

This lesson speeds through over a decade of Joseph's life, from the LORD raising him up to being a ruler over Egypt second only to Pharaoh to Joseph coming face-to-face with his brothers again. Although Joseph now had the power to avenge himself on his brothers he forgave them instead because he recognized that all of the events in his life had happened to fulfill the purposes of the LORD.

**Genesis 40:** Joseph is still in prison but has been given duties that afforded him much freedom. Pharaoh becomes angry with both his butler (cupbearer) and his baker and have them both tossed into the prison where Joseph is confined. Each of these two new prisoners has a dream and they tell Joseph their dreams and in return he gives the interpretations: in three days the butler will be restored to his position but the baker will be executed in three days. The dreams come true and Joseph asks the butler to speak to Pharaoh on his behalf in order to be released from prison but God sovereignly causes the butler to forget about Joseph's request.

**Genesis 41:1-13:** Two years later Pharaoh has two dreams in one night and no one is able to interpret them for him. The butler "suddenly" remembers how Joseph had interpreted the dreams that he and the baker had had while in prison two years earlier and mentions this to Pharaoh. The LORD obviously is guiding the circumstances by jogging the butler's memory at this opportune time.

#### Genesis 41

<sup>14</sup> Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved *himself*, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh.

Pharaoh sends for Joseph and the appropriate officials waste no time in locating and bringing him out of the prison. He makes himself presentable to Pharaoh by shaving and putting on clean clothes. Egyptians did not let their beards grow out and so the appropriate style to have when appearing before Pharaoh was to be clean shaven.

<sup>15</sup> And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and *there is* none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, *that* thou canst understand a dream to interpret it. <sup>16</sup> And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, *It is* not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.

**"And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and *there is* none that can interpret it"** – The LORD gave Pharaoh the dream and made sure that no one could interpret it for him. Pharaoh's magicians and wise men, who were supposed to be skilled in such things, were at a loss to understand the dream. The LORD also has prepared Pharaoh's heart to listen to a poor Hebrew slave who has been in prison for years.

**"and I have heard say of thee, *that* thou canst understand a dream to interpret it"** – Pharaoh had heard the testimony of the butler that Joseph could interpret dreams. The LORD had guided circumstances two years prior in order to prepare the way for this moment.

**"And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, *It is* not in me"** – Joseph understood that the supernatural ability to interpret dreams did not come from him and humbly gave the glory to God. The years since he was sold into slavery had taught him that it was God Who had blessed him with his abilities, gifts and success.

**"God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace [*peace; welfare; prosperity*]"** – In that day the general belief was that dreams were revelations from the spirit world and so it was troubling to Pharaoh to not know the meaning of his. The Hebrew word translated here as "peace" can also be translated "welfare" or "prosperity." Joseph gives the glory to God saying it will be He Who will relieve Pharaoh's anxiety over his dream and will give him an answer that will assure the welfare and prosperity of Egypt. At this point Joseph has not heard the dream nor knows what the interpretation might be, but he trusts that God had not brought him before Pharaoh so that Pharaoh could execute him because of bad news.

**Verses 17-27:** Pharaoh describes the two dreams he had the night before (he had awoken briefly and then fell asleep again to dream the second one). The first dream featured seven healthy and seven malnourished cattle, with the malnourished cattle consuming the healthy. The second dream was similar, with seven healthy looking ears of wheat being consumed by their seven malnourished counterparts. Pharaoh mentions that none of his magicians were able to interpret these dreams. Joseph states that the two dreams are one in meaning, and that God is using them to reveal to Pharaoh what He is about to do. The healthy cattle and ears represent seven good years and the malnourished cattle and ears represent seven years of famine.

<sup>28</sup> *This is* the thing which I have spoken unto Pharaoh: What God *is* about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh.

Joseph repeats his statement that God is revealing His plan for the future to Pharaoh, emphasizing the prophetic nature of the dreams. These were not just dreams that can be laughed at and then forgotten. They are important because they are a message from God.

<sup>29</sup> Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt: <sup>30</sup> And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land; <sup>31</sup> And the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following; for it *shall be* very grievous.

Joseph now puts the meaning of the dreams in context. There will be seven years of abundance where the fields of Egypt will produce far above their usual amounts. These will be followed by seven years of famine that will be so intense that it will seem like the abundant years never happened.

**Verses 32-37:** Joseph emphasizes the certainty of the coming famine because God gave Pharaoh the two dreams with the same meaning in one night. He goes on to recommend that Pharaoh appoint a wise and capable man to oversee the collection and storage of twenty percent of the grain produced during the seven years of abundance in order to prepare for the seven years of famine. Pharaoh and his servants recognize the wisdom in Joseph's recommendation.

<sup>38</sup> And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find *such a one* as this *is*, a man in whom the Spirit of God *is*?

