



**Sunday School Lesson Summary for November 11, 2007  
Released on Wednesday, November 7, 2007**

**"A Dream Unfolded"**

**Lesson: Genesis 41:25—40.**

**Read: Genesis 41:25—45.**

**Devotional Reading: Psalm 105:16—22.**

**Times: 1884 B.C.**

**Place: Egypt**

**HOW TO SAY IT**

EGYPT. *Ee-jipt.*

PHARAOH. *Fair-o* or *Fay-roe.*

POTIPHAR. *Pot-ih-far.*

**LESSON TEXT**

**Genesis 41:25—40**

25And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh is one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do.

26The seven good kine are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years: the dream is one.

27And the seven thin and ill favoured kine that came up after them are seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine.

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

29Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt:

30And 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;

31And the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following; for it shall be very grievous.

32And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

33Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt.

34Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years.

35And let them gather all the food of those good years that come, and lay up corn under the hand of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities.

36And that food shall be for store to the land against the seven years of famine, which shall be in the land of Egypt; that the land perish not through the famine.

37And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants.

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

39And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art:

40Thou 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.

### **LESSON AIMS**

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

Explain how God elevated Joseph to a position of power in Egypt.

Compare Joseph's experience of hardship resulting in blessing with other biblical or modern examples.

Give thanks to God for working all things together for good in his or her own life.

### **LESSON OUTLINE**

JOSEPH'S INTERPRETATION (Gen. 41:25–32)

JOSEPH'S PROPOSITION (Gen. 41:33–36)

JOSEPH'S EXALTATION (Gen. 41:37–40)

### **INTRODUCTION**

Some researchers argue that dreams are not to be taken seriously because they usually are an extension of our conscious thoughts and cannot be given much unbiased consideration. For example, if you watch a scary movie and then go to sleep shortly thereafter, you are likely to have a nightmarish dream. Or, if you are having apprehensions about an upcoming chemistry test in school, you may find yourself being chased by giant unbalanced chemical equations the nights leading up to your test. (This last example is a true story... from my high school days.)

Researchers have concluded that about one-fourth of our time sleeping is spent dreaming. Upon awakening, we may wonder why we had such strange dreams.

Some (others) believe dreams have special meaning and attempt to interpret them, though there is usually little agreement among the interpreters. Dreams recorded in the Bible often did have special meaning, though. God even used dreams to communicate with those not directly serving Him, as with Abimelech (Gen. 20:3) and Pilate's wife (Matt. 27:19).

While God did speak in many and various ways (Heb. 1:1), dreams were frequently used to communicate His will in the Old Testament. There are also some notable examples of dreams and visions after Pentecost (Acts 9:10; 10:9–10; 16:9; 18:9).

Joseph's brothers had already tagged him with the nickname "dreamer" (Gen. 37:19). Sharing his dreams with them had only aroused their hatred of him. Now, however, his ability to interpret dreams led to his release from prison and catapulted him into prominence in Pharaoh's court.

### **LESSON BACKGROUND**

When we last saw Joseph, he was on his way to Egypt and into slavery. His chances for a good life appeared to be very bleak. Joseph probably thought he would never see his family again.

Joseph was purchased by Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. Joseph proved to be an excellent worker. Soon he was appointed to be manager over all the administrative affairs of Potiphar's household.

This situation lasted as long as Joseph was able to keep his master's wife away from him. Potiphar's wife lusted after Joseph, creating a major temptation for him. One day she waited for the appropriate moment to try once more. Joseph rebuffed her approach. Unfortunately, in revenge she accused him of attempted rape (Genesis 39).

Joseph wound up in prison. There he demonstrated his skills as an administrator, and he was soon running the prison. This position lasted for several years. During that time, Pharaoh's butler (or cupbearer) and baker were thrown into prison. Both had dreams. Joseph interpreted their dreams, and the interpretations proved to be accurate: the butler was restored to his position, and the baker was hanged.

