

Pharaoh's Dreams

Genesis 41:1-24

Genesis 41:1-24 - *"Then it came to pass, at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh had a dream; and behold, he stood by the river. ² Suddenly there came up out of the river seven cows, fine looking and fat; and they fed in the meadow. ³ Then behold, seven other cows came up after them out of the river, ugly and gaunt, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the river. ⁴ And the ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven fine looking and fat cows. So Pharaoh awoke. ⁵ He slept and dreamed a second time; and suddenly seven heads of grain came up on one stalk, plump and good. ⁶ Then behold, seven thin heads, blighted by the east wind, sprang up after them. ⁷ And the seven thin heads devoured the seven plump and full heads. So Pharaoh awoke, and indeed, it was a dream. ⁸ Now it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh.*

⁹ Then the chief butler spoke to Pharaoh, saying: "I remember my faults this day. ¹⁰ When Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, both me and the chief baker, ¹¹ we each had a dream in one night, he and I. Each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his own dream. ¹² Now there was a young Hebrew man with us there, a servant of the captain of the guard. And we told him, and he interpreted our dreams for us; to each man he interpreted according to his own dream. ¹³ And it came to pass, just as he interpreted for us, so it happened. He restored me to my office, and he hanged him."

¹⁴ Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him quickly out of the dungeon; and he shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh. ¹⁵ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that you can understand a dream, to interpret it."

¹⁶ So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace."

¹⁷ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph: "Behold, in my dream I stood on the bank of the river. ¹⁸ Suddenly seven cows came up out of the river, fine looking and fat; and they fed in the meadow. ¹⁹ Then behold, seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and gaunt, such ugliness as I have never seen in all the land of Egypt. ²⁰ And the gaunt and ugly cows ate up the first seven, the fat cows. ²¹ When they had eaten them up, no one would have known that they had eaten them, for they were just as ugly as at the beginning. So I awoke. ²² Also I saw in my dream, and suddenly seven heads came up on one stalk, full and good. ²³ Then behold, seven heads, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprang up after them. ²⁴ And the thin heads devoured the seven good heads. So I told this to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me."

Background Notes

Pharaoh had his dreams "at the end of two full years." Does that mean that Joseph spent two years in prison, or does it mean that two years had gone by since he interpreted the dreams of the baker and the butler? We can't be sure, but in

any case Joseph spent at least two years in prison. Finally, according to God's plan, the time arrived for Joseph to be released.

Pharaoh had dreams about cows and grain. There was nothing unusual about cows coming up out of the Nile. It was normal for cows to submerge their bodies in the waters of the Nile to escape the heat and insects, and then emerge from the river to graze in the marsh grasses. What was unusual about this dream was that seven lean and mean and ugly cows completely devoured seven sleek and well-fed cows!

The dream about the grain was similar. There was nothing unusual about seven plump heads of grain, or seven thin heads of grain scorched by the east wind (the Palestinian sirocco.) What was unusual was that the thin scorched heads of grain swallowed up the plump heads of grain!

Pharaoh was troubled by these unusual dreams. Not one of his magicians or sorcerers (the pagan priests of Egypt) or his scholars or wise men was able to interpret these dreams. Finally, at this point, the butler remembered Joseph! Joseph was taken out of prison and brought before Pharaoh, and he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams with God-given insight and wisdom.

Doctrinal Points

1. Unbelievers cannot understand God's program for the world.

God gave Pharaoh two dreams that outlined His program for the world at that time. Remember, Egypt was the most powerful world empire in those days. But none of Pharaoh's scholars or magicians could understand the dreams, nor did they have any insight into what God was communicating. Why? Because unbelievers cannot understand God's program for the world!

The magicians and wise men would all have been involved in the occult, and they would have had demonic connections (as did the Egyptian magicians later on, in Moses' time). What is amazing, at first glance, is that one of the Egyptian scholars or sorcerers didn't at least take a guess about the meaning of the dreams. After all, Pharaoh had told them his dreams!

Many years later, in Daniel's time, Nebuchadnezzar didn't reveal his dream, but he expected his wise men to tell it and interpret it! God enabled Daniel to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream. But when Pharaoh told his wise men the dreams, no one even ventured a guess. Why not? The reason, I think, is that God would not allow these Egyptian magicians and wise men to obtain any knowledge of His program through their demonic connections or by any occult sources.

