

PM Genesis 41: 1-36 Life of Joseph: Pharaoh's Dreams

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[0 : 00] Well friends, we come again to worship the living and the most holy God. We'll continue our studies and our theme this evening in the life of Joseph.

The life of Joseph, we come tonight to that incident where Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams. It's in Genesis 41. And we're going to read the first 36 verses.

Next week we'll consider together the second half of Genesis 41, when Joseph is in effect prime minister of the land of Egypt. But for the moment we'll read Genesis 41 and verses 1 through 36.

This is the word of God. After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile. And behold, there came up out of the Nile seven cows, attractive and plump, and they fed in the reed grass.

And behold, seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. And the ugly, thin cows ate up the seven attractive, plump cows, and Pharaoh awoke.

[1 : 00] And he fell asleep and dreamed the second time. And behold, seven ears of corn, plump and good, were growing in one stalk. And behold, after them sprouted seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind.

And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump, full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream. So in the morning, his spirit was troubled. And he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men.

Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh. Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, I remember my offenses today. When Pharaoh was angry with his servants and put me and the chief baker in the custody in the house of the captain of the guard, we dreamed on the same night, he and I each having a dream with its own interpretation.

A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each man according to his dream. And as he interpreted it to us, so it came about.

I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged. Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph. And they quickly brought him out of the pit. And when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh.

[2 : 16] And Pharaoh said to Joseph, I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream, you can interpret it. Joseph answered Pharaoh, It is not in me.

God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, Behold, in my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile. Seven cows, plump and attractive, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass.

Seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and thin, such as I had never seen in all the land of Egypt. And the thin, ugly cows ate up the first seven plump cows.

But when they had eaten them, no one would have known that they had eaten them, for they were still as ugly as at the beginning. Then I awoke. I also saw in my dream seven ears growing on one stalk, full and good.

Seven ears withered, thin and blighted by the east winds, sprouted after them. And the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. And I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me.

[3 : 14] Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, The dreams of Pharaoh are one. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years.

The dreams are one. The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind are also seven years of famine.

It is as I told Pharaoh. God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt, but after them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt.

The famine will consume the land, and the plenty will be unknown in the land by reason of the famine that will follow, for it will be very severe. And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that this thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about.

Now therefore let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land, and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plentiful years, and let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it.

[4 : 27] That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine. Amen.

This is the reading of God's inspired and inerrant word. Let's turn to the Lord in prayer now. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, as we gather this evening, we thank you for your word.

Lord, we thank you for the clarity with which it speaks. We thank you for the way in which it speaks right into our situation today. We thank you for the life of Joseph.

We thank you for what we've seen so far in the one who suffers unjustly. We thank you this evening that as we consider him, we'll see Joseph rise to be a savior over the land of Egypt.

We pray, Father, as we come to your word now, that you would give us humility to sit under its message, that the Holy Spirit would work mightily in our hearts, that he would minister to us mightily as we gather together this evening.

[5 : 34] May we be not only hearers of the word, but may we be doers also we ask, in Jesus' name. Amen. So this passage then, Genesis 41 and verses 1 through 36, this very famous passage where Joseph interprets the dreams of Pharaoh.

I was reading a novel recently, that's one of the benefits of lockdown, isn't it, that we've had much more time to read and digest things. I was reading a novel recently about a brutal murder.

Two of the witnesses to this brutal murder happened to be Ukrainian nationals who worked in a beauty salon. Now, it wasn't central to the story, but bubbling away in the background was the kind of question, would the chief constable continue to pay for interpreters for these Ukrainian women?

You see, they spoke English, but not very good English. They spoke English, but not enough English to convey their side of the story, to get it across in real term. Being a Ukrainian interpreter is a fairly nice speciality, so as you can imagine for the police force, hiring these interpreters came at considerable expense.

But why did they need an interpreter? They needed an interpreter to make things clearer, to help the police understand more clearly what it was that they saw, to help the police ultimately be able to capture the killer.

[7 : 01] They could speak English, yes, but not to a decent enough standard to express themselves clearly. An interpreter helps to make things clear.

An interpreter helps people to understand what one person is saying, usually in a language that they don't understand, to help people see what's really going on or what's gone on.

And as we come to Genesis 41 this evening, that's exactly what we find Joseph doing, isn't it? He takes these dreams of Pharaoh and he makes them clear. He takes these dreams of Pharaoh and he enables Pharaoh to understand what they truly mean.