Then Pharaoh had dreams that no one could explain. The butler told Pharaoh about Joseph. Joseph was cleaned up, appropriately dressed, and brought before Pharaoh (Genesis 41:14).

The Egyptians believed that revelation from "the gods" could come through dreams. The dreams of Pharaoh thus provided the avenue for Joseph to be released from prison. Joseph himself had had two dreams (Genesis 37:5-7, 9) and two of his fellow prisoners had dreams as well (40:5-23). Then Joseph found himself confronted with two dreams of Pharaoh to interpret.

## **QUESTIONS**

### **I. JOSEPH'S INTERPRETATION (Gen. 41:25-32)**

#### **1. What were some of the events that occurred after Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers?**

Because they hated him, Joseph's brothers first plotted his death and then agreed to sell him into slavery instead (37:27). Carried off to Egypt by Ishmaelite traders, he was sold to Potiphar, the captain of the guard of Pharaoh (39:1). Before long, Joseph distinguished himself as a trustworthy servant and was promoted by his master (vs. 4).

One thing that we are reminded of throughout Joseph's ordeal is the fact that God never left him stranded. "The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man" (Gen. 39:2). "And his [Joseph's] master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand" (Gen. 39:3). "But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor..." (Gen. 39:21). "...because the Lord was with him; and whatever he [Joseph] did, the Lord made it prosper" (Gen. 39:23). We can be sure that when we belong to God, He has our back no matter what!

#### **2. How did Joseph end up in prison? How did he get out?**

Things seemed to be looking up for Joseph until Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce the young slave (Gen. 39:7). Recognizing that to succumb would be a sin against God (vs. 9), Joseph fled the house. Incensed at having been spurned (or rejected) by the handsome Hebrew servant, Mrs. Potipher falsely accused Joseph of attempted rape. "And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound" (vs. 20).

Once again, it seemed that things were going badly for young Joseph. In His providence, however, God was preparing for the future, for the Lord was with Joseph. Joseph again distinguished himself from the other prisoners by being trustworthy and was put in charge of all the prisoners.

Sometime after this, Pharaoh's butler and baker displeased him and were thrown into prison. Perhaps someone was trying to poison Pharaoh, the butler and the baker being likely conspirators in the plot. In prison, Joseph was given the responsibility to attend to these men (Gen. 40:4).

While imprisoned, both the butler and the baker had troubling dreams. After hearing their dreams, Joseph declared that the butler would be restored to his position but that the baker would be executed. Within three days the dreams were fulfilled as Joseph had foretold. Joseph pleaded with the butler to help him get out of prison once he was restored to his position in Pharaoh's court. But instead of putting in a good word for Joseph to the ruler, the butler promptly forgot about him.

It was not until after Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams did he manage to be released from prison. (See next question.)

### **3. What dreams did Pharaoh have?**

How long Joseph spent in prison is uncertain, but it was two years after the butler's release that Pharaoh had his own troubling dreams that would need interpreting. In his first dream, the king was standing by the Nile when he saw seven fat cows come up out of the river. Then seven lean cows came from the river and devoured the fat ones (Gen. 41:1–4). This was followed by a second dream by the king in which seven healthy heads of grain were eaten by seven scorched heads of grain (vss. 5–7).

Realizing that these were no ordinary dreams, Pharaoh "called for the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof: and Pharaoh told them his dream; but there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh" (Gen. 41:8; cross reference Dan. 2:1–13).

It was at this moment that the butler remembered Joseph's ability to interpret dreams. As to Joseph's gift, the butler told Pharaoh, "And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was" (Gen. 41:13). At this, Joseph was brought from prison and presented before Pharaoh.

### **4. What is the meaning of "kine" and "ears" (Gen. 41:26)? What did these represent?**

The word "kine" is an old word for "cows." Likewise, the reference to "ears of corn" (vs. 5) indicates heads of grain. When most of us think of corn, we mean tall annual cereal grass bearing kernels on large ears, which is native to the New World. In Great Britain (where the King James version originated), the word "corn" was and is used to denote several types of grain.

