



Brown Community Group Discussion Guide

Genesis 41:1-57 – Pharaoh’s Dreams

August 18, 2019

In our last lesson of Genesis, we covered how Joseph was assigned Pharaoh’s chief cup-bearer and chief baker while in prison. It was here that he interpreted their dreams through God direction. Joseph was clear to give all the credit to God as opposed to himself. Even though Joseph properly interpreted both dreams, ultimately the chief cup-bearer forgot all about Joseph once he was restored to his former position, even after Joseph had asked him to do him a favor once he was out of prison mentioning him to Pharaoh. SO our stage is now set of Joseph!

1) Failure of the Seers 41:1-8

¹ When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing by the Nile, ² when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. ³ After them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank. ⁴ And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up. ⁵ He fell asleep again and had a second dream: Seven heads of grain, healthy and good, were growing on a single stalk. ⁶ After them, seven other heads of grain sprouted—thin and scorched by the east wind. ⁷ The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven healthy, full heads. Then Pharaoh woke up; it had been a dream. ⁸ In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him.

After two whole years, Joseph was trying to keep his own dreams alive in the most discouraging circumstances. His readiness to capture his own opportunity is about to be realized.

In Pharaoh’s dream, the seven cows mentioned were “water cows”. These animals actually stayed physically in the Nile river most of the time for protection and from the sun and insects. The first set of cows were “sleek and fat”. The term sleek is the same one used of Joseph in 39:6, meaning good-looking. The term fat meant robust. The second set of cows were “ugly and gaunt” literally meaning “bad looking” and emaciated.

Pharaoh was haunted by this dreams and they kept him awake, so he decided to call his “experts” so that they could interpret the meaning of the dreams. So all of the wise men and magicians of Egypt were called and but yet none of them could or “would” interpret the dreams. They were possibly too afraid of the consequences if they were wrong.

2) Joseph Before Pharaoh 41:9-24

⁹ Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, “Today I am reminded of my shortcomings. ¹⁰ Pharaoh was once angry with his servants, and he imprisoned me and the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard. ¹¹ Each of us had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. ¹² Now a young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream. ¹³ And things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was impaled.” ¹⁴ So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh. ¹⁵ Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.” ¹⁶ “I cannot do it,” Joseph replied to Pharaoh, “but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.”.....I told this to the magicians, but none of them could explain it to me.”

The Cupbearer actually finally did as Joseph requested to remember him. Since it was a very dangerous thing to remind Pharaoh of your “faults and transgression”, plus if it did not work out, he was also putting himself in great danger again.

Although Pharaoh hastily sent for Joseph, it took a while to “prepare him” for presentation. Joseph’s moment and a key part of God’s plan had finally come to fruition. It was a unique opportunity created and directed by God, but happening due to Joseph’s faith, following and listening to God’s plan for him.

Joseph’s response clearly shows that God himself will answer Pharaoh’s question and interpret, he was only the messenger of God’s power revealed. In verse 16, it is not saying that God will give Pharaoh a good or favorable answer that he likes, but was suggesting that by telling him the truth about the dreams that it would calm his troubled soul. It was better to know the truth than to live in uncertainty.

Joseph made it clear that he was not competing with the magicians of the court, but saying it was not himself that would interpret the dreams. The revelation would be straight from God.

3) **The Dream’s Meaning 41:25-36**

²⁵ Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁶ The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads of grain are seven years; it is one and the same dream. ²⁷ The seven lean, ugly cows that came up afterward are seven years, and so are the seven worthless heads of grain scorched by the east wind: They are seven years of famine. ²⁸ “It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁹ Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, ³⁰ but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land. ³¹ The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the famine that follows it will be so severe. ³² The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon. ³³ “And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. ³⁴ Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. ³⁵ They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. ³⁶ This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine.”

Joseph did not hesitate in his interpretation of the dream. There would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Joseph added that the dream was doubled to emphasize both its certainty and immediacy. God’s plan and will was set, it was about to happen, so they better prepare adequately or suffer the consequences.

The first characteristic for the man “to be put in charge” was the ability to discern. The second characteristic was to know how to act effectively and be wise in administering. These characteristics are difficult to find in one person. It seems obvious that Joseph was attempting to describe himself, for the advice that he was now giving was not requested specifically by Pharaoh. Giving advice without Pharaoh specifically asking his servants was very dangerous and assertive behavior. Joseph was really stepping out in faith and putting himself at great risk with Pharaoh. This man was in prison a few hours ago and was not boldly giving recommendations without Pharaoh’s asking.

Joseph had already demonstrated his discernment with the interpretation of the dream and was now showing his awareness of what to do punctuated with his practical ability.

