseph was cornered. 'It happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside, that she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me. But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside'.

This was not the time for Joseph to try to argue himself out of the situation. Frankly, there are times when it is best to think with your feet – and this was one of them.

'Flee fornication' – flee sexual immorality – Paul wrote to the Corinthians in chapter six of his first epistle, 1 Cor. 6. 18. In verse 9 of the *previous* chapter, he had said, 'I wrote to you ...not to company with fornicators' – which, many years ago, I noticed, with some amusement, is rendered in the New English Bible, 'you must have nothing to do with loose livers'. I'm serious – that's how that version translates Paul's words. The mind boggles!

And when Joseph – quite literally – 'fled' from temptation to immorality, we read, 'he left his garment in her hand'. But, though Joseph left his coat, he retained something infinitely more valuable – his character. And surely, as one commentator of long ago wrote, 'Better to lose a good coat than to lose a good conscience'.<sup>15</sup>

And so, for a second time, Joseph is stripped of his clothes. Earlier, the *envy* of his brothers had stripped him of his distinctive tunic – now the *lust* of Potiphar's wife's strips him of his loose outer garment.

Which brings us to link number 8 ...

## 8. The injustice of Potiphar's decision, 39. 19-23.

And, if Joseph's tunic was used by his brothers to hide and cover up their sin, his outer garment is used by Potiphar's wife to hide and cover hers. For although, without doubt, there is something here of the 'rage of a woman scorned' – that, in part, she planned to avenge herself on Joseph for his rebuffing of all her advances – she now finds *herself* in something of a corner – having Joseph's garment as evidence to incriminate her. And so, in part at least, to divert suspicion from herself, she launches a pre-emptive strike – going on the offensive by raising an outcry against him.

And, just as once Joseph's tunic had been used to deceive his father into believing he was dead when he wasn't, so now his garment is used to deceive his master into believing he is guilty when he isn't.

We do not have time to expand on it, but it is interesting to follow the thread which runs through chapters 37 to 39.

In chapter 37, Jacob is deceived – and Joseph's coat is produced as evidence.

In chapter 38, Judah is deceived – and his signet and staff are produced as evidence.

Now, in chapter 39, Potiphar is deceived – and Joseph's robe is produced as evidence.

In each of these chapters then, key characters are deceived. And, in each case, they (Jacob, Judah and Potiphar) are compelled to recognise certain personal items – items by which other key characters are identified – and by means of which, in each case, cleverly planned schemes prove successful.

But here in our story, the young man, who has earlier suffered trials of slavery and of temptation, must now suffer the further trial of false accusation and of slander.

Last week, I commented on Potiphar's status as 'Chief of the Executioners' – with the authority, no doubt, to execute anyone proved guilty of serious crime. And that *in itself* bode ill for Joseph! The more so given that the normal fate of a servant who sexually assaulted his master's wife in Egypt *would be execution*. And yet ... and yet, remarkably, we read that Potiphar only 'took him, and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were bound', Gen. 39. 20.

Why? – I wonder. Ancient historians assure us that the chastity of Egyptian women was in bad repute from time immemorial.<sup>16</sup> And it may well be that Potiphar had some doubt about his wife's version of the story, and so was relatively lenient in the punishment he meted out to Joseph. Certainly, imprisonment was a *very moderate* punishment if Potiphar had believed Joseph guilty.

But, even if Potiphar *was* suspicious of his wife's role in what had happened, he was in no position to disprove her accusations – and, in any case, could hardly be expected to relish the shame which her guilt would bring upon him – and, after all, he did hold a very important post in the palace!

All that remained was for him to remove his highly efficient and effective business manager! And so Potiphar cast Joseph into prison<sup>17</sup> – and his wife into history!

So Joseph is taken off to *that* prison where, as it says, 'the king's prisoners were bound' – which prison appears, for reasons I have no time to explain in full, to have been on Potiphar's own property. Suffice to say that the word translated 'prison' is unique to this section – and that this particular prison is described in verse 3 of the next chapter as 'the house of the captain of the guard' ... and we all know who that was. Yes, Potiphar. And it was, according to verse 4 of that chapter, the same 'captain of the guard' who himself later assigned the chief butler and chief baker to Joseph's care in that prison.