Joseph told Pharaoh, "The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads are seven years; the dreams are one. And the seven thin and ugly cows which came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty heads blighted by the east wind are seven years of famine" (Gen. 41:26–27). What the magicians and wise men could not interpret, Joseph easily and confidently interpreted for Pharaoh. Joseph did not fail to give credit for his gift to God. "Joseph answered Pharaoh,

saying, 'It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace'" (Gen. 41:16b).

## **II. JOSEPH'S PROPOSITION (Gen. 41:33–36)**

### **5. Why was the dream given to Pharaoh twice?**

Pharaoh's two dreams were really one. In short, they had a single message. Both the seven good cows and the seven good heads of grain represented seven years of abundance to be visited upon the land of Egypt. "The two dreams signified the same thing, but the repetition was to denote the certainty, the nearness, and the importance, of the event" (Henry, Matthew Henry's Commentary, Zondervan).

Joseph put it to Pharaoh more clearly when he said, "God has shown [you] what He is about to do... God has shown [you] what He is about to do" (Gen. 41:25b, 28b). The importance of the repetition of Pharaoh's dream was further relayed in verse 32, "And the dream was repeated to Pharaoh twice because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass."

### **6. What suggestion did Joseph make concerning the kind of person the king should appoint over Egypt?**

Besides telling Pharaoh what was going to happen, Joseph advised the king on how to deal with the approaching famine. While the advice given by Joseph might have come to him by way of divine revelation, it is also possible that he was simply speaking out of his own experience. Watching his father, Jacob, accumulate wealth may have taught him many things about investing and planning for the future. Of course, Joseph had already distinguished himself as a wise steward in the house of Potiphar (39:3–4) and in the prison (vs. 22). Obviously, he knew how to manage both material and human resources.

We do not know whether Joseph had himself in mind when he suggested that Pharaoh appoint "a man discreet and wise" (Gen. 41:33) to oversee the project. Joseph nevertheless seemed to know what he was talking about when he presented the plan he had already formulated to save Egypt from economic disaster.

### **7. What plan did Joseph suggest should be initiated immediately?**

The plan was rather simple, though it would prove to be quite effective. Government officials would make sure that 20 percent of the good harvests were saved for use during the years of famine that were coming. In this case, the grain was going to be collected and saved by the officials of the king, not by individuals.

Had this plan been left up to the Egyptian people to carry out, they probably would have done no better than most people today who are told that they should save for the future but then fail to do so. (*Ouch!*) Indeed, if people could manage to save 20 percent of their income during times of prosperity, they would generally have enough reserves to carry them through any times of adversity.

A word of wisdom to young folks today: look at how your grandparents and great-grandparents "saved for a rainy day." They may have been talked about or laughed at for living such meager lives, but when the time came to help out another family member, or a family friend, or a member of their church, they were able to do so without breaking the bank because they had been wise in their savings; they were good stewards over what God had blessed them with. It is never too late to start saving for tomorrow. Today, God is the same. He is faithful in blessing his faithful and obedient children because He relies on them (us) to be a blessing to others.

Getting back to our original question. Not only would Joseph's plan make it possible for Egypt to escape economic collapse, in addition, so much food would be saved that people from other countries would actually journey to Egypt to buy grain. This, of course, set the stage for Joseph's reunion with his family.

### **III. JOSEPH'S EXALTATION (Gen. 41:37–40)**

#### **8. What kind of man did Pharaoh and his servants conclude Joseph was?**

Pharaoh was obviously impressed with the young Hebrew slave. Not only had he wisely interpreted the dreams of the king, but he also offered a plan to meet the needs of the nation. Pharaoh's impression of the young slave was shared by the members of his court. "And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants" (vs. 37).

