

Pentwater Bible Church

*Joseph is Elevated to Prime Minister
Genesis Message Seventy-Seven
Genesis 41: 37-57*



'Joseph, Overseer of the Pharaoh's Granaries' by Lawrence Alma-Tadema 1874

Dentwater Bible Church

Genesis Message Seventy-Seven Joseph is Elevated to Prime Minister

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Review:

PHARAOH'S DREAMS

Genesis 41: 1-8

The text opens with the declaration of, *at the end of two full years*. This means that the following story occurred after the events of Joseph's interpretation of the dreams of both the royal cupbearer and the royal baker. He was still in prison after asking the cupbearer upon his release, to put a good word in to Pharaoh for him. That was obviously not politically expedient for the cupbearer to do so. Even though he was still imprisoned the events of this chapter show that Joseph's faith in God was still strong.

Interestingly the dreams of Pharaoh came in a pair. So did the last two dream and interpretation incidents Joseph experienced. The first pair was with his family and the second while in prison with the royal cupbearer and royal baker. The dreams that Pharaoh experienced involved the Nile River, which is the life source of food in Egypt. There is very little rain in Egypt if at all; the entire economy of the agriculture was dependent for water, which came from the periodic flooding of the Nile.

The first dream opens with Pharaoh standing by the Nile watching seven stout cows rise out of the river where they would normally be feeding. After this seven gaunt cows came out of the river, approached the stout ones and ate them. This dream woke him up but did not bother him, as it was just a dream. He went back to sleep and received another dream. The second dream did greatly bother him. It was similar to the first except there were seven ears of grain that were dry by the blasting of the eastern sirocco winds coming from either Arabia or the Sahara Desert. These winds typically will lower the level of the Nile and have a devastating effect on the crops. These seven dry stalks of grain then ate seven healthy ones. Being the chief ruler in Egypt, Pharaoh must have realized the ominous sign that these dreams gave him. He knew that Egypt's entire economy was dependent upon agriculture through the Nile. From their pagan religion the cow was a representation of their god Isis the god of fertility. Osiris the god of vegetation was represented as a bull. He just did not understand the details or what exactly they meant.

Finally he called for his magicians and the wise men of Egypt to find out what the dreams meant. They were the experts in the priestly craft of magic. We see references to them in Daniel 1: 20, 2:2 and Exodus 7-9. These occultists were unable to provide a satisfactory interpretation for him. These dreams came from Jehovah God and the occultists who were connected to the demonic world could not be able to provide an answer to Pharaoh's questions from their normal source.

THE CUPBEARER SPEAKS UP

Genesis 41: 9-13

The cupbearer who was a close servant of Pharaoh “suddenly” remembers one who can interpret dreams accurately. He had been restored after imprisonment and at that time he had nothing to gain by helping Joseph as requested. Now it was going to help him in Pharaoh’s court to reveal Joseph’s gift. He begins by stating his personal faults that landed him in prison where he encountered Joseph. The political intrigue here is interesting. If Joseph could provide a satisfactory interpretation the cupbearer would be a hero. If Joseph failed then along with the failures of the occultists perhaps there was no interpretation to be had. Interestingly the cupbearer only spoke of Joseph’s ability. He did not make any promises to Pharaoh. He saw the degree of stress these dreams had on him and was probably concerned for his job if a replacement came into power. The fact that Joseph had accurately interpreted the two dreams of both the cupbearer and the baker both good and evil must have impressed Pharaoh. He sent for Joseph to be brought out of the dungeon and appear before him. Joseph then shaved himself, as the Egyptians were clean-shaven. He changed his clothes, which could have come from Potiphar so he could make the best appearance before the king of Egypt. Perhaps he realized that this was his one chance to finally be released from an unjust imprisonment.

PHARAOH’S SPEAKS TO JOSEPH

Genesis 41: 15-24

Surely Joseph was prepared by Potiphar and others close to Pharaoh what the nature of his appearance before the king was. So Pharaoh begins his discourse with Joseph by relating the failure of his magicians and soothsayers to successfully interpret the dreams. Then he lets Joseph know that it has been said of him “*when thou hearest a dream thou canst interpret it.*” Joseph knowing God says, “*It is not in me: God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace.*” Joseph is not saying the dream will be to his liking, just that he will have the satisfaction of knowing exactly what the dream meant. He is also saying to Pharaoh that knowing the genuine meaning of the dream will remove your anxiety, which seemed to be great. Joseph is saying that God will communicate his intentions to Pharaoh so he can respond according to God’s divine plan. The same idea is conveyed in Proverbs 21: 1.

¹The king's heart is in the hand of Jehovah as the watercourses: He turneth it whithersoever he will (ASV 1901).

Just as Jehovah God can change the course of a stream of water, He can turn a king's heart any way He desires. We must remember that even though this man was an absolute autocrat, God controls him and allows him to do what He wills him to do.

