

# Genesis 41

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[ 0 : 00 ] It's chapter 41, and Donald will come and read for us. Genesis 41. Let's hear the Word of God. When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream.

He was standing by the Nile, when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. And after them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank. And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows.

Then Pharaoh woke up. He fell asleep again and had a second dream. Seven ears of corn, healthy and good, were growing on a single stalk. After them, seven other ears of corn sprouted, thin and scorched by the east wind.

The thin ears of corn swallowed up the seven healthy, full ears. Then Pharaoh woke up. It had been a dream. In the morning, his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt.

Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him. Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, Today I am reminded of my shortcomings. Pharaoh was once angry with his servants, and he imprisoned me and the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard.

[ 1 : 30 ] Each of us had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. The young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream.

And these things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us. I was restored to my position, and the other man was hanged. So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon.

When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Joseph, I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream, you can interpret it.

I cannot do it, Joseph replied to Pharaoh. But God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires. Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile.

When out of the river there came up seven cows, fat and sleek, and they grazed among the reeds. After them seven other cows came up scrawny and very ugly and lean.

[ 2 : 36 ] I had never seen such ugly cows in all the land of Egypt. The lean ugly cows ate up the seven fat cows that came up first. Even after they ate them, no one could tell that they had done so.

They looked just as ugly as before. Then I woke up. In my dreams I also saw seven ears of corn, full and good, growing on a single stalk. After them seven other ears sprouted, withered and thin and scorched by the east wind.

The thin ears of corn swallowed up the seven good ears. I told this to magicians, but none could explain it to me. Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same.

God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. The seven good cows are seven ears, and the seven good ears of corn are seven ears. It is one and the same dream.

The seven lean, ugly cows that came up afterwards are seven ears, and so are the seven worthless ears of corn scorched by the east wind. They are seven years of famine.

[ 3 : 48 ] It is just as I said to Pharaoh, God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do. Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, but seven years of famine will follow them.

Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land. The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the famine that follows it will be so severe.

The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon. And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man, and put him in charge of the land of Egypt.

Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming, and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh to be kept in the cities for food.

This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so the country may not be ruined by the famine.

[ 4 : 57 ] The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials, so Pharaoh asked him, Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the Spirit of God? Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you.

You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you. So Pharaoh said to Joseph, I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.

Then Pharaoh took a signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in a chariot as his second in command, and men shouted before him, Make way!

Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt. Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, I am Pharaoh, but without your word, no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt.

Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphonath, and gave him Asenath, daughter of Potipharah, priest of Onn, to be his wife.

[ 6 : 09 ] And Joseph went throughout the land of Egypt. Joseph was 30 years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Joseph went out from Pharaoh's presence and traveled throughout Egypt.

During the seven years of abundance, the land produced plentifully. Joseph collected all the food produced in these seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. In each city, he put the food grown in the fields surrounding it.

Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea. It was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure. Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath, daughter of Potipharah, priest of Onn.

And Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, it is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household. The second son, he named Ephraim and said, it is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.

The seven years of abundance in Egypt came to an end and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said, there was famine in all the other lands, but in the whole land of Egypt, there was food.

[ 7 : 24 ] When all Egypt began to feel the famine, the people cried to Pharaoh for food. Then Pharaoh told all the Egyptians, go to Joseph and do what he tells you.

When the famine had spread over the whole country, Joseph opened the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians. The famine was severe throughout Egypt and all the countries came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph because the famine was severe in all the world.

To Genesis chapter 41, to notice in particular, in this great chapter, God's timing and God's deliverer.

The Joseph story is epic in its scale, isn't it? It takes a long time even to read it. And here we're reminded of this movement in the story of Joseph.

We began with him, sort of riches, glory in his father's house. Then we see him in rags. Now we see him in riches again in Pharaoh's palace.

[ 8 : 26 ] There's a great drama, a great sweep of drama taking place in his story. But also the Joseph story is a great illustration for us of the Bible's big story.

You know, what's the Bible all about? As you look across 66 books that are contained, and it's really telling one great story.

Who is God? And how can I know this God? What's wrong with the world? And how can I be saved so that I might know and enjoy God?

