

God reveals through Joseph to Pharaoh what He is going to do

This is the fifth Bible study on Joseph. You can find the first four Bible studies at www.febelijbelstudies.nl/archief. But you can also use this Bible study on its own.

Before we begin the Bible study, some background information:

Joseph was born in Haran and, when he was about 6 years old, emigrated to Canaan, the land his father came from. To do this, he and the family he was born into had to walk some 800 kilometers. When they arrived in Canaan, his mother died giving birth to his little brother Benjamin. Joseph also has 11 older half-brothers and a half-sister. But his brothers dislike him because they see that father Jacob loves Joseph very much.

The brothers are jealous and also find it irritating that Joseph tells them that he dreams that everyone bows before him. So they mockingly call him "the master dreamer." One day, as the brothers are grazing the flock, they see Joseph approaching in the distance. He stands out because of his colorful coat.

When Joseph reaches his brothers, they grab him. They take off his coat and they throw him into a well. Then they see a caravan arriving; they are Ishmaelites bringing merchandise to Egypt. They pull Joseph out of the well and sell him to the traders. They take Joseph and sell him in Egypt to Potiphar. With Potiphar, Joseph is promoted because God blesses everything he does. Soon he controls all of Potiphar's household. But Potiphar's wife wants to seduce him. When Joseph does not respond to this, she turns the story around; she says that Joseph wanted to seduce her. Potiphar becomes furious and throws him into prison. In prison, Joseph notices that God is still with him. The jailer makes Joseph do more and more chores. This is how he gets to other prisoners. One day, two prisoners, Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker, tell him they both had a dream. Joseph listens to them and God shows Joseph what those dreams mean. Joseph tells them and asks the cupbearer to think of him when he is free again. After three days, Joseph's explanation comes true; they are both released from prison; the cupbearer gets his job back and the baker is hanged. But unfortunately, the cupbearer forgets that he was going to ask Pharaoh for a pardon for Joseph.

We read from the Bible (Amplified Bible): Genesis 41:1-45

Pharaoh's Dream

1Now it happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile. 2And lo, there came up out of the Nile seven [healthy] cows, sleek and handsome and fat; and they grazed in the reed grass [in a marshy pasture]. 3Then behold, seven other cows came up after them out of the Nile, ugly and gaunt and raw-boned, and stood by the fat cows on the bank of the Nile. 4Then the ugly and gaunt and raw-boned cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. Then Pharaoh awoke. 5Then he fell asleep and dreamed a second time; and behold, seven ears of grain came up on a single stalk, plump and good. 6Then behold, seven ears [of grain], thin and dried up by the east wind, sprouted after them. 7Then the thin ears swallowed the seven plump and full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and it

was a dream. 8So when morning came his spirit was troubled and disturbed and he sent and called for all the magicians and all the wise men of Egypt. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them to him.

9Then the chief cupbearer spoke to Pharaoh, saying, "I would mention my faults today.

10[Two years ago] Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and he put me in confinement in the house of the captain of the guard, both me and the chief baker. 11We dreamed a dream on the same night, he and I; each of us dreamed according to [the significance of] the interpretation of his own dream. 12Now there was with us [in the prison] a young man, a Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard; and we told him, and he interpreted our dreams for us, to each man according to the significance of his own dream. 13And just as he interpreted [the dreams] for us, so it happened; I was restored to my office [as chief cupbearer], and the baker was hanged."

Joseph Interprets

14Then Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon; and when Joseph shaved himself and changed his clothes [making himself presentable], he came to Pharaoh. 15Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have dreamed a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you that you can understand a dream and interpret it." 16Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not in me [to interpret the dream]; God [not I] will give Pharaoh a favorable answer [through me]." 17So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "In my dream, I was standing on the bank of the Nile; 18and seven fat, sleek and handsome cows came up out of the river, and they grazed in the reed grass [of a marshy pasture]. 19Lo, seven other cows came up after them, very ugly and gaunt [just skin and bones]; such emaciated animals as I have never seen in all the land of Egypt. 20And the lean and ugly cows ate up the first seven fat cows. 21Yet when they had devoured them, it could not be detected that they had eaten them, because they were still as thin and emaciated as before. Then I awoke [but again I fell asleep and dreamed]. 22I saw in my [second] dream, seven ears [of grain], plump and good, growing on a single stalk; 23and lo, seven [other] ears, withered, thin, and scorched by the east wind, sprouted after them; 24and the thin ears devoured the seven good ears. Now I told this to the magicians and soothsayers, but there was no one who could explain it [to me]."

25Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The [two] dreams are one [and the same and have one interpretation]; God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do. 26The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the [two] dreams are one [and the same]. 27The seven thin and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years; and also the seven thin ears, dried up and scorched by the east wind, they are seven years of famine and hunger. 28This is the message just as I have told Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do. 29Listen very carefully: seven years of great abundance will come throughout all the land of Egypt; 30but afterward seven years of famine and hunger will come, and [there will be such desperate need that] all the great abundance [of the previous years] will be forgotten in the land of Egypt [as if it never happened], and famine and destitution will ravage and destroy the land. 31So the great abundance will become forgotten in the land because of that subsequent famine, for it will be very severe. 32That the dream was repeated twice to Pharaoh [and in two different ways] indicates that this matter is fully determined and established by God, and God will bring it to pass very quickly. 33So now let Pharaoh [prepare ahead and] look for a man discerning and clear-headed and wise, and set him [in charge] over the land of Egypt [as governor under Pharaoh]. 34Let Pharaoh take action to appoint overseers and officials over the land, and set aside one-fifth [of the produce] of the [entire] land of Egypt in the seven years of abundance. 35Let them gather

[as a tax] all [of the fifth of] the food of these good years that are coming, and store up grain under the direction and authority of Pharaoh, and let them guard the food [in fortified granaries] in the cities. 36That food shall be put [in storage] as a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine and hunger which will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land (people) will not be ravaged during the famine.”

37Now the plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all of his servants.

Joseph Is Made a Ruler of Egypt

38So Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find a man like this [a man equal to Joseph], in whom is the divine spirit [of God]?” 39Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since [your] God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and clear-headed and wise as you are.

40You shall have charge over my house, and all my people shall be governed according to your word and pay respect [to you with reverence, submission, and obedience]; only in [matters of] the throne will I be greater than you [in Egypt].” 41Then Pharaoh said to Joseph,

“See, I have set you [in charge] over all the land of Egypt.” 42Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand, and dressed him in [official] vestments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. 43He had him ride in his second chariot; and runners proclaimed before him, “[Attention,] bow the knee!” And he set him over all the land of Egypt. 44Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Though I am Pharaoh, yet without your permission shall no man raise his hand [to do anything] or set his foot [to go anywhere] in all the land of Egypt [all classes of people shall submit to your authority].” 45Then Pharaoh named Joseph Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On (Heliopolis in Egypt), as his wife. And Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt [to inspect and govern it].

Explanation

When we dream, we soon forget them the next day.

But the Pharaoh of Egypt remembers exactly what he dreamed. In his dream, he is standing by the Nile River. There are 7 cows coming out of the river. They are beautiful, fat cows.

They go to graze along the river. Then 7 more cows come out of the Nile, these are 7 skinny and ugly cows. They join the other cows and then the skinny, ugly cows eat the beautiful cows!

Pharaoh wakes up. Then he falls asleep again. Now he dreams that 7 thick, beautiful ears grow from 1 culm. Then from the same stalk also grow 7 thin, dry ears. And those 7 thin, dry ears eat the thick, full ears!

The next morning, Pharaoh is restless. What do these dreams mean anyway?

He sends for all the wise and learned men of the land and he tells them what he dreamed.

But none of the wise men can tell what these dreams mean.

“Then can no one explain these dreams?” cries Pharaoh.

The words echo in the cupbearer's head. He stands with Pharaoh. And suddenly he thinks of Joseph, who explained his dream when he was in prison. And to his shame, he also thinks

back to what Joseph asked him, 2 years ago now, "Think of me when you are well again. Tell Pharaoh about me so that I will be taken out of here, because I am sitting here innocent!" Still he fulfills his promise and the cupbearer tells Pharaoh what happened 2 years ago. How Joseph explained his and the baker's dreams and how everything went exactly as Joseph had explained.

"Bring him here," orders Pharaoh.

Joseph is brought out of prison. He is allowed to shave and he is given new clothes. Then he is brought to Pharaoh.

Pharaoh says, "I have been dreaming and no one can explain my dreams. But I have heard that you can."

Then Joseph says something remarkable. Joseph is not going to brag about explaining the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker. Nor is he thinking, "I'm out of prison now, I have to make sure I stay out at all costs, possibly with a little lie."

No, the first thing he says to the powerful ruler of Egypt is, "no, I cannot explain dreams. But God will tell you the meaning so that you will have peace again."