Pharaoh then recalls the dream to Joseph and adds some new information. He says that the thin cows were worse than he has ever seen in Egypt and after the thin ones ate the stout ones they were still gaunt. He moves on to describe the sirocco winds causing some grain to be withered and that they ate the healthy stalks of grain. He concludes his exposition by stating that his magicians could not decipher the dreams.

JOSEPH INTERPRETS AND ADVISES

Genesis 41: 25-36

Joseph begins the interpretation immediately. The sense of urgency is apparent with the speed that they got him out of prison and in front of Pharaoh. He tells Pharaoh that the two dreams are of the same issue. Joseph stated the divine purpose of the dreams to be, “*what God is about to do he hath declared unto Pharaoh.*” This is what Daniel would tell Nebuchadnezzar in a later period (Cir. 598 B.C.) in Babylon when he dreamed a dream of a massive image (Daniel 2). Joseph tells him that there will be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. It will be a very difficult time in Egypt for all who live there. The Nile flooding will cease for seven years causing a grievous famine. Joseph follows this interpretation with a strategy.

He tells Pharaoh to appoint a wholesome, trustworthy, and effective economic czar as well as overseers to implement the following plan for safely providing for his citizens through the famine. Joseph suggests that a twenty percent tax should be implemented for the next seven years of plenty instead of the normal ten percent. The citizens would not see any negative effects because the seven years of plenty would produce a bumper crop making the higher temporary tax virtually unnoticed. Farmers would still have approximately their normal yield. The food would be stored in various locations around the country making it accessible when needed and visible to the population so they could see the genuineness of the plan as it was implemented. When the famine struck Pharaoh would be well liked as the savior of Egypt. Since the hated Hyksos were in charge of Egypt this would soften the citizen’s view of them. The Hyksos would not have to rely too heavily on military force to maintain population control.

Today’s Message:

PHARAOH APPOINTS JOSEPH PRIME MINISTER

Genesis 41: 37-44

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, a man in whom the spirit of God is? ³⁹And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath showed thee all of this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou: 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. ⁴¹And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. ⁴²And Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph’s hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; ⁴³and he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he set him over all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁴And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or his foot in all the land of Egypt (ASV 1901).

Pharaoh listened to Joseph telling him the nature of his dreams and the plan that must be implemented in order to save the nation of Egypt from the coming famine. He agreed with Joseph that his plan had merit. He then turned to his advisers who recognized that the dreams were correct asking, “*Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom the spirit of God is?*” The text does not show any comments coming from the advisors. They perhaps thought they would be chosen to implement this grand fourteen-year plan to save Egypt. If so their silence indicates their disappointment in not getting chosen.

Pharaoh’s mention of a man in which the Spirit of God resides is actually as spirit of the gods. אֱלֹהִיםThe term gods here is Eloheem, which can mean The Godhead, or it can refer to the pagan gods or even to our Father Jehovah if His name YHWH is coupled with Eloheem. This context suggests that it is a reference to some generic gods. Context governs how we translate this word. Its translation in various English texts lets us know the personal preference of the translator. Pharaoh did not know Jehovah and saw a supernatural interpretation of his dream by Joseph and therefore attributed it to “some god” as its source was clearly beyond all natural reason. This is the first reference within the biblical text of one so endowed. Pharaoh then goes on to repeat Joseph’s own words of a person so “discerning and wise.”

Pharaoh did not waste any time in selecting Joseph for this task as he saw that he had supernatural guidance and could perform the task as outlined by Joseph. Joseph is now getting an appointment to the office of Prime Minister of the greatest nation on earth at that time. He came from a seven-year term in prison to an appointment of high office in control of all of Egypt’s economic affairs. Pharaoh would retain supreme rulership but Joseph had all other control over this country. He could make treaties and direct trade policy with other nations. This was now the fourth time Joseph had been elevated to be an overseer. This was his highest elevation. As seen in other elevations in the past Joseph’s temperament was not that of a heady prideful man. He stayed humble giving credit to God for the dream interpretations and insight he received. With the selection of Joseph Pharaoh immediately gave him his signet ring, which was used to validate the authenticity of the throne on legal documents. All would know that when Joseph entered into a legal issue that he *was* the authority. Pharaoh then gave him a fine linen robe and a golden chain for his neck. A royal procession was then organized to display Joseph to the citizens of Egypt.

As the royal parade was taking place Joseph was given the second chariot of Pharaoh to ride in. This is the first mention of a chariot in the Bible. The Hyksos introduced chariots into Egypt. With Pharaoh being a Hyksos this was a sign of the Hyksos being in charge and letting the population realize that Joseph, the Hebrew was given *visible* high authority. He needed this to succeed in his assignment. The population had to obey him if Egypt was going to survive the difficulties, which lay ahead. Additionally Pharaoh had runners going before Joseph in the procession as heralds, loudly exclaiming the new person elevated to high office. The citizens were also required to bow their knees to Joseph in obedience as Prime Minister or Grand Viceroy of Egypt. Finally, Pharaoh exclaims to all that Joseph has total control over Egypt and no one can do anything without Joseph’s approval. The economic future of Egypt depended upon them precisely obeying all that Joseph would command them to do.

