

God Rewards Obedience

Bible Background • GENESIS 41

Printed Text • GENESIS 41:25–33, 37–40, 50–52 | Devotional Reading • 1 PETER 5:5–11

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will DISCOVER how Joseph's love for God and faithfulness helped him find success in Egypt, ASPIRE to remain steadfast in love and obedience to God when facing extreme hardships, and CELEBRATE God's providential care in times of suffering.

In Focus

Robert had been in his new advertising job for more than six months. He enjoyed the job but didn't really feel like he was making a contribution to his team. All the other team members had talents he could clearly see. Monica was creative; Michelle was a good organizer; Pierce was a good motivator; and Ronald was an excellent long-range planner.

Marvin, their team leader, had given each of them the chance to head an important project. One day his team was discussing the fact that their line of products wasn't being received well in a particular region of the country. The project had been reassigned to Robert's team. What could they do that was different?

"What have they already done?" Robert got up the nerve to ask.

Marvin began to explain some advertising campaigns and slogans the other team had tried. Robert spoke up again. "I think I know what part of the problem may be. I'm from around there and that's just not the way people there make decisions about using a product like ours." He began to explain some of the differences. "Why don't you head this project then, Robert?" asked Marvin. "You're probably our best hope." Then and there, Robert said a quick prayer, thanking God for this chance, but also asking God to help him do a good job.

How has God provided places for you to use your gifts and skills? How have you seen Him guiding you through those places?

Keep in Mind

"And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: Thou 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" (Genesis 41:39-40, KJV).

Say It Correctly

Asenath. **AH**-sen-ath.

Potipherah. **PAH**-teh-FARE-uh.

Heliopolis. he-lee-**OH**-poh-liss.

Giza. **GEE**-zah.

Cairo. **KIE**-row.

KJV

Genesis 41:25 And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh is one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do.

26 The seven good kine are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years: the dream is one.

27 And the seven thin and ill favoured kine that came up after them are seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine.

28 This is the thing which I have spoken unto Pharaoh: What God is about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh.

29 Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt:

30 And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land;

31 And the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following; for it shall be very grievous.

32 And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

33 Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt.

37 And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants.

38 And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?

39 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art:

40 Thou 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.

NLT

Genesis 41:25 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."

The People, Places, and Times

Dreams. In the Old Testament, dreams were very important, though not every dream was thought to be from God. Many divine revelations came through the dreams of various kings, prophets, and ordinary people. God would reveal His plans to those who worshiped Him or to pagans in dreams. In ancient times, the dreams of kings and holy people were considered to have national or international significance. Kings often retained several specialists to interpret their dreams for them, and being able to interpret prophetic dreams was a sought-after skill. While dreams were considered significant, God often warned against relying solely on dreams to know and understand His will (Deuteronomy 13:1-5; Jeremiah 29:8-9; Matthew 16:3; 1 Corinthians 13:9).

Potipherah. Pharaoh gave Joseph Asenath, the daughter of Potipherah priest of On, as his wife (Genesis 41:45, 50). The city On was situated north of Cairo, on the Nile Delta, about 17 miles away from the Pyramids in Cairo. Potipherah is believed to be a high-ranking priest of the Egyptian sun-god Ra, their chief deity. Worship of Ra permeated the city, causing the Greeks to give it the name Heliopolis, "City of the Sun."

What does Joseph's marriage to the daughter of a pagan priest imply about marrying people outside the faith?

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.

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

At-A-Glance

1. Joseph Interprets the Dream (Genesis 41:25-33)
 2. Joseph Receives Honor (vv. 37–40)
3. Joseph Establishes Familial Roots with the Egyptians (vv. 50-52)

In Depth

1. Joseph Interprets the Dream (Genesis 41:25-33)

God reveals to Joseph that Pharaoh's dreams are a warning to prepare for a famine. Pharaoh had two dreams, but Joseph realizes they were the same and that the repetition addresses the urgency with which Pharaoh should act. The nation of Egypt will have seven years of good crops and plenty, but those will be followed by a seven-year famine of equal proportion.

Without this warning, Egypt would have been devastated, and the nation could have dissolved through the death of its people and the vulnerability of its government. Joseph does not stop at just interpreting the dreams, however, he goes on to apply his gifts of administration to suggest a plan of action. Pharaoh will need a discerning man in charge of the land to put aside extra during the years of plenty so that the nation can survive during the famine.

