

DHW

## **LESSON 32**

### **THE BOOK OF GENESIS**

#### **Chapter 41**

#### ***INTRODUCTION***

The greatest moment of Joseph's life had arrived although in the precious chapter there was a dismal note that the butler did not remember Joseph but had forgotten him. However, we have learned that Joseph did not give up his hope of his dreams. Many times the divine author commented that God was with Joseph. God has promised those, who walk with Him, that He will be with them and they will prosper and be successful. The beginning part may seem difficult or even contrary to what God has promised. However, patience bids us to wait upon the Lord, who does not lie or change His mind.

Dreams had played an important part in Joseph's life. In his father's home in Canaan, he

dreamed two dreams. But his father and brothers interpreted his dreams by saying whether one day they would bow down before him. In the Egyptian prison on the same night, the butler and baker each of them dreamed. Their dreams did not involve Joseph in the sense that he was not featured in them. However, he interpreted their dreams. His interpretations came true. In this chapter two years since the release of Pharaoh's butler, Pharaoh dreamed. Pharaoh sought an interpreter of his dreams and none of his wise men could interpret them. In this chapter, we will learn of the sovereignty and providence of God. God is in control in the affairs of men in order to fulfil His plan and purpose. While God is in control, it does not mean that man is completely free from doing his part. Man is still responsible for making decisions and taking appropriate actions. This lesson shall bear out in our study. There are also other wonderful and precious lessons that we can learn

from this chapter. The following is an outline of this long chapter:

- 1) Pharaoh sought someone to interpret his dreams (Gen. 41:1-13);
- 2) Joseph was called before Pharaoh to interpret his dreams (Gen. 41:14-24);
- 3) Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams (Gen. 41:25-36);
- 4) Joseph was made Prime Minister of Egypt (Gen. 41:37-45); and
- 5) Joseph carried out the work according to his advice to Pharaoh (Gen. 41:46-47).

### ***STUDY THE WORD***

#### **Pharaoh Seeks the Interpretation of His Dreams**

Pharaoh dreamed two dreams and was deeply troubled. He dreamed that he was standing by the river, which was obviously the Nile. He dreamed two dreams: in the first one, seven good-looking and fat cows emerged from the river, and another seven ugly and thin cows came up out of the river. Then the seven ugly and thin cows

devoured the good-looking and fat cows. This strange dream startled and shocked Pharaoh, who suddenly woke up. Pharaoh slept and dreamed again. This time he saw seven fat and good heads of corn appeared on one stalk. Then another seven thin heads of corn were withered by the east wind. These seven withered corn devoured the seven fat and good heads of corn. Pharaoh was again startled and shocked, and he awoke. Pharaoh was deeply troubled. In those days dreams were considered significant and prophetic. Pharaoh sought the interpretation of his dreams but *all the best magicians of Egypt and all the wise men* could not interpret them (v.8).

Then Pharaoh's chief butler, who was previously imprisoned in the same ward as Joseph, now remembered that Joseph could accurately interpret dreams. Two years had passed since his release. He had forgotten Joseph, who had asked him for help when he was freed to plead on his behalf before Pharaoh for his freedom. We should not be too hasty to

condemn the butler for his ungratefulness. If the butler had pleaded for Joseph, Pharaoh might not even be interested in or taken notice of an imprisoned Hebrew slave. We can be certain that Joseph's faith and hope in God was still intact, and must have waited day by day for indications regarding his case. We see then that God had His timing which is always right.

The butler then said to Pharaoh that he remembered his faults (v.9) when Pharaoh was angry with him and imprisoned him together with the baker. He related that each of them dreamed and they told their dreams to a young Hebrew slave. Note that the butler did not mention the name of Joseph neither did he say that it was Joseph who took the initiative to ask them to relate their dreams to him. He made it appear that he told his dream first to Joseph. The butler also did not mention that Joseph had said to them that the interpretation of dreams was the prerogative of God. He continued and said that Joseph's interpretations of each of

their dreams came true. He was freed and re-instated but the baker was hanged. It is the Providence of God that the butler remembered his experience in prison in the same ward as Joseph was. This was God's timing.