Which may explain why – apart, of course, from the 'favour' which the Lord gave Joseph in his eyes – why 'the keeper of the prison' – the prison superintendent or governor – so readily placed the running of the prison under Joseph's charge. Joseph may have been very well known to the man.

But whatever personal – and natural – reasons *Potiphar* had for sparing Joseph's life, you and I cannot fail to detect an unseen hand at work. For, given the big story which we outlined in our first study, young Joseph was effectively immortal till his work was done.

And we note that that unseen hand not only restrained Potiphar's anger – which we are told 'was kindled' – that is, it 'glowed', v. 19 – but directed him in the choice of prison – to *that* prison 'where the king's prisoners were bound'. And I don't need to tell you just how critically important that little detail is to prove!

For, although neither Potiphar nor Joseph knew it, Joseph was there in that prison to keep a divinely-fixed appointment!

A divinely-fixed appointment which will form the next link in the chain which will take Joseph to the top job in all Egypt – when the young man who let go his outer garment rather than sin against God will be clothed in fine linen robes, according to chapter 41 verse 42 ... when the young man who lost his good name (in preserving his character) will, according to verse 45 of that chapter, be given a new name – 'Zaphenath-Paaneah' – probably meaning something like 'Sustainer of Life', ... when the young man who forfeit his position as 'overseer' in Potiphar's house, Gen. 39. 4, will be made, in the words of Stephen in Acts 7, 'governor over ... all' Pharaoh's house, Acts 7. 10

And meanwhile, as we read twice in the opening verses of our chapter concerning Joseph's time in the house of Potiphar, 'the Lord was with him', Gen. 39. 2-3, so now we again read twice concerning Joseph's time in the prison, 'the Lord was with him', vv. 21, 23.<sup>18</sup>

But, though God is with him, we could hardly criticize Joseph, could we, if now, with, according to Psa. 105. 18, his feet hurt by his fetters, and lying in irons, he should be asking, 'What price my dreams now?'

But, speaking of dreams ... to link number nine ...

**9. The falling from favour of Pharaoh's chief butler and chief baker, Gen. 40. 1-4.**<sup>19</sup>

... as we sit in as observers on what *for Joseph* was a totally unexpected meeting with two of Potiphar's former colleagues – with two other of Pharaoh's high-ranking officials, that is. And I stress that Joseph's encounter with the two men was unexpected *by him*, because you and I know that, in the unfailing providence of God, the three men had converged on this particular prison right on schedule!

When it is said that the two men had 'offended' Pharaoh this reads literally that they had 'sinned' against him – that is, they had both been guilty of some crime against the king. And since the baker and butler were responsible for all that Pharaoh ate and drank – and since there is no mention of any others being put into prison with them at the time – it seems most likely that their crimes had something or other to do with Pharaoh's table.

Joseph's attitude towards the two men provides us with a window onto another of his lovely character traits – namely, his sensitive and caring nature. 'Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and, behold, they were sad. And he asked ... saying, Why are your faces sad today?' And, when they answered, 'We have each dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter', he said to them, 'Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me', Gen. 40. 6-8.

The men were troubled because the Egyptians regarded dreams and their interpretation as carrying great significance. And, indeed, in this particular instance, we know that these dreams *did* have great significance for the two men – and that the dreams could be traced back to God Himself – because they paved the way, in His time, for Joseph to stand before Pharaoh himself.

And I have no doubt that the two dreams rehearsed by the butler and baker must have brought to Joseph's mind the two dreams which he had had long before as a lad in the land of Canaan – for we know that he remembered his dreams very clearly when he saw his brothers again for the first time in chapter 42, v. 9.