Like Joseph, when we have been misunderstood and oppressively ostracized, we need to continue cultivating a good relationship with the Lord. It is only through such faithfulness that we will be spiritually ready when God's time comes for our deliverance and vindication. In fact, God will use our spiritual gifts to exalt us into the influential positions in life where He designs for us to be.

2. Joseph Receives Honor (vv. 37–40)

Joseph does not ask to be put in charge. Pharaoh, however, recognizes that Joseph does not rely on his own cleverness and wisdom. Instead, Joseph follows God, who has revealed this great truth. Pharaoh, who neither knows nor serves Joseph's God, concludes that Joseph's ability to interpret his dreams serves as evidence that the hand of God rests upon him. Pharaoh decides to make Joseph the prime minister in charge of the palace and the country (v. 40). By elevating Joseph, Pharaoh acknowledges that God is powerful!

The Lord has the supernatural ability to work in the lives of those inside and outside the faith community. When we are faithful to our Lord, God might elevate us to positions where we have favor even with those who do not know Jesus.

In the positions God calls us to serve, we have the ability to make enormous contributions that will impact our society for the good. For God to use us, however, we must commit to acting responsibly. As a result, we also introduce God to others.

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

3. Joseph Establishes Familial Roots with the Egyptians (vv. 50-52)

God not only uses His servants to help people in need, but He enjoys giving personal blessings to those who do His will. Joseph and his Egyptian wife Asenath are blessed with two sons. One is named Manasseh, meaning "forget." Through the blessings of Joseph's elevation, God brought fulfillment to his life, letting him forget the pain of his enslavement and filling the void caused by the distressing experiences of his past (v. 51). The second son is named Ephraim, meaning "doubly fruitful," capturing Joseph's glorious prosperity in Egypt (v. 52).

Through Joseph's marriage and family, God provides for perpetuation of His divine presence with Egypt, and with the Hebrews. The Egyptians were kind and welcoming to Joseph's whole extended family, letting them settle in Goshen, partially because of Joseph's Egyptian family. Joseph's Egyptian sons provide him with a lasting heritage within the nation of Israel. There is no tribe named for Joseph as there is for his brothers, but the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, though technically half-tribes, often receive full recognition and blessing comparable to other full tribes, like Levi or Judah.

How have you established roots after a move, whether to a different house, a different job, or a different chapter of life?

Search the Scriptures

1. How does Pharaoh acknowledge God? (vv. 37-39)
2. How is Joseph rewarded for using his gift? (vv. 39-40)
3. What names does Joseph give his children and why (vv. 51–52)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why do you think God allows us to endure trials, tribulation, and hardship prior to elevating us?
2. We sometimes underestimate the power of our gifts and miss opportunities to serve God. How does Joseph overcome the urge to underestimate himself?

Liberating Lesson

Each of us faces circumstances that can lead us to doubt our faith and plunge us into despair. It is important that, like Joseph, we find ways to give godly and practical encouragement to others whose situations seem bleak, even if our own circumstance is equally dire. We would also do well if we, like Joseph, were to see God at work in unlikely places in our own lives. When we seek God's wisdom in solving problems, we should be proactive and prepared for God to act rather than despondent when we face unexpected crises. We should, like Joseph, remain confident that God is working on our behalf as we prepare for His next move in our life.

Application for Activation

During the week, take some time to remember the promises or dreams God has given you, but which have not yet been fulfilled. Have you given up on any of your God-centered dreams? How can you maintain the right kind of attitude that will enable you to be ready if God should suddenly bring your dreams to pass? Share your dreams with trusted friends so you can encourage each other and help each other take steps to see the God-centered dreams come to be.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Paul and Barnabas Appointed for Ministry
(Acts 13:1-5)

TUESDAY

Joseph, Chief Interpreter of Dreams
(Genesis 41:9-13)

WEDNESDAY

Dreams of Cows and Corn Explained
(Genesis 41:14-24)

THURSDAY

Preparing for the Expected Famine
(Genesis 41:34-36)

FRIDAY

Storing Grain for the Future
(Genesis 41:41-49)

SATURDAY

Egypt Feeds the Middle East
(Genesis 41:53-57)

SUNDAY

Leadership During Crisis
(Genesis 41:25-33, 37-40, 50-52)