### **Joseph Is Summoned Before Pharaoh**

After hearing the butler's account, Pharaoh called for Joseph. They brought Joseph hastily to Pharaoh but not until his head had been clean shaven. The Egyptians considered clean shaven heads to be hygienic. Being Hebrew, Joseph would sport a beard on his face and that too would have to be shaved off. He was given new robes, probably made of fine Egyptian white linen. He did not know yet why he was summoned to go before Pharaoh.

Joseph's faith and patience were tested again. He had requested the butler to put a good word on his behalf to Pharaoh that he had done nothing to deserve his imprisonment. But the butler had forgotten Joseph. Two years

then passed without any news from the authorities about his case (41:1). How Joseph must have waited and hoped! Had he given up on his own dreams? We can safely say that he had not otherwise he would not have interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's butler and baker. He believed that he had this God-given gift of interpreting dreams. Would the two years of waiting go to waste?

God's appointed time had finally come for Joseph to be freed so that the wheel of His plan and purpose for His people will continue to turn and may not be stopped by man. Pharaoh had two God-given dreams. He was perturbed by these dreams which were about two main supplies of food for the people - cows and corn. It is no wonder that the wise men of Egypt could not interpret the dreams because they were so bizarre – cows turned carnivorous and heads of corn became aggressive. It is clear that God had intended them for Joseph's sake, so that Joseph could have the opportunity to interpret them.

Pharaoh put to Joseph that he had heard that Joseph could understand and interpret dreams. Joseph's reply to Pharaoh is not only descriptive of his exemplary character but also instructive. Joseph disclaimed any ability to understand and interpret the dreams. This self-renouncing spirit is most remarkable. Indeed, he could be tempted to say that he could gain the favour of Pharaoh in order to bargain for his freedom. But in the depth of his heart, he knew that such knowledge and wisdom he possessed were gifts from God. Joseph was honest, humble and faithful to God. God's servants must display such characteristics.

### **Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dreams**

Joseph interpreted the dreams. He explained that the two dreams were actually one with a single message. The dream was repeated because God wanted to reveal to Pharaoh what He was about to do (v.25). The prophecy would be a certainty and it would happen. So Joseph continued that the seven fat and lean cows and

the seven ears of full and thin corn were seven years of agricultural prosperity in Egypt. And this would be followed immediately by seven years of famine. Then Joseph took upon himself to advise Pharaoh what was the logical thing to do. This was unsolicited. Did he take a risk? No, because he believed God and that his interpretation was accurate. Therein lay his faith in God. He advised Pharaoh to harvest the food in the seven years of plenty, and to take twenty percent of the harvest and store them in the cities. It was in order to provide food for the years of famine. He also advised Pharaoh to appoint a man, who should be *discreet and wise* to take charge of the whole operation (vv.33-36).

The fact that Joseph advised Pharaoh to appoint someone whose qualities he had described showed that Joseph believed without a doubt that the interpretation of the dreams would happen as he had explained. This is another evidence of his continual and complete trust in God and in the interpretation of

his own dreams in Canaan. Joseph had never wavered in his faith in God. By now, he had learned to be patient and wait upon the Lord. Observe that he did not promote himself as the discreet and wise man who could take charge of the whole operation. That possibility never crossed his mind.

### **Joseph Becomes the Prime Minister of Egypt**

The next interesting part is that Pharaoh believed him. All his servants in his court also believed. For Pharaoh to believe a Hebrew, who was his prisoner and a slave was beyond explanation. Moreover, he not only believed Joseph's interpretation of his dreams, he even readily accepted the advice of this insignificant prisoner and slave. Then he did another thing, which is hard to explain. He was so pleased with Joseph that he appointed him to be the man to take charge of the whole operation. However, he gave his reasons: Pharaoh observed three things about Joseph: 1) that the Spirit of the God, whom Joseph worshipped was upon him; 2) that the God of

Joseph had revealed the interpretation to him, and 3) that he was *discreet and wise* par excellence. And the climax of Pharaoh's response is that he promoted Joseph to be the most powerful man in Egypt, second only to him.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly Pharaoh gave Joseph an Egyptian name, *Zaphnathpaaneah* (a revealer of secrets). He gave his signet ring to him, which was the sign of his authority. Then he clothed Joseph with the typical white robe of nobility, and gave him a gold chain for him to wear round his neck and to ride on his second chariot as the mark of power. When he moved among the people, they were to bow on their knees to him! That was not all. Pharaoh gave him a wife, Asenath, the daughter of Potipherah, the priest of On (Heliopolis, 11 km. northwest of Cairo). This exaltation of Joseph was beyond his imagination and

expectation. In all probability, he might begin to see that God was fulfilling His promise to him.

