

GOD REWARDS OBEDIENCE

Bible Background – GENESIS 41:14-57

Printed Text – GENESIS 41:25-33, 37-40, 50-52

²⁵ Joseph responded, “Both of Pharaoh’s dreams mean the same thing. God is telling Pharaoh in advance what he is about to do.

²⁶ The seven healthy cows and the seven healthy heads of grain both represent seven years of prosperity.

²⁷ The seven thin, scrawny cows that came up later and the seven thin heads of grain, withered by the east wind, represent seven years of famine.

²⁸ “This will happen just as I have described it, for God has revealed to Pharaoh in advance what he is about to do.

²⁹ The next seven years will be a period of great prosperity throughout the land of Egypt.

³⁰ But afterward there will be seven years of famine so great that all the prosperity will be forgotten in Egypt. Famine will destroy the land.

³¹ This famine will be so severe that even the memory of the good years will be erased.

³² As for having two similar dreams, it means that these events have been decreed by God, and he will soon make them happen.

³³ “Therefore, Pharaoh should find an intelligent and wise man and put him in charge of the entire land of Egypt.

³⁷ Joseph’s suggestions were well received by Pharaoh and his officials.

³⁸ So Pharaoh asked his officials, “Can we find anyone else like this man so obviously filled with the spirit of God?”

³⁹ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has revealed the meaning of the dreams to you, clearly no one else is as intelligent or wise as you are.

⁴⁰ You will be in charge of my court, and all my people will take orders from you. Only I, sitting on my throne, will have a rank higher than yours.”

⁵⁰ During this time, before the first of the famine years, two sons were born to Joseph and his wife, Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, the priest of On.

⁵¹ Joseph named his older son Manasseh, for he said, “God has made me forget all my troubles and everyone in my father’s family.”

⁵² Joseph named his second son Ephraim, for he said, “God has made me fruitful in this land of my grief.”

-----New Living Translation

Lesson Introduction

In this lesson, we will discover how Joseph’s love for God and faithfulness helped him find success in Egypt. Although Joseph experienced betrayal, extreme hardships and oppression at the hands of his brothers and later was imprisoned through circumstances that he did not cause, he continued to be faithful to God and to honor Him in his behavior and attitude. Through the study of Joseph, we learn how to celebrate God’s providential care even in times of suffering and extreme crises.

Background: While Joseph languishes in prison on false charges, Pharaoh of Egypt has two disturbing dreams. In the first dream, seven healthy cows that come out to the Nile and begin to graze. But then, seven scrawny cows appear and eat the fat ones. In the second dream, seven choice ears of grain grow on one stalk; then seven skinny ears of grain blossom on that stalk and consume the hearty grain. Pharaoh is extremely troubled and beckons experts to give meaning to the dreams, but none of them provide a suitable analysis. Eventually, these events remind Pharaoh's cupbearer of the time Joseph had rightly interpreted the cupbearer's dream. Pharaoh wastes no time, and Joseph is pulled out of jail to stand before the great ruler! Before Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams, he announces that it is not he that provides the interpretation but God. Only God can give the correct answer and assure the Pharaoh of its accuracy. Through this event, God provides an opportunity for Joseph to find favor with Pharaoh and to give God credit for the interpretation.

-----*Precepts for Living*, the UMI Annual Commentary 2020-2021, p. 25

Joseph Interprets the Dream

Genesis 41:25-33: Joseph is now preparing to tell Pharaoh the meaning of the dreams that the ruler has had. But before he begins, Joseph makes it clear that God has sent these two dreams to Pharaoh as a revelation of God's plan and what action the leader is to take. The fact that two different dreams reveal the same meaning implies the urgency and the emphasis that what is revealed will surely take place. Throughout the history of the patriarchs, God used dreams to communicate His plan. Through a dream, He told Abraham that his offspring would go to a strange land and leave that land with great wealth (Genesis 15:12-16). He revealed to Joseph that He would exalt him above his brothers (Genesis 37:5-10). He revealed how He would deal with the pagan nations used to bring judgment to a rebellious people (Daniel 2:27-30).