And, in asking the chief butler, when restored to Pharaoh's favour, to do one – a favour, that is, for him – for Joseph – namely, to 'remember me when it is well with you, and show kindness to me, and mention me to Pharaoh', Gen. 40. 14 – in asking the chief butler to do him this favour, Joseph was, in effect, hoping to help on the fulfilment of his own dreams.<sup>20</sup> Not, of course, that it is wrong to use lawful means to achieve God's purpose – after all, God does it all the time!

But, in this particular case, it was premature – a little, I guess, like Moses attempting to liberate Israel from Egypt some forty years too early, Acts 7. 25 – before the close of the 400 year period of which God had spoken, and before the iniquity of the Amorites – the Canaanites – was full, Gen. 15. 13-16. Fortunately for Joseph, he would not – as Moses – have to wait a further *forty* years before God's clock would strike.

But he would have to wait *two*. Which brings us to the last link in our chain ...

#### 10. **The memory of the chief butler**, Gen. 40. 20-23; 41. 9-13.

According to Joseph's interpretation of their dreams in verses 13 and 19 of chapter 40, in three days time both the chief butler and the chief baker were to have their heads 'lifted up' – but with the all-important difference that in the baker's case, his head would be lifted up from off him, v. 19 – that is, whereas the butler would be reinstated, the baker would be decapitated.

And happily for the butler – but unhappily – for the baker – Joseph's interpretation of both dreams proved accurate – in the case of the baker, you could say, *deadly* accurate.

But, given that it was only the butler who played any further role in the story, we may wonder why God, in His providence, caused the baker to be there in the prison and to dream as well. But the answer lies surely in that the equally correct – though very different – interpretation of the chief baker's dream was necessary to convince the chief butler that the interpretation which Joseph gave of his own (the butler's) dream was not just an inspired and lucky guess. This perception of the chief butler became critical, of course, later when he spoke to Pharaoh on Joseph's behalf.

But, alas for Joseph, the chapter ends with the statement, 'Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph' – or, as paraphrased in the Good News Bible, he 'never gave Joseph another thought' – 'but he forgot him' – and, as the opening verse of the next chapter tells us, there would be *no further action* for 'two full years' – and I guess, as the days, the weeks, the months dragged by – those years must have seemed virtually endless to Joseph.

Did he never ask, in the words of David in Psalm 6, 'O Lord, how long?' It all seemed so unfair. First, the betrayal of his brothers ... then, the false accusation of Potiphar's wife ... then, the injustice of Potiphar ... and now, the ingratitude of the butler ... is there no end to this tunnel?

Did he never ask, 'Lord, why were the butler's and baker's dreams fulfilled in just three days, and mine have remained unfulfilled for now well over 11 years?' Lord, what price my dreams now?

Oh, its all very well for you and me – we can race from the beginning of chapter 37 to the end of chapter 41 – we can race from Pit to Prison to Palace – but it was no race for Joseph! Joseph wasn't able to 'fast-forward' the tape!

But, please, we must recognise that it was the same happy Providence which brought Joseph into contact with the man able to speak to Pharaoh for him, which caused that man to forget him!

For, *had* the butler remembered and spoken up on Joseph's behalf earlier, the very most Joseph could have hoped for at the time was for his release. And I note that Joseph exposed the limit of his horizon when he requested the butler 'mention me to Pharaoh, and *bring me out of this house*'.

But you and I know that God had far bigger – better – more exciting – plans for Joseph than that. When the butler had first been reinstated, Pharaoh would have had absolutely no reason to confer any dignity on Joseph. Yes, the dreams of the butler and baker *were* all-important – but they were all-important in God's time, not Joseph's! And God's clock – as the clock here at Adamsdown – keeps very strict time.

But, though the chief butler had forgotten Joseph – contrary to all appearances, Joseph's Friend in High Places had not!

And, right on time, there comes another pair of dreams – this time given by God *to Pharaoh* – and before you can say, 'time to go home', this third pair of dreams – with which Joseph came into contact, of course, only because of the second set of dreams – was leading to the fulfilment of the first set.<sup>21</sup>

God simply puts *a double dream* into the head of Pharaoh<sup>22</sup> ... *a distant memory* into the head of the butler ... and *a desired interpretation* into the head of Joseph – and it is all over.