### **Joseph Begins His Work as Prime Minister of Egypt.**

Joseph was thirty years old when God raised him to be the Prime Minister of Egypt. He rose up to this position in thirteen years from the time his brothers sold him to the Midianite merchants. Joseph left the court of Pharaoh and carried out his work thoroughly and conscientiously. He began his work by touring the land (v.46). He wanted firsthand information about the land and the people so that he was able to accurately assess the problems of his enormous task. He was wise. The seven years of plenty as he had predicted came to pass and the land produced *by handfuls* meaning abundance (v.47). The twenty percent of the produce were stored in the cities as planned. The amount gathered must have been very abundantly great.

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<sup>1</sup> The appointment of Joseph, a Hebrew, to the highest office in Egypt was not extraordinarily unique. Semitic rulers known as Hyksos pharaohs (1720-1550 B.C.) had taken over existing Egyptian bureaucratic administration. They scrupulously observed Egyptian conventions (Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 533).

Two sons were born to Joseph before the years of famine. Joseph called his firstborn, *Manasseh* (meaning cause to forget); and the name of the second son, *Ephraim* (meaning doubly fruitful). Now the seven years of plenty were ended. This was followed by the next seven years of famine *in all the lands* as Joseph had accordingly predicted. It meant that the famine affected not only in Egypt but also in the neighbouring regions. But in Egypt there was food. When the inhabitants in the lands of the surrounding region had no food, they went to Egypt where Joseph sold food to them.

### **PRACTICAL VALUE**

We can now understand why God put Joseph through those difficult times. God was moulding his servant for the position, which He had reserved for him. In this chapter, Joseph's humility, patience and faith stand out prominently. People do not simply grow and bear the fruit of the Spirit instantly. It takes time and sometimes years to bear all

the nine-fold facets of the fruit of the Spirit. To be a great leader and a servant of God, these qualities are essential. Pride will bring the downfall of a person. Faith in God is to believe God's Word wholeheartedly without compromise.<sup>2</sup> God demonstrated that He was in control of the destinies of people and nations in order to protect His covenant people. God is still in control. Let us believe in God and do His will.

Before Joseph could be presented before Pharaoh, he needed to be shaved. It was the custom of Hebrews to wear a beard, whereas the Egyptians were clean shaven. Moreover, it would be improper and disrespectful for Joseph to appear before the king in shabby prison clothes. There is a valuable lesson which we can learn without much hardship. How do we present ourselves before the God Almighty and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Kings of all kings on

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<sup>2</sup> James wrote James 1:3, 4): *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. 4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*

every Lord's Day? When we have a meeting with the head of a country or some government dignitaries, do we not always put on our best, both in character and clothes? Should we not do the same when we present ourselves before God on every Lord's Day when we come to worship Him? The answer is a resounding "Yes"! In the old days, we put on our Sunday best. It is a good custom or tradition. This is God pleasing if we do it to honour Him. What has happened to this custom? Let us not be found wanting in this respect.

An additional thing that can be learned is that Joseph was prepared to tell Pharaoh the whole truth and nothing but the truth. In short he told everything whether it was good or bad without fear or favour of men. The servant of God must constantly remember this. He must be faithful to preach, teach, and declare the Word of God without compromise.

One glaring principle we learn about God's dealings with His people is that what comes in the

end counts and not what happens along the way. It is the final destination and not the hardships along the way. So it is with all Christians. Our Christian path may be strewn with adversities and difficulties. But if we remain faithful and obedient to Him, like Joseph we will be in for a great surprise. As Paul exclaimed (Romans 8:18): *For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.* The real stuff that makes a person is not how he behaves when he is successful but what he does after a fall. AMEN