Once again, Joseph emphasized that the dreams reveal God's plan and that the two dreams reveal the same meaning. The seven healthy cows and the seven good ears of grain represent seven years of good harvest and prosperity in the land with plenty of food. The seven lean cows and seven empty ears of grain represent seven years of famine. The interpretation is that the seven years of abundance will be followed by seven years of devastation. The famine would be so bad that it would obliterate the memory of the seven good prosperous years that preceded it. The time of plenty would be forgotten (Heb. *shakach* – to forget, to cease to care). The severity of the famine would totally consume (Heb. *kalah* – consume completely) and destroy life, cattle, and crop. The “double” dream emphasized that these were prophetic dreams from God and the foretold events would surely come to pass.

Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams and also gives advice for what should be done to save the land of Egypt during the devastating years of famine. The recommendation Joseph offered was that a wise man should be appointed to take charge during this time. One who had discernment, administrative skills and wisdom to guide the affairs of the nation during the times of plenty and of famine. According to God's plan, Joseph was the man for the job. Joseph would gain his freedom and Israel would be preserved.

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◆ *Does God speak through dreams today? What biblical and experiential evidence do you have for your answer?*

Joseph Receives Honor

Genesis 41:37-40: It is important to note that during the difficult time of his approximately 13 years of slavery and imprisonment, Joseph remained obedient to God. He refused to shame God by giving in to Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39:9). He made it clear that he depended on God to give wisdom in the dreams he interpreted for others (Genesis 40:8, 41:25, 32). Although, Pharaoh neither served nor knew Joseph's God, all that he saw showed him that the hand of God was surely on Joseph and that he was the one who could lead the nation through the next 14 years. Joseph was elevated to prime minister, second only to Pharaoh himself. All were to follow Joseph's direction as he was given charge over all the operations in running the nation. And all of this was according to God's plan.

This was a fulfillment of God's revelation to Joseph and an example of how God can exalt anyone He chooses. His word never changes and He is faithful to His promises. The Lord has supernatural ability to work through those who know Jesus and are willing to submit faithfully to His will. And like Joseph, we can have tremendous impact on our community for the good of many if we act responsibly and witness to others about our faith in Christ Jesus.

◆ *When has your faith in Christ drawn others to ask about Him even when you were not "witnessing" aloud?*

Joseph Establishes Familial Roots with the Egyptians

Genesis 41:50-52: Joseph became an Egyptian ruler second only to Pharaoh in power over the entire kingdom. The Pharaoh gave him an Egyptian name, Zaphnath-Paaneah and an Egyptian wife, Asenath (v. 45). His father-in-law was a priest and probably an important figure in an Egyptian cult that worshiped the sun god Ra. Joseph was clearly steeped in the Egyptian culture. However, it appears that he never lost his faith and commitment to Jehovah God.

His two sons who were born in Egypt during the prosperous years were given Hebrew names. The first born was given the name Manasseh (meaning – "cause to forget" or "forgetful") and the second was named Ephraim (meaning – "double fruit" or "fruitful"). The names that Joseph chose for his sons could represent that Joseph recognized the hand of God in all that he suffered in his past. He had put his trust in God and was able to put the memory of the hardship and oppression he endured behind him. He also recognized that through God's compassion and grace, he was promoted and received increase and influence as a result of his faithfulness to the Lord.

Conclusion

When we are faced with challenging times in our lives, we would do well to follow Joseph's example. Learn to recognize these circumstances as an opportunity to seek God's wisdom and to allow Him to work in our lives to execute His plan through us. Like Joseph, we should remain confident that God is working on our behalf and wait in expectation for His next move in our life.

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Sources:

Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation, Carol Stream, Illinois.

Ogbonnaya, A. O. (Ed.). (2020). *Wisdom. Precepts for Living*, 22(Summer Quarter), 21 – 31. The Urban Ministries, Inc. Annual Commentary 2020-2021.

Lesson for Next Week – September 20, 2020 – Study Guide 3

LOVE VERSUS GUILT

Bible Background ♦ GENESIS 42

Printed Text ♦ GENESIS 42:6-25

Devotional Reading ♦ PSALM 51