Joseph is using the gifts, he's using the abilities, he's using the talents that God has given him to interpret Pharaoh's dreams for him and ultimately save the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

Ultimately to save the land of Egypt. I want to see three things this evening, think about three things tonight. Firstly, we want to think about a confused ruler, that as Pharaoh has these dreams, he doesn't really understand.

[8 : 08] He knows they must be significant for a reason, but he doesn't know. He's confused about their meaning. Secondly then, we want to think about a confessing interpreter, that as Joseph is brought to Pharaoh, we see him confessing that the gift isn't in him as such, but that the gift comes from God.

That if Pharaoh asks God to interpret these dreams, he will surely do it. It's not in Joseph, but it's in God. And then thirdly, we want to think about a confidence in God's plan.

That Joseph always remains ultimately convinced that God will do all things well. A confused ruler, a confessing interpreter, and a confidence in God's plan.

So let's think then, first of all, about the confused ruler. A confused ruler. And we see that in verses 1 through 13. So remember where we were last week in the life story of Joseph.

Remember the things that we thought about last week in the life story of Joseph. We saw him in prison, yes, but we saw him interpreting the dreams. We saw him in confinement, yes, but we saw him still advancing God's plans and purposes.

[9 : 16] We saw the chief cupbearer and the chief baker each have these dreams. We saw how one would receive restoration, one would be restored to his position in Pharaoh's palace, while the other would receive death.

Remember last week how we thought about the cupbearer being asked to remember Joseph. Joseph says, look, please remember me when you're restored. Please tell Pharaoh about me. But instead of remembering, the cupbearer promptly forgets all about Joseph.

And that sets the scene for us then as we come tonight. That sets the background for us then as we come tonight to Genesis 41. Because as we come to Genesis 41, the first thing we read in verse 1 is after two whole years.

After two whole years that the cupbearer has been restored. After two whole years when he has failed to remember Joseph. When Joseph has been languishing in prison.

After two whole years of being in the pit. Pharaoh dreamed a dream, we're told, verse 1. He was standing by the Nile.

[10 : 23] He was standing there. And behold, seven good cows came out. Seven fat, plump cows came out. They began eating the reed grass. They began feeding, as you would expect cows to do.

And then, verse 3, seven other cows came out. Now these cows weren't like the first cows. These weren't good, attractive cows. Rather, these cows were ugly and thin.

The unattractive cows, verse 4, eat the good, fat, plump cows. And then Pharaoh wakes up. He falls asleep, we're told, verse 5, a second time.

And dreams another dream. It's a similar dream in many respects, but there's slight nuances to it, isn't there? This time, seven ears of grain, plump and good, are growing on the one stalk.

And then seven other grains arise that have been scorched by the east wind. These ears of grain that would have been useless, that would have looked unattractive to the eye. And yet again, notice that they arise and eat the seven plump and good ears of grain.

[11 : 28] He realizes that it's all a dream. He wakes up, realizes that it's all a dream, verse 7, but it's troubled him. It's spoken to him.

It's left him feeling uneasy. It's left him with a lot of questions. Now I want us to notice that, friends, and spend a little bit of time thinking about some of the implications of that, some of the applications of that for ourselves.

Because this dream clearly speaks to Pharaoh. This episode with these dreams clearly speaks to him. Now it can't be that Pharaoh hasn't had any dreams for the past two years.

However, there's something about these dreams. There's something about the visceral nature of these dreams. There's something so real about them. There's something so tangible about them that they speak to Pharaoh.

He knows they must mean something. He knows they must stand for something. He just can't quite work out what that something is. Now the danger is that we jump straight to ourselves.

[12 : 36] So we say Pharaoh had these dreams. God was using these dreams to speak to Pharaoh. Therefore, God will use dreams to speak to us today. If you listen to some testimonies, some conversion stories of believers, perhaps of believers especially coming from a Muslim background, they will often speak about dreams that they've had of Christ or visions that they've seen of people telling them to go to church, people telling them to read the Bible, people telling them to study Scripture.

And so we want to ask ourselves, well, is that normative for us? Will God speak to us through dreams and visions? Now the first thing that we need to say is that we can't limit the power of God.

If God chooses to, God could speak to us through dreams. God could speak to us through visions. God could use any means. He's used a Balaam's ass before to speak. God could use those means to speak to us.

But I would say that there are exceptions rather than the rule. There are things that happen very, very, very, very, very occasionally rather than the things that we should expect to happen. Now why do I say that? Well, first of all, we live in an era where we have the entire closed canon of Scripture.