And so you read the Old Testament before Jesus comes, and you see that it's all pointing forward towards Jesus. It's like the shadows before the substance comes.

You read the New Testament, and you see that it's reflecting back on the life of Jesus, the death and the resurrection of Jesus, and its significance for the church, and indeed for the world.

[ 9 : 27 ] So there's one big story, and this big chapter, I think, can help us to see so much of the good news at the heart of the Christian faith. And to summarize these 57 verses, what we see here is the all-powerful God who is working to his perfect timetable to raise up a savior who is the answer to human distress so as to bring blessing to the world.

That's the gospel, as we'll see as we get into this story. First thing to look at, God's timing and God's control.

So here is Moses, and he's writing the story of Joseph, and he wants us to see very clearly God is in control, and his timing is perfect.

Now, how does he do that? Well, we see it throughout our text. So verse 16, we discover God is the God who gives answer to dreams.

In verse 28, we discover God is the God who will bring these seven good years and seven years of famine. We see in verses 51 and 52 as Joseph names his sons an awareness of God's providence and control.

[ 10 : 51 ] God has made me. God has made me. So it's there in the flow of the text, but it's also in the theme of the dreams that we get through the story of Joseph.

So very quickly, some of us haven't been here since we began our Joseph story. Joseph at the age of 17 has a couple of dreams sent by God announcing to Joseph that he will be raised up to a position of prominence so that his family will bow down to him.

Now his brothers, they don't like this message to say the least. They hate Joseph anyway because he's the father's favorite. They hate him all the more because of these dreams and so they sell him into slavery in Egypt.

And while in Egypt, he'll go from being a slave to being a prisoner, but while he's in prison, so somewhere between the ages of 17 and 30, we find Joseph both a slave and a servant and a prisoner.

Somewhere during that time, around the age of 28, another prisoner comes, the cupbearer of Pharaoh, and he too has a dream and Joseph interprets that dream and it's a favorable interpretation because he has returned to the place of honor with the Pharaoh.

[ 12 : 16 ] God gave him the interpretation. God was announcing that the cupbearer would be back beside Pharaoh so that, chapter 41, verse 1, when two few years had passed, Pharaoh would now also have a dream.

So here's our third dream and what happens? The cupbearer, verse 9 to 13, he remembers.

Joseph. He remembers. There's someone in prison who's able to interpret the dream for you, Pharaoh, and because of that sequence, Joseph finds himself in the palace of Pharaoh.

Joseph finds himself in the position where he can be, effectively, the savior for the world because this famine hits hard. And so what we see by the end of the chapter, we've got Joseph somewhere around the age of 37, so about nine years pass in the course of chapter 41, and we can see that his dream from 20 years earlier is beginning to come to pass, but it's not fully realized yet.

God is in control in this long drama of Joseph's life. At any point in the story, someone might have asked, has God lost control?

There was this dream about Joseph and glory and honor, but look at him. He's a slave. Look at him. He's a prisoner. Look at him. He's been forgotten by the cupbearer. But as Moses invites us to take this wide-angled view, we recognize God has not lost control because God never loses control.

[ 13 : 56 ] That's one of the central teachings of the Bible about God. He is our creator. He is the one who sustains our life. He is the one who plans all things according to his will, his way, and his timetable.

He is the sovereign king. For Moses' first readers, for the newly established people of Israel, as they're wandering in the wilderness, as they haven't reached their final destination, this is good news.

It's good news for them to hear that God who rescued you, just as he promised from Egypt, you can trust him. The promised land will come.

come, have faith in God's perfect timing. And you know, those truths about God never change. We need those truths too.

We need that encouragement that we have a God who we can trust. We have a God whose word and whose promise never fails for his people, for his plans.

[ 15 : 06 ] And in particular, not only do we see God is directing things, we see God is directing things for a particular purpose. God is directing history here so that he might keep his promise to bless and to save through the family of Abraham.

Genesis chapter 12. From your family, Abraham, will come blessing to the nations, will come blessing to the world. Joseph is a small part of how that is going to work out as he is sent to be the people's savior from this famine.