**“And Pharaoh said unto his servants”** – These servants were most likely government officials and advisors to Pharaoh.

**“Can we find such a one as this is”** - Pharaoh is so impressed with Joseph and the wisdom of his recommendations that he decides that they could find no other man that would surpass the capabilities of Joseph. Of course, God has touched the man’s heart and guided him to make this decision.

**“a man in whom the Spirit [breath; wind] of God is?”** - Being an idolatrous people, the Egyptians knew nothing about the Holy Spirit. Joseph had already given the credit for his ability to interpret dreams to God and so Pharaoh recognized that Joseph’s wisdom came from God. The Hebrew word for “spirit” means “breath” indicating Pharaoh’s belief that God was with and “breathed” (spoke) through Joseph.

<sup>39</sup> And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, *there is none* so discreet and wise as thou *art*: <sup>40</sup> Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou.

These verses are an amazing demonstration of the sovereignty of God, for He moves the heart of Pharaoh to raise a foreign prisoner from prison all the way to being the second-most powerful man in Egypt. Nothing is beyond God’s ability!

**“And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this”** – Pharaoh recognizes that God is with Joseph since the wisdom Joseph demonstrates and the ability to interpret dreams is beyond human capabilities.

**“there is none so discreet [intelligent; having understanding] and wise as thou art”** – Since God is with Joseph, Pharaoh sees that Joseph has an advantage over all the wise men of Egypt who were limited to their own human wisdom.

**“Thou shalt be over my house”** – Joseph will be the steward over Pharaoh’s household and possessions. God gives everyone who meets Joseph the desire for him to run things!

**“and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled”** – Joseph will not only manage Pharaoh’s house but he will also manage Egypt itself.

**“only in the throne will I be greater than thou”** – The only limitation to Joseph’s power and authority is that Pharaoh will still be the king over Egypt. However, Joseph will manage the day-to-day administration of the nation since Pharaoh will defer to Joseph’s wisdom (**Gen. 41:55** “*And when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread: and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do.*”).

**Genesis 41:41-57:** Pharaoh gives Joseph his signet ring, which grants him the king’s authority to do whatever is needed. Pharaoh then honors Joseph with gifts of clothing, jewelry, a chariot ride honoring him before the people and an upper-class wife (daughter of a priest). Joseph immediately gets to the business of preparing for the seven years of famine by implementing his plan to store twenty percent of the grain produced by the fields of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. He was able to store enough grain by the time of the famine started that not only could he feed the Egyptians but there was enough to sell to people from other countries.

**Genesis 42:1-5:** Back in Canaan the famine is affecting Jacob and his family as well so he sends his sons to buy grain in Egypt. However, he keeps Benjamin (Joseph’s brother) at home because he is afraid that he might lose him like he did Joseph.

## Genesis 42

<sup>6</sup> And Joseph was the governor over the land, *and he it was* that sold to all the people of the land: and Joseph’s brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him *with* their faces to the earth.

The land was governed by Joseph and it was under his authority that grain was sold. The brothers arrive and unknowingly fulfill the dream that Joseph had had at the age of 17 (Gen. 37:5-8) – the dream that they hated so much!

**Genesis 42:7-45:2:** Joseph pretends to not know them and accuses them of being spies. Joseph sends the brothers home with grain, holding their brother Simeon in prison until they return with their youngest brother Benjamin. When they return with Benjamin, Joseph treats them to a banquet and then sends them home with more grain. However, Joseph had his personal cup placed in Benjamin’s sack of grain and then sends his men after the brothers to accuse them of stealing it. The cup is discovered in Benjamin’s sack, incriminating him, and the brothers are brought back to Joseph. When Joseph declares that Benjamin must remain and pay for his “crimes” and the other brothers are free to return home, they refuse to leave without Benjamin and plead for mercy. Joseph can hold out no longer and finally reveals his identity.

## Genesis 45

<sup>3</sup> And Joseph said unto his brethren, I *am* Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. <sup>4</sup> And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I *am* Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.

Joseph reveals that he is their brother and immediately asks about the welfare of his father. The brothers were understandably anxious about the meaning of this revelation and did not know what to say. Joseph invites them to come closer so that they could get a better look at him and recognize him. He then reminds them of something that only Joseph would know: that they had sold him as a slave into Egypt.

<sup>5</sup> Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.

**“Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither”** – Joseph knew that the guilt of what they had done had to be eating away at them and so he expresses his forgiveness by telling them not to blame themselves.

**“for God did send me before you to preserve life”** – Over the last two decades Joseph had learned that God was in control of the events that led him to where he was now. Even though his brothers had indeed sinned against Joseph, it was all part of God’s plan to preserve the lives of millions of people (**v. 8a** “*So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God...*”; **Gen. 50:20** “*But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.*”).