We have the revelation of God Himself in Scripture. We live in an age where the Bible is freely available, where we can pick up and read the Bible anytime we want in our own language, whenever we can understand most things that God is saying to us.

[14 : 04] And in that sense then, I think it's very, very, very, very rare that God would speak to us through dreams and visions. But God does, however, use the circumstances.

God does use the situations in our lives to speak to us, to draw us to Himself. Perhaps some troubling news comes to us and we just can't shake it off.

God could be using that situation to draw us to Himself, to draw us closer to Himself, just as He uses these dreams of Pharaoh to draw Pharaoh to understand what's going to happen.

It could be that we experience tragedy after tragedy after tragedy, and God is using that tragedy again to speak to us, to draw us to Himself.

So what's Pharaoh going to do? He's had these dreams. He knows that they stand for something. He knows that something's being conveyed by them, but he just can't work it out. So what does he do? Well, he calls all the wise men.

[15:10] Verse 8. He calls all the magicians of Egypt. He calls all of the wise men. And says to them, Look, what does this mean? What's this conveying?

What's this story here? There's been a lot of talk in the media recently and in the papers recently about the so-called siege group. Now, for those of you who don't know the siege group, they are the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies.

I had to read that because I couldn't remember it all. And the idea is that they're basically some of the most eminent scientists in the country. They're being brought together. They come together and advise the government in emergencies.

They're saying to them, Well, look, here's what the science says about COVID-19. Here's what we understand at the moment by COVID-19. They're trying to help the government see the big picture of the coronavirus.

Help them see the data around COVID-19. And that's why I like to imagine this group here, that as Pharaoh calls them in verse 8, as he brings them to him, the kind of the wise men of the day, they're the sages of the day, they're the most understanding people that Pharaoh can find.

[16:19] Pharaoh tells them the dreams. He tells them what's happened. But there's no one who can tell him what's going on. No one could interpret the dream to Pharaoh, verse 8. It's why these wise men are struggling.

It's why these wise men are floundering that suddenly, verse 9, the cupbearer remembers. Suddenly, verse 9, the cupbearer says, That's right. Now I remember.

Now I remember what I've done wrong. There was this young Hebrew who helped me understand. I remember when we were in prison, the chief baker and I, I remember we had these dreams.

I remember neither of us could understand them. I remember we didn't know what was going on. But there was a young Hebrew there who did. He gave us an interpretation. And more than that, the interpretation he gave us turned out to be right.

I was restored to my office. I was restored to being the cupbearer. And the baker was hanged for his crimes against Pharaoh. So Pharaoh then is confused by the dreams that he has.

[17:22] He doesn't understand what they're saying. Secondly then, we want to think about a confessing interpreter. A confessing interpreter. And we see that in verses 14 through 24.

Verses 14 through 24. Pharaoh sends for Joseph, this Hebrew slave who's been in prison for quite some time now. And Joseph gets himself ready. He gets himself shaved.

He gets himself changed. He's trying to kind of cleanse himself from the pit, if you like. And Pharaoh says to Joseph, verse 15, Look, I've had these dreams.

There's no one who understands it. There's no one who can interpret it. All of the wise men, they've had a crack, but they don't know. All of the magicians of Egypt, they've had a crack, but they can't work it out. No one can interpret this dream.

But, verse 15, I've heard it said of you that when you hear a dream, you can interpret it. Don't you just love Joseph's response?

[18 : 22] Because he doesn't see this as an opportunity for self-advancement. He doesn't see this as an opportunity for self-aggrandizement. He doesn't see this as an opportunity even to secure his release from prison.

Rather, he simply says to Pharaoh, Pharaoh, remember verse 15, says, Look, I know, I've heard that you can interpret dreams. And what does Joseph say, verse 16? It's not in me, but God will give you a favorable answer.

I'm not the one who can interpret dreams, but God is. I'm not the one who can help you understand what these dreams mean, but God can. God's the one in whom all of the power lies.

Friends, how we need to remember this. How we need to be reminded of this. How quick we are to take credit.

How quick we are to take claim for the things which God has given to us. The things that God come to us from the hand of God. How quick preachers can be to build a following around themselves rather than the God whom they claim to serve and preach.

[19 : 33] How quick the businesswoman can be to claim that all of her success is down to her hard work and her diligence rather than the goodness of God to her.

Friends, there's nothing that we have that we did not receive from the hand of God. There's no gift that comes to us that does not come to us from the hand of God. So why then do we boast?

There's no blessing that comes to us in this life that we have earned or deserve. Every blessing is a blessing that comes to us from the hand of God. And we should be thankful to Him not to ourselves just as Joseph is here.

