

Critics have pointed out that there is an ancient hieroglyphic relic in the British Museum, Papyrus d'Orbiney, which tells the story of The Two Brothers. In their interpretation, there is a close parallel between how the wife of the older brother in the story speaks and acts towards the younger brother, and Potiphar's wife towards Joseph (Genesis 39:7) - as if to suggest this story was borrowed by the writer of Genesis.

Against this insinuation it has been recorded by the ancient historians Herodotus and Diodorus that chastity was uncommon among Egyptian wives of that time - and so the historical reports concur in making this incident in Joseph's experience not an unlikely one.

Regardless of how highly Potiphar regarded the character of his Hebrew slave, seeing Joseph's garment in the hands of his complaining wife left him with no option. And so he threw him into prison, not the prison for petty miscreants, but (providentially) with those held as criminal who had served in the royal palace (39:20).

While in that dungeon, Joseph came into favor with the warden (v.21), and so the young Hebrew, instead of being Potiphar's household manager, was now responsible for the running of the prison. Only the imagination of the textual critics could make Potiphar's action and that of the prison warden to be the product of two different sources.

But Joseph, in his new position was able to continue his naturalization process, learning the Egyptian language and social customs. By the time Joseph stood in the presence of Pharaoh to interpret his dreams, Joseph had learned enough to be able to speak and act well enough to favorably impress the king.

Joseph's incarceration in this particular prison put him in the presence of the king's butler and baker, whose dreams Joseph interpreted. Three days later the king released both servants, executed the baker and restored the butler, in fulfilment of Joseph's prediction. Joseph had appealed to the butler to put in a good word with Pharaoh to get him released. But the butler forgot all about it until Pharaoh had his own dreams which needed explanation.

We pause to look at what was going on in the mind of Joseph at this time, to understand his attitude during this distressing phase of his life. By seeming accident of birth, Jacob clothed his favorite son in a royal robe, occasioning his brothers' jealousy. Then God sent dreams which Joseph told in the hearing of his whole family - dreams which foreshadowed his eventual rise to prominence in the family. Now the envy of the brothers turned into their hatred. Why?

Joseph's father Jacob, while a young man, had made a vow, "IF GOD WILL BE WITH ME, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on... then THE LORD SHALL BE MY GOD..." - Genesis 28:20-21 - and Jacob at the end of his life declared that God did take care of him (48:15-16). It is not unlikely that Jacob would encourage his favorite son to devote his life to God in the same way.

That Joseph evidently had done so can be seen in his response to the seductive words of Potiphar's wife, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (39:9). And Jacob had clearly told Joseph about the promises which God had made to Abraham, Isaac and himself.