

Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dreams, and Becomes Prime Minister of Egypt

Genesis 41:25-45

Genesis 41:25-45 - *"Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do: ²⁶ The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads are seven years; the dreams are one. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ This is the thing which I have spoken to Pharaoh. God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do. ²⁹ Indeed seven years of great plenty will come throughout all the land of Egypt; ³⁰ but after them seven years of famine will arise, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine will deplete the land. ³¹ So the plenty will not be known in the land because of the famine following, for it will be very severe. ³² And the dream was repeated to Pharaoh twice because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass. ³³ "Now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. ³⁴ Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, to collect one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years. ³⁵ And let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. ³⁶ Then that food shall be as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish during the famine." ³⁷ So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. ³⁸ And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?" ³⁹ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. ⁴⁰ 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." ⁴¹ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." ⁴² Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. ⁴³ And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, "Bow the knee!" So he set him over all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁴ Pharaoh also said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." ⁴⁵ And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-Paaneah. And he gave him as a wife Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On. So Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt.*

Background Notes

There were many dreams from God in Joseph's life: Joseph's two dreams in Genesis 37, the two dreams of the butler and the baker in chapter 40; and Pharaoh's two dreams in chapter 41. You might get the idea that God was giving dreams to everyone all the time back in Bible times, but this was **not** the case! Most of the dreams in Bible times were like dreams that people have today - they mean nothing, and they're triggered by various factors.

I've had a dream that I call the "preachers nightmare." I dream that I'm preaching somewhere and no one is listening, and certainly no one is taking notes. The lectern is too low, a fan is blowing my notes away, the platform is crooked and I'm slowly sliding off! Now what would trigger a dream like that? I have no idea! I don't think it means that the Lord is telling me to get out of the ministry, or something like that (although some of you may disagree on that!). Most dreams, both then and today, are not communications from the Lord. But some dreams and visions in Bible days were sent by God - and they had meaning, as in the life of Joseph.

Does God give dreams today? Although God can communicate by dreams today, His **primary** means of communication today is through His completed Word, the Bible.

Verse 45: *"And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-Paaneah. And he gave him as a wife Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On."* The meaning of Joseph's Egyptian name is quite difficult to ascertain. It may mean "Revealer of Secrets," or it may mean "Savior of the World," or "God speaks and He lives." We can't be sure. Joseph married an Egyptian woman named Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah, priest of On. Poti-Pherah was not the same person as Potiphar, the captain of the guard, who purchased Joseph as a slave. Poti-Pherah was an Egyptian priest.

The fact that Joseph, a Hebrew, married Asenath, an Egyptian, was not improper or sinful. This marriage took place before the time when the Mosaic Law placed restrictions on marriage. The two boys who were born to Joseph and Asenath were given Hebrew names: "Manasseh" and "Ephraim." Both of these names have to do with God's control of Joseph's life, and this meaning may be an indication that Asenath became a believer in the one true God.

Joseph's position under Pharaoh can best be described as prime minister. Verse 44 says, *"Pharaoh also said to Joseph, 'I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.'" This figurative expression meant that **all** administrative decisions in all the land of Egypt were to be funneled through Joseph! What a change! And what a responsibility!*

Doctrinal Points

1. Joseph's exaltation is a lesson for every Christian to remember.

Joseph went from prison to prime minister in one day - a true "rags-to-riches" story! The lesson for the believer is - God can change your circumstances overnight, if He chooses to. Maybe your circumstances are similar to those of Joseph. Maybe things have not worked out well in your life, or the way you expected or hoped. Joseph's exaltation is a lesson for all of us to remember. God can move in your life and on your behalf. And circumstances can change quickly.

Proverbs 21:1 says, *"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water, He turns it wherever He wishes."* God can control the heart or the decisions of people with whom you have connections. God can turn them in your favor.

God is sovereign, and God can do these things! The key for you and for me is to put God first in our lives and our decisions. Trust Him, obey Him, and be humble before Him, as Joseph was.