And that climaxes, that blessing to the nations from the family of Abraham, that climaxes when God sends his own son, Jesus, to be born of a woman, to be born in the family line of Abraham to bring ultimate blessing and salvation to all those who will trust in him.

So we see very clearly God's timing and God's control. What we also see very clearly in our story here is human trouble and distress.

And it begins with Pharaoh's troubled sleep. I wonder if you've known that experience of having a disturbing dream and you wake up with a start and your heart is racing and you can feel the sweat on your face and you're distressed, agitated, confused.

[ 16 : 43 ] And sometimes it can take a while to realize it was just a dream. But you know, for Pharaoh, he doesn't have that resolution to the tension and the agitation.

because in the Pharaoh's story, because it's part of the Joseph story, we know that this dream is sent by God to reveal future reality.

And that future reality contains within it the distressing and disturbing news of famine for Egypt and indeed for the world. That's what's in those dreams in verses 2 to 7.

You've got the fat cows and then the skinny cows and the skinny cows eat up the fat cows but they're still as skinny as they were. And you've got the really good grain and the bad scorched grain and it swallows it up but it's still the same.

Verse 8, we're told Pharaoh's mind was troubled. So he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams but no one could interpret them.

[ 17 : 51 ] And then the cupbearer remembers Joseph and Joseph is brought in and Joseph for God interprets the dream. And what we see as the chapter progresses is what begins as personal distress for Pharaoh on earth with those dreams about becomes national distress as Egypt is told famine will come in seven years time so you better get ready.

And that then becomes global distress as the countries find themselves in famine and need to know what they can do. This is a dramatic story.

If this was happening today it would dominate world headlines. Global famine in this story. What do we make of it?

Now again we need to remember here's Moses writing the first five books of the Bible. He's written the book of Genesis and in the Genesis story we are introduced to the reason why death comes. We are introduced to the reason why there is suffering. We are introduced to the reason why there is threat that looms on our horizon because we are introduced to the fall of Adam and Eve.

[ 19 : 17 ] They were created in a perfect environment to enjoy perfect relationship with one another and with God. There was no famine in Eden but then sin came and as they decided to mistrust and distrust God and His word as they decided life would be better for them making up their own rules and refusing to listen to God's voice or to submit to God as king sin came and with sin came suffering and curse and death.

And so Moses has introduced us to that reality and we will see throughout the book of Genesis the threat of death and suffering that looms because of this fall into sin.

And it's important for us to recognize the importance of verse 8 because we are reminded in a very deliberate way here is Pharaoh and he faces trouble and distress but it's a problem that neither human power nor human wisdom is capable of fixing.

Who is Pharaoh? Pharaoh is the most powerful man of his day. He is the great superpower. He has all resources at his fingertips but that is not and will not be enough to spare him from the disaster that is coming.

It is true that wealth can act like a bubble and it can save us from much suffering and heartache.

Resources can do much to insulate us but power is a bubble that can burst and it can be lost and it does not spare us and it will not spare Pharaoh from suffering.

[ 21 : 28 ] Sometimes we lose sight of that. As society I think we expect that if people are wealthy and successful then nothing bad can possibly ever happen.

and it's one of the reasons why tragedies, sudden deaths of famous people is so shocking to many. Death invades that reality, challenges us with the brevity of life. It reminds us that no matter how much we have we are still weak and we will one day die.

And human power and wealth doesn't spare us from that. Human wisdom doesn't provide an answer. The wise men of Pharaoh's court, I guess like every wise man, would like to believe ideas can fix the world but here they find themselves clueless as to how to help Pharaoh in his distress. the wise in our generation, just like every generation, would expect that more legislation and better education and tighter security will lead to life being good and life being perfect.

[ 22 : 57 ] But what we see is that regardless of how good legislation is, still there is suffering in nations and societies, still there is hurt, still there is death.

So often the wise are looking for answers in the wrong places, looking for superficial fixes when the problem with humanity and society lies at the heart level.

It's where the Bible goes, saying the problem lies in the human heart. That's what we need to fix and that's something only God can fix. As the chapter moves on, we see the distress as it moves from Pharaoh to Egypt to the end of the chapter.