In next to no time, Joseph exchanges a prison for a palace – his fetters for a gold chain, Gen. 41. 42.

Let's hear you tell it, Stephen ... 'God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and *he* made him governor over Egypt and all his house', Acts 7. 9-10.<sup>23</sup>

And I ask you patient people to try to remember our chain of ten links – and to remember how every link was essential.<sup>24</sup> For, if just one had failed, I tell you, the history of the world – and of heaven itself – would be very different!

And I want to close our short series by making an important announcement. Please listen carefully. I am authorised to say this evening that the God of Joseph *has not abdicated!* He is *still* on the throne.<sup>25</sup> And He wants us to trust Him through all the hard times. For, although we may not always be able to grasp His *ways* – we can *always* grasp His *hand!*

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> A phrase used with the same sense (in Akkadian) in section 25 of the Code of Hammurabi.

<sup>2</sup> One of the twelve 'patriarchs' of Acts 7. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Note 'yepath mar'eh', Gen. 12. 11, 'tobat-mar'eh', Gen. 26. 7, with 'yepeth-th o'ar wipeh mar'eh', Gen. 39. 6.

<sup>4</sup> We do well to take a leaf out of Job's book – who, in Job 31. 1, says 'I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?' When will we learn to set a guard on the eyegate?

<sup>5</sup> Antiquities, Book II, Chapter IV, Section 4.

<sup>6</sup> And I cannot help but link this with the opening of the chapter – which has much to say both about how, in the house of Potiphar, Joseph has been both trusted by his master and blessed by his God. There, in the opening six verses, the Holy Spirit conveys both of these points by a series of double expressions : (a) God. 'Lord with', vv. 2, 3; (b) 'the Lord blessed Egypt's house for Joseph sake', v. 5, 'the blessing of the Lord on all he had', v. 5; (c) Joseph 'a prosperous man', v. 2, 'Lord made all did to prosper', vv. 2-3; (d) 'put (gave) all into hand', v. 4, 'left all in hand, not regard anything', v. 6.

<sup>7</sup> In Potiphar's household he becomes familiar with Egyptian life in general and with business matters in particular. 'When we see that Joseph was an Egyptian steward, we see him getting the kind of on-the-job training he would need for the ultimate task God had for him, the task of preserving the people of Israel during the coming time of great famine ... Joseph will eventually become the head of agriculture for the entire land of Egypt. Under Potiphar, he received vital experience on a smaller scale'. See ...

[http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/te\\_d\\_hildebrandt/OTeSources/01-Genesis/Text/Articles-Books/Aling-JosephPt2.pdf](http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/te_d_hildebrandt/OTeSources/01-Genesis/Text/Articles-Books/Aling-JosephPt2.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> See note 7 to the Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary.

<sup>9</sup> We discover that God is able to bring good out of evil in Genesis 38 – to accomplish His purpose, even if He has to use means other than His people to accomplish them. Just as chapters 37-41 preserved *the family* of Jacob (of whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, Rom. 9. 5), so chapter 38 preserved and secured *the line* through which Christ came.

<sup>10</sup> 'Everyone that hath this hope set on Him' (he Lord Jesus) 'purifies himself even as He is pure', 1 John 3. 3. John uses the same tense here that he had in chapter 1 verse 7 – there that the blood of Jesus keeps on cleansing me; here that I am to keep on purifying myself – to keep on resisting [as Joseph] all the defiling influences around me ... to be constantly on my guard against anything impure – indeed, to avoid feeding my mind with anything which might arouse unclean and sinful thoughts – whether the magazines I read, the TV programmes and DVDs I watch, or the internet websites I visit!

<sup>11</sup> '*Finishing Strong*', Steve Farrar, pages 41-42. The wise man warns us to avoid those things that tend and expose us to sin; especially the sin of uncleanness. Prov. 6. 27, 'Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burnt? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burnt? — So, whosoever touches her (the immoral woman) shall not be innocent'.