It is noteworthy that Pharaoh believed Joseph's abilities were not of human origin. Indeed, they were the result of Joseph being indwelt by the Spirit of God. This correct conclusion on the part of Pharaoh was encouraged by Joseph, who had previously informed the king that any interpretations he would give were from God, not from him. For Joseph to give credit to God reveals much about his character, showing that he was not attempting to advance himself in the eyes of the Egyptian monarch.

#### **9. In relation to his own power and authority, what authority did Pharaoh give Joseph?**

In relation to his own power and authority, Pharaoh told Joseph, "Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you... See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt" (Gen. 41:39–41).

The unbelievable becomes believable. Only a few hours earlier, Joseph had been in prison with little hope of ever being released. When Joseph left prison to meet Pharaoh, he had no idea what direction his life was going to take. A meeting with Pharaoh! This could have meant either the end of his life, freedom, or merely being thrown right back in prison. It is highly unlikely that the thought of receiving a lifetime appointment to a high government position ever crosses Joseph's mind.

But now he is being made the second most important man in all of Egypt (compare Daniel 2:48; 5:29; 6:1–3). Egypt is one of the most powerful nations in the world at the time. Now Joseph is in charge of *all* of Pharaoh's *people*. Joseph's word is to be the final word in all matters. He is answerable to no one except Pharaoh.

#### **10. What symbols of authority were given to Joseph?**

As symbols of his new authority, Joseph was given Pharaoh's signet ring, clothing of fine linen, a gold chain for his neck, and the second chariot of the king to ride (Gen. 41:42–43). Pharaoh even gave Joseph a new name (vs. 45), which literally meant "revealer of secrets." "He put upon him all the marks of honour imaginable, to recommend him to the esteem and respect of the people as the king's favourite, and one whom he delighted to honour" (Henry).

Sold as a slave by his brothers at age seventeen (Gen. 37:2), at the age of thirty (41:46) Joseph was elevated to ruler over Egypt (vs. 43). Events had been set in motion that would bring about Joseph's later confrontation with his brothers.—John Alva Owston

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Victory Through Faithfulness**

Joseph is one of the greatest men of the Old Testament. He started out as the special child of his father, but was hated by his brothers. He was sold into slavery by these brothers. Then he was indicted by a vindictive woman for refusing to be unfaithful to God. He was forgotten in prison for a time by a person whom he befriended and for whom he predicted a return to his former position.

Any one of these events could have been enough to send a person into a permanent depression. Joseph had frequent opportunities to sin. Who would care if he did? Potiphar's wife certainly wouldn't have cared! His father thought he was dead. His brothers were far away and didn't know or care where he was.

Through exile, slavery, and abuse, Joseph remained faithful to God. After 13 years (from age 17 to age 30), God honored Joseph's faithfulness.

### **PRACTICAL POINTS**

A wise man gives God the glory due Him (Gen. 41:25).

In His grace, God provides for men both great and small, righteous and unrighteous (Gen. 41:26–28; cross reference Matt. 5:45).

Only God can reveal the future, and when He does, you can believe Him (Gen. 41:29–32).

Revealed truth requires responsible action (vss. 33–34).

True faith does not exclude thoughtful preparation (vss. 35–37).

God usually entrusts His servant with a little before entrusting him with a lot (Gen. 41:38–40; cross reference Matt. 25:14–30).—*Don Kakavecos*

### **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

God never forgets faithfulness.

### **PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, give us the determination to persevere when times are difficult. Help us to use those times to draw closer to You. When we do draw closer, help us to remain close. Help us to thank You for the good times and the blessings You bestow. Give us the integrity that Joseph had. In Jesus' name, amen.

### **ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON**

In our November 18, 2007 lesson, we will see that God's hand on Joseph for blessing had not ceased its work. He had much more in store for him. In the next lesson we see how God arranged an encounter with his long-lost brothers and then revealed his identity to them. It is both heartwarming and encouraging for us as Christian believers. God has everything under control and is always planning something better for His children. Read Genesis 43:1–45:15 in preparation for next week's lesson, "God Preserved a Remnant." *Good studying!*

### **LESSON SUMMARIZED BY**

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