PHARAOH RENAMES JOSEPH

Genesis 41: 45-46

⁴⁵And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him to wife Asenath, the daughter of Poti-phaera priest of On. And Joseph went out over the land of Egypt. ⁴⁶And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt (ASV 1901).

Because of the fact that Joseph was not an Egyptian he would nevertheless be hindered in the performance of his duties. The people would resist a non-Egyptian as their governor so Pharaoh renamed him *Zaphenath-paneah*. The exact meaning of this name is somewhat obscure but it essentially refers to "God having spoken and is living." As an additional token to bring him in to Egyptian high society he gave him a wife who was the daughter of a prominent priest called Potiphera. He is not to be confused with the chief executioner who purchased Joseph thirteen years earlier from the band of Ishmaelites. Joseph was now connected to a prominent elite Egyptian family, which advanced his integration in their society. This strategic move would cause him to be more effective in carrying out his master economic plan. Joseph was now thirty years of age and started his tenure as Prime Minister of the greatest nation on the earth at that time. It has been thirteen years since he came to Egypt as a slave. Joseph began his role as overseer of the Granaries of Upper and Lower Egypt with a personal survey of the entire country to prepare for this tasks which lay ahead. This particular role within his office of Prime Minister was the equivalent to a modern minister of agriculture.



SEVEN GOOD YEARS

Genesis 41: 47-49

⁴⁷And in the seven plenteous years the earth brought forth by handfuls. ⁴⁸And he gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities: the food of the field, which was round about every city, laid he up in the same. ⁴⁹And Joseph laid up grain as

the sand of the sea, very much, until he left off numbering; for it was without number (ASV 1901).

Just as Joseph had predicted the land of Egypt produced a bumper crop. He had the twenty percent crop tax stored in government facilities distributed around the country in its various cities. After seven years the storage facilities could hardly hold the amounts being collected. In fact the collectors could not even count the volumes because they were so plentiful. God was blessing the land of Egypt.

SONS ARE BORN TO JOSEPH

Genesis 41: 50-53

⁵⁰And unto Joseph were born two sons before the year of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, bare unto him. ⁵¹And Joseph called the name of the first-born Manasseh: For, said he, God hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house. ⁵²And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath made me fruitful in the land of my affliction. ⁵³And the seven years of plenty, that was in the land of Egypt, came to an end (ASV 1901).

During the seven years of plenty Asenath gave birth to two sons for Joseph. Joseph gave them Hebrew names. This is an indication that he did not give in to the polytheistic paganism in which Asenath had been born and raised. The first-born was Manasseh meaning “Forgetting” and Ephraim, which means “Doubly Fruitful.” It is apparent that Joseph was designating his sons with his attitude related to his experiences coming to Egypt. Manasseh named for Joseph forgetting all the bad things that happened to him and Ephraim thanking God for the blessings that came his way. The lesson here is for us to forget whatever evil we have experienced and move on with our lives. To live in the past and nurture old pain causes it to remain alive and Satan then derails us in our sanctification. This truth is given in the New Testament in II Timothy 2: 11-12a and Romans 8: 18.

¹¹It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: ¹²If we suffer, we shall also reign with him (KJV).

¹⁸For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory, which shall be revealed in us (KJV).

THE FAMINE BEGINS

Genesis 41: 54-57

⁵⁴And the seven years of famine began to come, according as Joseph had said: and there was famine in all lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. ⁵⁵And 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. ⁵⁶And the famine was over all the face of the earth: and Joseph opened all the store-houses, and sold unto the Egyptians; and the famine was sore in the land of Egypt. ⁵⁷And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was sore in all the earth (ASV 1901).

Just as Joseph had predicted, the seven years of plenty had come to an end. They now entered the period of drought and famine. The Nile flooding ceased due to the sirocco winds from the Sahara or Arabia and caused a grievous famine. The country had come to expect the high standard of living they had for the previous seven years and now would experience a severe famine. The famine was in other countries as well as Egypt. The text says it was over the entire earth. This story can have an ominous import for us too. We should never let high living stop us from saving and becoming debt free. If we give our time and resources to God's work we will be rewarded (Luke 6: 38). Hard times will come. We must take this story to heart and prepare.

The first reaction of the people was to complain to Pharaoh. They reasoned that the government should provide for them. It might be politically expedient for government officials to claim to be able to provide but they have no genuine control of the economy, the weather, or in this case the flooding of the Nile. Generally if the government does the economy any good it is through low taxation and low borrowing. Too much government indebtedness crowds out private investment and therefore economic growth.

Joseph did not just give the people welfare. They were warned that this was coming and they should have saved themselves. He waited as long as possible then opened the granaries and sold them grain. He maintained strict control over the inventory to prevent looting and waste. This stored food had to last for seven years. Other countries came to Egypt to buy food. Pharaoh was realizing just what a good move it was to listen to the God of Joseph. Egypt had plenty and was profiting from the famine when they could have been suffering.

NEXT WEEK: JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS

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