I had always interpreted 1/5th of the harvest as taken literally, but the commentaries suggested that this meant to divide the land into fifths since that amount of grain would not have been enough to sustain seven poor years. In any case, there was an active plan to save and store large amounts of excess that

could be used later when needed. It was very common during that time that they would not have had any excess, so the whole concept of silos and excess would have been foreign to them.

Joseph's speech to Pharaoh is a good illustration of the goal toward which the training of a young man in good standing was directed and came to fruition. He spoke publicly, gave sound counsel, was charismatic and allowed God to use him in every way. A real godly living example that we can all study and follow.

One other very important note in this story is that the famine in no way is suggested to be regarded as an act of judgement by God upon the Egyptian people but was just part of the natural irregularity for which someone should wisely plan and prepare. Good sound advice for all of God's people, both financially and materially.

4) **Joseph's Reward 41:37-45**

³⁷ The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. ³⁸ So Pharaoh asked them, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?" ³⁹ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. ⁴⁰ You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you." ⁴¹ So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt." ⁴² Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. ⁴³ He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and people shouted before him, "Make way!" Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt. ⁴⁴ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt." ⁴⁵ Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah and gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, to be his wife. And Joseph went throughout the land of Egypt.

What pressure with a new name, a new position and a new wife all provided before anyone knew whether the dream interpretation was true! His unsolicited speech obviously went very well! Joseph's discretion and not claiming it as his own powers and giving God the credit impressed not only Pharaoh but also the servants of Pharaoh. They probably had not ever seen anything like this. Typically each person before the King would attempt to show how talented, great and impressive they were, not defaulting everything to another in an humble way!

For the first time in Genesis, the Spirit of God is credited with the inward gift of understanding. The ceremony that followed was spectacular and such a special honor for Joseph. Without Joseph's consent, no man would lift a hand or foot, described a totalitarian government.

The Egyptian name given to Joseph, most likely meant "The God speaks and he hears". Asenath was part of the most prominent priestly families in Egypt, but still pagan.

Both Isaac and Jacob had secured wives from their own cultural background. Joseph did the very thing that the others sought not to do, but did he have a choice? Either from Pharaoh in this position or from God's directive will?

The descendants of Joseph and Asenath would be the principal northern tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, who were always addicted to idolatry. So while the silence of this section does not speak directly to God's approval or not, the Genesis chapters that follow show a judgement in history for this group.

5) **The Years of Plenty 41:46-57**

⁴⁶ Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh's presence and traveled throughout Egypt. ⁴⁷ During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. ⁴⁸ Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. In each city he put the food grown in the fields surrounding it. ⁴⁹ Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure. ⁵⁰ Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. ⁵¹ Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." ⁵² The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering." ⁵³ The seven years of abundance in Egypt came to an end, ⁵⁴ and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in all the other lands, but in the whole land of Egypt there was food. ⁵⁵ When all Egypt began to feel the famine, the people cried to Pharaoh for food. Then Pharaoh told all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph and do what he tells you." ⁵⁶ When the famine had spread over the whole country, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe throughout Egypt. ⁵⁷ And all the world came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe everywhere.

As he promised, Pharaoh had delegated all authority over the whole country and its feeding to Joseph. In this situation, he had literally complete power. An amazing transformation and change of events in such a short period of time. By following God's directives and waiting for His timing, Joseph had ascended to an incredible position of authority and influence. God in His infinite wisdom, was only just beginning to use Joseph in a mighty and powerful way for the benefit of his chosen people. What an incredible opportunity was presented to Joseph!

6) **Group Discussion:**

1. In verse 25-36, can you think of a time in your own lives where you were close to being as bold in your comments and decisions as Joseph was before Pharaoh? Do you think Joseph had been warned by God in visions or was this just the culmination of his spiritual training resulting in quick decisions and actions?
2. In verses 37-45, describe the steps and characteristics in Joseph that God had been developing and exposing him to through this life to be ready for this moment? What were they and how did it impact his spirituality?
3. Do you think that God approved or disapproved of the marriage of Joseph to Asenath? Why or why not with examples? How do you reconcile this with the previous messages from God concerning Isaac and Jacob taking wives?
4. Remembering the saying "Power corrupts, absolute Power corrupts absolutely", discuss the many temptations that Joseph must have been exposed to once he ascended to his position of power? What were Joseph's characteristics that allowed him to stay constant in his relationship with God in times of great riches and times of nothing? This is an extraordinary example unlike almost any in the Bible for us to learn from.
 - a) Make sure and include in your discussion the pagan marital influence from his wife Asenath, who were themselves pagan priests in Egypt?