

## **Genesis 41 - Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dream and Rises to Power**

### A. Pharaoh's dreams and his dilemma.

#### 1. (1-7) Pharaoh's disturbing dreams.

a. **At the end of two full years:** Joseph was in prison - forgotten by the royal butler - for two years now. But God had a purpose in the delay, and now the purpose is explained. After all, if God wanted it, the butler could have remembered Joseph a year or more earlier. But God moved in His perfect timing.

b. **Pharaoh had a dream:** In Pharaoh's dream, seven fat cows came out of the waters of the Nile and were consumed by seven gaunt cows. Then in a second dream, seven thin heads devoured seven fat heads of wheat.

#### 2. (8-14) Joseph is called in to interpret Pharaoh's dreams.

a. **Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them:** Egypt's magicians were impressive, yet they could not interpret the dreams. Pharaoh knew they were significant, yet no one could give a suitable explanation of their meaning.

b. **I remember my faults this day:** The butler finally remembered Joseph and confessed the wrong he did against him. He recommended Joseph to Pharaoh as a man who interprets dreams.

c. **Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him quickly out of the dungeon:** When it was in the timing of God to get Joseph out of prison, it all happened **quickly**. Often, we feel there are long periods of time when God doesn't do anything, but when His timing is right everything can come together in an instant.

i. **During the times we think God isn't doing anything, He is doing the work most important to Him: developing our character and transforming us into the image of Jesus Christ.**

#### 3. (15-16) Joseph comes before Pharaoh.

a. **It is not in me:** Pharaoh gave Joseph a golden opportunity to glorify himself, but Joseph will have none of it. He did not use this as an opportunity to glorify himself before Pharaoh, but only to glorify God.

b. **God will give Pharaoh and answer of peace:** Joseph seems much wiser and perhaps more humble than he did before, considering the way he told his brothers his previous dreams in a self-glorifying way.

i. God's work of character building was being accomplished in Joseph even when he perhaps thought nothing was happening.

#### 4. (17-24) Pharaoh tells Joseph his dream.

a. **They were just as ugly as at the beginning:** More details of the dream come out on the second telling. When the skinny cows ate the fat cows, they themselves did not become fat.

## B. Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream.



### 1. (25-32) Joseph interprets the dream.

a. **The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do:** The seven cows and seven heads of grain each represent seven years. There will be seven years of plenty and abundance, then seven years of want and famine. The years of famine will be so bad that the good years **will be forgotten**.

b. **The dream was repeated to Pharaoh twice because the thing is established by God:** Joseph saw the confirming hand of God in the repetition of the dream. This repetition also gave Joseph a sense of urgency: **God will shortly bring it to pass**.

c. **God will:** Joseph knew the matter was entirely in the hands of God. God had a purpose for the dream, a purpose for the timing, a purpose for the famine, a purpose for Joseph being in jail, and a purpose for everything.

### 2. (33-36) Joseph gives his advice to Pharaoh.

a. **Let him appoint officers over the land, to collect one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years:** Joseph shows both his boldness and his gift of administration. No responsible administrator would present such news without also suggesting a plan to meet the coming crisis.

b. **That the land may not perish during the famine:** Joseph sensed there was a reason *why* God gave this word to Pharaoh. It was so he could prepare for the coming crisis. This was an urgent call to action.

c. **Select a discerning and wise man:** God picks a **man** when He has something to accomplish. He uses people to further His plan. "God always works through men performing tasks on the earth." (Barnhouse)

### 3. (37-45) Joseph's promotion to a position of great authority.

a. **In whom is the Spirit of God:** This is the first mention in the Bible of the Holy Spirit coming upon a man. Pharaoh saw that Joseph was filled with the **Spirit of God**.

b. **Only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you:** Joseph has now gone from the pit to the pinnacle, but it took some 13 years to happen. From the outside, Joseph looked like an "overnight success," but it was more than 13 years in the making.

i. Joseph is a good example of a man who seemed to have all the gifts and talents for leadership, but God developed his character and talents over many years. Gifts and talents may be impressive and immediate, but character is what God looks for and always takes time to develop.

c. **And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-Paaneah:** Jewish legends say each letter of Joseph's Egyptian name means something. Linking them all together, the name is "Seer - redeemer - prophet - supporter - interpreter of dreams - clever - discreet - wise."

i. The name itself means, *God Speaks and He Lives*, referring to God's word coming through Joseph, his own preservation, and the way he has preserved the country.

d. **And he gave him as a wife Asenath:** Asenath was a very common name and it was just a coincidence that her name was the same as the daughter of Dinah.

### C. Joseph's life as Prime Minister.

1. (46-49) The seven years of plenty came to pass.

a. **He gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt:** Joseph did what was right. He actually stored up the grain during the seven years of plenty.

b. **Joseph gathered very much grain:** It seems it was customary for Pharaoh to take 10% of the grain in Egypt as a tax. Essentially, Joseph doubled the taxes over the next seven years (Genesis 41:34 mentions *one-fifth*, that is, 20%).

2. (50-52) Joseph's two sons and his state of heart.

a. **Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh:** From his Egyptian wife, Joseph fathered **Manasseh**, whose name means "forgetfulness." This was because God made Joseph to forget all the previous pain and trial in his life. His second son is **Ephraim**, which means "fruitfulness," because God made Joseph fruitful in Egypt.

i. We can't be *doubly fruitful* until we are also *forgetting*. In his book *The Great Divorce*, C.S. Lewis described hell as a place where no one forgets anything, remembering every slight, every cruel exchange of words, every wrong ever done to them, and everybody is utterly unforgiving. But in heaven all these things are put away because all things have become new.

b. **For God has made me forget . . . For God has caused me to be fruitful:** Joseph did not forget the faith of his fathers even though he rose to great glory in Egypt and had an Egyptian wife. As a sign of this his children were given Hebrew names not Egyptian names.

3. (53-57) The seven years of famine begin.

a. **The famine was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread:** Because of Joseph's wise preparation, Egypt became a supply source for the whole region, which experiences this severe famine.

b. **So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain:** The people in Canaan - including Joseph's family - also suffered from this famine. But God made wise (though unexpected provision) for them by sending Joseph ahead of the family.

i. *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose* (Romans 8:28). Joseph did not have Romans 8:28 on paper, but he had it in his heart. A Christian today may very well have it on paper, but not in the heart.