<sup>12</sup> 'He that would not hear the bell, must not meddle with the rope', Thomas Brooks, '*Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices*', page 67.

<sup>13</sup> Matt. 5. 29-30.

<sup>14</sup> Mat. 26. 41, where he directs us to 'watch lest we enter into temptation.' On this account He said it, 'the flesh is weak! 1 Cor. 10. 12. The slope is more slippery than we allow. The Nazarite had to avoid grapes lest they led him to drunkenness.

<sup>15</sup> Matthew Henry.

<sup>16</sup> Diod. Sic. i. 59; Herod. ii. 111.

<sup>17</sup> At the outset, this was very severe; 'whose feet they hurt with fetters; he was laid in iron', Psa. 105. 18.

<sup>18</sup> This chapter is bracketed by the providence of God - like a picture frame that surrounds all of this story. The chapter ends the way it began – with Joseph in bondage, Psa. 105. 18; Gen. 40. 3. But also with more or less identical expressions found at the close as at the opening of the chapter.

(a) '*The Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand*', v. 3; '*Whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper*', v. 23.

(b) '*Joseph found favour in his (Potiphar's) sight*', v. 4; '*The Lord ... gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison*', v. 6.

(c) '*He gave all that he had into Joseph's hand*', v. 4; '*The keeper of the prison gave all the prisoners who were in the prison into Joseph's hand*', v. 22.

(d) '*He did not know anything he had*', v. 6: '*The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was in his hand*', v. 23.

*And above anything else ...*

(e) '*The Lord was with Joseph ... the Lord was with him*', vv. 2-3; '*The Lord was with Joseph ... the Lord was with him*', vv. 21, 23.

Joseph was no fool – he knew that ultimately there would be a price to pay for refusing the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife. But what cost he would have paid if he had relented – it would have cost him everything. Victory over temptation secured him the continued sense of God's presence and blessing, vv. 2, 3 and vv. 21, 23. 'The Lord was with him' in prison, but would not have been with him in bed of Potiphar wife. The lives of Abraham and Jacob were punctuated by appearance, vision or voice. Abraham had eight visits; Jacob had five. Even Isaac had two

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appearances. Nor had such experiences ceased; see chapter 46 to Jacob. But Joseph had none ... but, though everything seemed against him, and though he received no reassuring revelations, God was with him!

Compare the words of Anthony Norris Groves, 'Last week I buried my wife. This week I buried my daughter. I know no-one in Baghdad except my God'.

<sup>19</sup> One marvellous quality seen in Joseph time and again is his conscientious service for those we could loosely describe as his employers – whether going the second mile for his father from Shechem to Dothan – whether serving Potiphar well first as his household servant and subsequently as his senior steward, whether later promoting Pharaoh's best interests in securing for him ownership of more or less all the land of Egypt – or whether here serving the prison governor faithfully.

<sup>20</sup> I note that Joseph is careful not to expose : the sin of his brothers in selling him to the Ishmaelites, the false accusation of Potiphar's wife or the injustice of Potiphar in putting him into the prison. He asserts only his own innocence – making it clear that he had been 'stolen' – carried away by force and had not therefore absconded because guilty of some crime, v. 15. I guess that, as the wife of another of Pharaoh's senior officials, Potiphar's wife may have been known to the chief butler.

<sup>21</sup> It is possible that the Pharaoh of Joseph's days was Senusret II (Sesostris II) – 1897-1878. See Eugene Merrill, 'Kingdom of Priests', page 50; also [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelfth\\_dynasty\\_of\\_Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelfth_dynasty_of_Egypt). 'Sesostris imported and employed great numbers of Asiatic slaves and mercenaries, a policy which shows anything but an anti-Semitic bias. Most striking of all perhaps were the land-reclamation and flood-control projects undertaken ... A principal feature of these was a canal dug to connect the Fayyam basin with the Nile, a canal whose ruins to this day bear the name Bahr Yusef ("River of Joseph"). Can it be that this name survives as a testimony to the contribution of Joseph to the public works projects of Sesostris II?', Merrill. [But surely such an Egyptian would have used Joseph's Egyptian name?]