Joseph is already giving God credit in advance for his gift of explaining dreams.

Pharaoh remembers exactly what he dreamed and in great detail he tells them to Joseph.

Then Joseph says, "the 2 dreams mean the same thing, Pharaoh. God has made known to you what He is going to do."

Again Joseph indicates that it is God who makes known to Pharaoh what is going to happen.

Then Joseph comes up with the explanation:

7 fat cows and 7 full ears are 7 years of great abundance.

7 lean cows and 7 thin ears are 7 years of famine. After the 7 years of abundance, there will be 7 years of famine. All abundance will be forgotten and famine will devastate the land.

The fact that you have had this dream twice, Pharaoh, means that God's decision has been made and that it is going to happen soon.

God also lets Joseph know what Pharaoh must do, for Joseph goes on to say, "Pharaoh, you must appoint a wise and wise man. You must also appoint overseers throughout Egypt to claim one-fifth of the yield of the land during the 7 years of plenty. This will be the food supply in the 7 years of famine so that the land will not perish of hunger."

The explanation of the dreams and the directions Joseph gives deeply impress Pharaoh. He believes what God tells him, through Joseph. He says to his servants, "could we find someone wiser than this man? God's Spirit dwells in him!" Joseph surpasses all the wise scholars of Egypt. Pharaoh says, "God has made this known to you Joseph, there is no one as wise and sensible as you. You must be that man. I appoint you as viceroy over all of Egypt."

Joseph gets Pharaoh's ring on his finger, he gets beautiful linen clothes, a chain around his neck. And he gets to ride in a beautiful chariot, before him servants shout "bow! bow! Where other people kept taking away Joseph's identity by taking away his coat or robe and life environment, Pharaoh gives him back an identity. Through the nice things and through his function. But his real identity is deep inside: in his character. Joseph always kept his heart by the choices he made and by his good attitude. He continued to trust God because he noticed that God blessed everything he did.

In the morning Joseph was still in prison, in the evening he is Viceroy of Egypt. What a lot can happen in 1 day. God has exalted Joseph. Joseph gets to lead in the 7 years of prosperity to prepare the land for the famine that will strike numerous nations. He gets to marry Asnat, the daughter of the priest of On, they have 2 children. And Joseph is given a new name by Pharaoh: Zaphenath-paneah, which means "interpreter of dreams" or in another translation "savior of the world. But Joseph knows that not he, but God is the savior of the world. Joseph gives God all the glory. God has turned his sorrow into joy. God gives a crown instead of ashes.

Prayer: Lord, after all the adversity Joseph has had, now comes a turning point in his life. You were always with him Lord. He noticed that and he trusted in You. You knew Lord that a great famine was coming that would affect many nations. And You already knew exactly that Joseph would be the right man to rule in the years of plenty so that in the years of famine he could care for the people You entrusted to him. Lord, You see the bigger picture when we only look at the here and now. Help us to trust, too, that You care for us, in good times and in bad.

Questions:

1. A lot can happen in 1 day. In the morning Joseph was still working in prison, and in the evening he was viceroy of Egypt. What would this have been like for Joseph?
 - a. How many times would he have thanked God for bringing him to this position?
 - b. Would we do the same? Or do we consider "good times" very normal and forget to thank God just then?
2. Read Genesis 41:50-52. Here we get a glimpse into the heart of Joseph. How does he look back on what his brothers did to him?
 - a. And how does he look to God?
 - b. Why does he incorporate this into his children's names? (Does this still happen today?)
3. Are you now in "years of plenty" or in "years of famine"? Is there anything you can learn from Joseph?
4. The rhymed psalm* 77:6 reads:

'Would God forget His mercy?
Never know of His mercy again?
Has He cut off His mercies
By His wrath cut off?
'I said afterward, "This hurts my life,
But God will give change;
The Most High makes it right,

After the sour He gives 't sweet.”

(Rhymed psalms are the texts from the Bible book “Psalms” that were put in rhyme in the 18th century. This way we can sing the Psalms).

a. What do you think of this psalm? Can you/or can people identify with this? Does this make sense to you?

b. “After the sour He gives 't sweet. Do you believe this?

c. Joseph could not have imagined that he would one day become Viceroy of Egypt. Yet, at the end, all the puzzle pieces fall together. 'The Sweet' may well be far greater than we could ever imagine. Are there puzzle pieces in your life whose bigger picture you don't understand? Can you prayerfully bring these puzzle pieces to God?