The famine is severe in all the world. Here is a problem that everybody is facing. famine. And it's a great illustration of sin and its effects.

One of the themes of the book of Genesis is the seed theme. And we can see that in this chapter, both negatively and positively.

[ 24 : 15 ] The famine is a result of the seed in the ground not growing. Here is part of that curse that came because of sin.

That growth and fruitfulness is affected because Adam and Eve did not want to live under the good rule of God.

Because of sin, the earth fell under a curse. The environment is affected. Adam was told, you will toil to produce food.

So at the roots of this famine, at the roots of all disaster and suffering, is the consequence of our rejection of God. We recognize the world is a beautiful place because God has made it beautiful, but the world is also broken because of our sin, because of the mess that we have made.

And what becomes clear in Genesis 41 is that as people, we cannot save ourselves from suffering, from a biblical, taking the whole picture of the Bible, we cannot save ourselves from this sin that leads to death, which is the greatest crisis for the human race in every generation.

[ 25 : 41 ] But that seed theme that we find in Genesis also has a positive element because it speaks to us of God's grace. So after Adam and Eve had sinned and rebelled against God, there was a promise that from the seed of the women would come one who would crush the head of the serpent, there would be one who would win a decisive victory over the powers of evil.

And then in Genesis 12, the seed from Abraham's family who would bring God's blessing to the world. And so our story, even as it moves towards global crisis, is also at the same time a message where there is hope because of God's promise, God's promise of a rescuer who will come.

Here in this story, we see him in Joseph, but Joseph represents Jesus. That's what we want to look at next, God's chosen deliverer comes.

One of the wonderful things that this chapter does and that the Bible does is it highlights that God's salvation comes from the humble place, comes from the lowly place, comes from the unexpected place.

Who is the hero of Genesis 41 at a human level? It's Joseph. Now who is Joseph? In Egypt, he is a foreigner, a slave, and a prisoner.

[ 27 : 14 ] And where does he come from? Not from power and prestige, he's summoned from the king's dungeon. The answer to the problem facing Egypt, facing the world, doesn't come from the mighty and the powerful.

The answer doesn't come from the wise men of the royal court. It doesn't lie in the resources of Pharaoh the king. It comes from this humble and unexpected place.

And this has always been God's chosen way of working. Joseph is in Abraham's family. Abraham gets that wonderful promise, your family will be as many as the stars in the sky.

Your family will be a blessing to the world. Kings will come from you. That promise is given to Abraham, married to Sarah, very old, and with no children.

That's a small beginning, an unexpected place to announce salvation. But it emphasizes God's grace and God's glory. Or think about the nation of Israel. So they've just been called by God to be his people.

[ 28 : 25 ] Israel wasn't the great superpower of its day, not even close. A tiny nation at this point, weak and landless and vulnerable, but God has called them to himself, and he's made a covenant commitment to them, and he's given promises to them, and given them this message that they will be his messengers bringing light to the world.

Through that tiny nation, salvation would come. It's the same for us as a church. Paul says, not many powerful, not many noble were called, because God delights to work in the weak and the small.

The church can seem weak and small and insignificant to our society, perhaps to ourselves, but in God's hands, God can use his church, and God has always used his church, weak as we are, for his purposes, so that God gets the glory.

And when we think of salvation coming from the humble place, and the low place, and the unexpected place, don't we see this is true in the story of Jesus? Here is Jesus, the eternal Son of God, but in human terms, how does he enter the world?

He is born in a stable, in a backwater town, to a poor young mother. And as he grows and as he begins his ministry, he is seen by the religious establishment as mixing with the wrong crowd.

[ 30 : 03 ] Here he is spending his time with the poor and the sinners, not the religious elite. He's seen to be working in the wrong place. He's working up in Galilee. That's a bit of a mixed background.

Why is he not in Jerusalem? That's where kings should be. That's where the power people are. Jesus is called a blasphemer.

He's called a false messiah. people cannot marry up his low place with his high claims. And he will be crucified, dying in apparent weakness.

But, as the Bible declares, in his death is God's loving response to our need. As God, as Jesus dies for our sin and in the place of sinners.