1 Peter 5:6 says: *“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.”* That was true of Joseph, and it can be true of you and me as well. Joseph’s exaltation is a lesson for every Christian to remember.

2. Joseph’s exaltation is a picture of the glorification of Christ.

There are a number of parallels between the life of Joseph and the life of Christ. Like Joseph, the Lord Jesus was the beloved Son of the Father, but was betrayed by His own people. Like Joseph, the Lord Jesus was treated unjustly. Although He was innocent, He suffered - yet He did not speak out against those who betrayed Him. And now we see a further parallel: Joseph’s elevation is a picture of the glorification of Christ.

Verse 43 says that Joseph was placed over all the land of Egypt, and every knee had to bow to Joseph. **Every knee** - what a picture of the exaltation of Christ! In a coming day, the whole world will be subject to Christ, and **every knee** will bow to Him! Philippians 2:9-11 says, *“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him [Jesus] and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* Joseph’s elevation is a picture of the glorification of Christ.

Practical Applications

1. Can you handle sudden reversals?

Joseph had several sudden reversals in his life, both good and bad, but he handled them all - and he handled them well. Joseph was suddenly wrenched from his privileged position in his family to become a slave in Egypt - but he handled it. Joseph was suddenly put in charge of everything in Potiphar’s household, and he handled it. Joseph was suddenly falsely accused and shackled in a dungeon for something he had not done, but he handled that situation. Joseph was forgotten by the butler, but he handled it. And when Joseph was suddenly elevated to be prime minister over all of Egypt, he handled that well, too!

How was Joseph able to handle these sudden reversals without giving up hope - or without becoming proud and arrogant? He was able to handle all the changes in his life because he knew God was in total control of every event of his life, and he knew that God had a plan for his life.

In Philippians 4:12-13, Paul wrote: *“I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ¹³ I can do all things through Christ who*

strengthens me.” Paul had numerous sudden reversals in his life of service to the Lord. In Philippians 4 he tells us that he was tested in hunger, and he was tested in prosperity - and he had learned how to handle all of the tests. What was his secret? He had **learned to adjust to every situation**, whether good or bad, through Jesus Christ, who gave him the strength to adjust.

Can you handle life's sudden reversals - sudden job loss, sudden poverty, sudden grief, or sudden unfair treatment - without despair or bitterness? On the other hand, can you handle sudden promotion or sudden prosperity without becoming proud and extravagant? Answer: Yes, you can! If you recognize that God is in control and you know that He has a plan for your life, you can adjust properly to **any** situation. You can be sure that the strength of Christ will be available to enable you to meet and handle every situation.

How mature are you as a Christian? Can you handle sudden reversals?

2. Do unbelievers recognize the Spirit of God in us?

Verse 38 says, *“And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?”* Some translations have “spirit” of God (small “s”), and some translations have “Spirit” of God (capital “S”). Which is correct? Well, we can't tell from the original Hebrew, because the Hebrew language doesn't have upper and lower case letters!

The question is, was Pharaoh thinking of some kind of “divine spirit” in Joseph, or did he actually recognize the Spirit of the one true God in Joseph? In view of verse 39, I believe Pharaoh was actually thinking of the one true God, Joseph's God, about whom Joseph had witnessed when he gave the interpretation of the dreams: *“Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you.”* Pharaoh recognized that Joseph's God was superior to the pagan gods of the Egyptian magicians and priests.

Do unbelievers recognize the Spirit of God in us? By the way we talk? By the way we act? By the way we reach out to others?

Recently I witnessed an unusual display of patience from a driver in a crowded parking lot. He was being held up by two cars that were blocking the way, because the owners of the cars were transferring a bunch of stuff from one car to the other. The man who was being delayed didn't beep his horn. He didn't shout out the window, “Hey, get your act together” or “Get out of the way!” He patiently waited, and he even backed up to allow the transfer of the material. When he was finally able to drive by, I noticed the Christian “fish sign” on his rear bumper. There was a Christian who was exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit.

What about us? How do other people perceive us through our speech and behavior? Do unbelievers recognize the Spirit of God in us?