Unbelievers cannot understand God's program for the world. It was true then, and it is true today. God's program for the world is written down in black & white Scripture, but unbelievers don't see it. Unbelievers are blind. They cannot understand because they don't know God, so they do not value and cannot understand God's Word.

1 Corinthians 1:20 says: *“Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?”* And 1 Corinthians 2:14 says: *“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”*

Unbelievers cannot understand God’s program for the world.

2. Believers can understand God’s program for the world.

In the next section of this chapter, Joseph was able to give the interpretation of Pharaoh’s dreams, with no problem. Why? Because Joseph recognized that Pharaoh’s dreams were from God, and believers **can** understand God’s program for the world. We may not have the gift of interpretation of dreams as Joseph had, but we do have the gift of the Holy Spirit. So believers can understand God’s program for the world.

Ephesians 1 lists a number of the believer’s spiritual blessings - and these spiritual blessings are for **all** believers. One of these spiritual blessings is “understanding God’s program for the world.” Listen to the words of Ephesians 1:9-10: *“having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.”*

Do you see what the Bible is teaching in those verses? God has given believers wisdom and insight about His program for the world. Everything that’s happening in the world is working towards the return of Christ and the setting up of His kingdom, when **everything** will be subject to Him! There are many other Scriptures that give us details about this program.

Now if you share all of this with unbelievers they’ll laugh at you, because they can’t understand God’s program for the world! But because you are a believer, you can! This is one of your spiritual blessings. We don’t know that date of the Lord’s return, but we do know God’s future program for the world. Believers can understand God’s program for the world.

Practical Applications

1. Let’s remember that God remembers, even when others don’t remember.

The last verse of Genesis 40:23 says, *“Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.”* Even though Joseph had interpreted this man’s important dream, and even though Joseph had specifically asked him not to forget, the butler forgot.

Has this ever happened to you? Did you ever really depend on someone to help you out, or put in a good word for you, but they completely forgot? Why does God let this happen? Why would God let this happen to faithful Joseph? Well, one answer is that **our** timetable is not **God’s** timetable. The butler finally did remember - when it was **God’s** time for him to remember.

Also, because the butler forgot about him, Joseph was forced to depend more completely on **God**. God had not forgotten Joseph, but He allowed some time to go by - and during that time period Joseph had to **depend on the Lord alone**. And when Joseph was finally released, he would know he didn't get out of prison through the butler, or through his own ingenuity, or through some other maneuver. No - it was the **Lord** alone who brought him out of prison!

So if you experience disappointment because others forget all about you, remember that Isaiah 64:4 says: "*For since the beginning of the world men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, nor has the eye seen any God besides You, Who acts for the one who waits for Him.*" Let's remember that **God remembers** - even when others don't remember!

2. Let's remember to give God all the credit!

Verses 15-16: "*And Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that you can understand a dream, to interpret it. So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, 'It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace.'*"

Joseph gave God all the credit. Notice that he didn't even say, "God will give *me* the answer." No, he said, "God will give **Pharaoh** the answer." "*Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, 'The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do'*" (v25).

Joseph left himself out of the picture completely. Would we have done the same? Or would we have taken just a little of the credit for ourselves?! And there would have been a natural tendency for Joseph to triumph over all of the Egyptian wise men and magicians - but he didn't!

In addition, remember that Joseph was a prisoner. Just because he had been brought from prison to interpret Pharaoh's dreams didn't mean he would automatically be released. The natural tendency would have been to make a bargain with Pharaoh: "If you release me from prison, I'll give you the interpretation of your dreams!"

But Joseph didn't bargain, and he didn't triumph. He talked boldly about the Lord to that pagan king, and he took no credit for himself. This is a biblical example for us to follow.

Let's remember to give God all the credit. 1 Corinthians 4:7 says: "*For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?*" That verse applies to **everything**. It applies to our intelligence. It applies to abilities. It applies to our accomplishments. It applies to our appearance. It applies to our possessions. It applies to our spiritual gifts. **This applies to everything we are and have!**

How dare we be proud and self-satisfied (and sometimes even look down on others) because of our abilities or our accomplishments or possessions? What do we have that we didn't receive from God?

Let's remember to give **God** all the credit!