<sup>22</sup> Pharaoh's advisors were unable to figure out the double-dream. The story goes ... 'After she woke up, a woman told her husband, "I just dreamed that you gave me a pearl necklace for our anniversary. What do you think it means?" "You'll know tonight." he said, smiling. That evening, the man came home with a small package and gave it to his wife. Delighted, she opened it to find a book entitled "The Meaning of Dreams"'.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen stayed close by the text of Genesis, and, as such, tells the story of Joseph with its 'fairy story' ending; the young man sold as a slave who became governor of all Egypt. And what a story this was – ending where the once-abused Joseph and his once-wicked brothers kiss and make up – and they all live happily ever after. Isn't that nice! But tell me, Stephen, will *your* story end up like that? Are *you* destined to become governor of all Egypt? Or might *you* just end up pounded to death by the stones and rocks of the unbelieving Jews?

'Oh, Malcolm', Stephen would say, 'you just don't see it, do you. There is *another* world – a bigger, better, more glorious world – a world with vistas that exceed your wildest imaginations. And, Malcolm, I am to be granted a glimpse of that very world – allowed to peer into that very world – "I see the glory of God, and Jesus standing ...". I began my last message for God with a reference to 'the God of glory' (Acts 7. 2), but I end my life with a vision of 'the glory of God'.

'And it is in *that* world that everything will be put right. There I too will see how *my* God brings good out of evil – that *the God of Joseph* hasn't changed!

'Who knows, Malcolm, perhaps that young man over there – the one at whose feet my persecutors will soon lay their garments ... who knows, perhaps one day that young man will have the 'the God of glory' appear to *him* – and who knows what he might then become in the service of the Lord Jesus. And who knows, Malcolm, perhaps even my witness (Greek, 'martureo') will play some small part as a goad to prod him towards accepting the Saviour?

'Rest assured, Malcolm, the God I serve continues to work all for the ultimate 'good' of everyone who loves him – even if they end their earthly lives in suffering and martyrdom. But, Malcolm, we must all leave *God* to define that word 'good' for us. For He is painting on a bigger canvas than we are. He is preparing us for that bigger, better world. And His priority is not therefore to make our earthly lives pleasant and carefree – not to ensure that they are happy, healthy and comfortable – but to allow such experiences to come our way as will best mould and fit us for His service above. Weep not for me, Malcolm'.

'*The Maryrdom of Stephen*', by Lucy A Bennett

*Asleep! asleep! when soft and low  
The patient watchers come and go,  
Their loving vigil keeping;  
When from the dear eyes fades the light,  
When pales the flush so strangely bright,  
And the glad spirit takes its flight,  
We speak of death as "sleeping".*

*Or when, as dies the orb of day,  
The aged Christian sinks away,  
And the lone mourner weepeth;  
When thus the pilgrim goes to rest,  
With meek hands folded on his breast,*



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*And his last sigh a prayer confessed,  
We say of such, "He sleepeth".*

*But when amidst a shower of stones,  
And mingled curses, shrieks, and groans,  
The death-chill slowly creepeth;  
When falls at length the dying head,  
And streams the life-blood dark and red,  
A thousand voices cry, "He's dead";  
But who shall say, "He sleepeth"?*

*"He fell asleep"! A pen divine  
Hath writ that epitaph of thine ...*

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<sup>24</sup> 'God often permits the things which He hates to accomplish the things which He loves', Joni.

<sup>25</sup> I read of a printer's error in the program of a performance of Handel's Messiah. It listed the Hallelujah Chorus as 'The Lord God Omnipotent resigneth!' But God *hasn't* resigned. As the Chorus correctly claims, He 'reigneth!' No matter what is happening in the world, God knows all about it and has the situation under control.