So, Jesus takes a low place in order to rescue and deliver. And it's announced and foretold in the story of Joseph.

[ 31 : 14 ] What else can we say about Joseph as deliverer from our text? We see some wonderful scenes here. In verse 16, we see very clearly, Joseph is God's man.

Here he is, brought into the palace from the prison. Pharaoh tells him he's got a dream. I've heard it said of you that when you hear a dream, you can interpret it.

I cannot do it, Joseph replied to Pharaoh, but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires. So, here is Joseph standing in front of Pharaoh. Pharaoh who describes himself as a son of the God.

And Joseph boldly says, the true God, he will give interpretation. Joseph has God's spirit.

It's amazing, even Pharaoh can see it, verse 38, as Joseph announces his plans for how to prepare the nation for famine.

[ 32 : 11 ] The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. So, Pharaoh asked them, can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God? Recognizing he's equipped in a unique way, called clearly, God's hand is with this man.

And Joseph, too, identifies with God's people. And we see that in what happens in his own family life and personal life.

So, in verse 44 onwards, as Pharaoh introduces Joseph to the establishment, what does he do? he gives him a new name.

Let's put Egyptian culture on him. He's given an Egyptian wife, and that wife comes from a line of pagan false worship.

But what do we see about Joseph? In verse 50 to 52, we see two sons are born. They're not given Egyptian names. They're given Hebrew names.

[ 33 : 18 ] He hasn't lost his identity. He hasn't lost his sense of connection to the people of God and to his father's house. He identifies with the people of God.

And in verse 57 and in verse 55, Joseph is clearly revealed to us as God's answer to human need.

When Egypt cries to Pharaoh, Pharaoh says, don't come to me, go to Joseph. He's the one who can help you.

Do what he tells you. And then in verse 57, all the countries came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph. Moses is very deliberate.

God has raised Joseph up so that he is seen to be the deliverer for the world. From the distress that they are facing through Joseph comes blessing.

[ 34 : 16 ] Just as God has been promising all along. And in this chapter, the promise of Jesus is everywhere. Jesus isn't just God's man.

He is God who became man in order to be our deliverer. Jesus is spirit-filled. He is empowered for ministry by the filling of the spirit.

Jesus is the one who left heaven to become one of us, to identify with us in our need, so much that he'd be baptized for us, that he would then go to the cross to die in our place for us.

And Jesus offers salvation to the world, to anyone who believes, regardless of culture, or race, or background.

He is God's chosen deliverer. How should we respond to the Jesus story as we see signpost to it here in chapter 41?

[ 35 : 22 ] one. We certainly need to be like the cup bearer who recognized it was wrong of him to forget about Joseph.

It is wrong for us to forget about Jesus, to push him to one side as if he is no big deal, as if his identity and his death on the cross and his resurrection and return to glory is of no consequence to him.

Jesus is the central figure in history and he needs to be central to our lives as the only hope for a broken world. We also would do well to follow Pharaoh, respond like Pharaoh.

What does Pharaoh do for Joseph? First of all, he honors Joseph and we should honor Jesus in our lives, recognizing here is God's rescuer.

And just as Pharaoh told Egypt, we should go to Jesus. We should listen to him. We should trust in him.

[ 36 : 36 ] And indeed, this is our message to others. Once they come to us, we can fix your problems. We say, go to Jesus. We found the one who can. We need to be like the nations of verse 57 who come streaming to Joseph, coming empty, needing to be filled.

We need to come to Jesus in our need to recognize he is the bread of life, to recognize he is the one who can satisfy and who can save.

Nothing changes. in all of history. The world still needs God's Savior. You and I still need God's Savior.

The story of Joseph is an old story, it's an ancient story, but it's a vital story for you and me as it points us towards Jesus, as it reminds us of the reality of human distress and suffering, as it reminds us that we are by ourselves despite our resources unable to fix all that is broken in our hearts and in our world.

It points us beyond ourselves to God's provision, to God's Savior, to a hope that comes from God. This story points us squarely to Jesus, to the cross of Jesus, as my hope and your hope to date.

[ 38 : 13 ] Thank you.