I can't do it but God can. I can't interpret your dream but God will. But it's a strange statement in a sense, isn't it?

We get the theology of it. We understand the theology of Joseph's statement but what does he say? Look, I can't do it, verse 16 but God will give Pharaoh a favourable answer.

[20 : 42] Now the answer here doesn't seem too favourable, does it? Because the answer here seems to be years of famine years of suffering years of distress and probably years of death for some of Egypt's residents. The results of the dream don't seem too good so how do we tie these two things together?

Well look, note what Joseph says. Pharaoh says, look, I've heard verse 15 you can interpret dreams. And Joseph says, verse 16, no, not me but God can.

You're asking me to interpret your dream. You're asking me to understand your dream and I can't do that. But if you ask God to interpret your dream he can do that. He can give you a favourable answer to that question.

So Pharaoh recounts the dream as this will be a fairly short section. Pharaoh recounts the dream as what we've seen before. The details are largely all of the same. He tells them about the seven fat cows, the seven thin cows, the seven good years of grain followed by the seven bad years of grain and all of the thing that happens in the dream.

So we've seen a confused ruler we've seen a confessing interpreter who's not afraid to confess God to Pharaoh. And then thirdly finally this evening we want to think about a confidence in God's plan.

[21 : 59] A confidence in God's plan. And we see that in verses 25 through 36. So the dream's been told. The two dreams have been told to Joseph. And now it's over to him.

Well, what does this mean? Well, what's your understanding of it? What do these cows and ears of grain stand for? What's the point that's being conveyed?

And Joseph understands verse 25. Look, these dreams are one. You've had two dreams, yes, but it's one message. You've had two dreams and two manifestations of it, yes, but it's really the one message.

It's really one meaning. God is showing you what he's about to do in the land of Egypt. God is warning you of what's coming to the land of Egypt. And again, notice the courage in that.

The courage that Joseph displays. You see, Pharaoh's the most powerful man in the world at this point. Certainly, Pharaoh has the power over life and death over Joseph. The Egyptians believed in gods.

[23 : 06] Of course they did. But Joseph stands there and tells him, well, this is what the one true God says is about to happen. This is what the one true God of the universe says is about to happen.

This is what the God who is over all says is about to happen. It's a good reminder to us, isn't it? That we must never be afraid to speak of God.

That we must always be ready to speak. We must always have that reason for the hope that is in us and be ready to tell it to people. Be they the Prime Minister, be they the Secretary of State for Scotland, or be they the Tea Lady, it doesn't matter.

In a culture that has many gods and in a culture that in some senses claims to be post-God, we must never be afraid to speak of the things of God. We must never be afraid to speak of the reality of the God of the universe.

We must never be afraid to speak of the sovereignty of God over the world that he has created. We must never be afraid to confess the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[24 : 20] Joseph wasn't afraid here as he looked into a polytheistic Egyptian culture, as he looked into a culture that had many gods. Joseph said, well this is what the God of the Hebrews says.

This is the truth that God speaks. The seven good cows are seven years. The seven good ears of grain are seven years and so are the seven bad cows and the seven bad heads of grain, if you like.

This is what it means. The seven good cows stand for seven years of plenty. Seven years of abundant harvest. Seven years when grain will be plentiful in the land.

Seven years whenever no one will worry about anything. But the seven thin cows also stand for seven years. And more than that is seven years of famine.

Seven years of unimaginable famine and suffering. God has certainly shown Pharaoh what he's about to do and the fact that he's repeated the dream twice, the fact that you've had this dream twice, proves that this is what God's going to do.

[25 : 26] There's no turning back. There's no doubt in God's mind. This is what's going to happen. There is no changing of his mind. You see that verse 32.

The doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God and God will surely bring it about. So what's to be done?

This is what's coming. These seven good years and seven bad years are coming. So what's to be done? Well, what does Joseph say? Verse 33. Now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man.

Now notice the hint that's being dropped here. Now Pharaoh, if I was you, I would select a wise and discerning man. If only there was someone here like that.

If only there was somebody like that. Set him over all the land of Egypt. Now if that's where kind of Joseph's interpretation ended, you could be forgiven for saying, well this isn't really a pitch for a job.

[26 : 27] This isn't really Joseph saying, I am that wise man. But it continues. Doesn't it? Verse 34. Set overseers over each of the regions. Take one fifth of the total produce for the year and store it away in barns.

So that in effect when the famine comes there will be grain enough. If you store one fifth over the course of seven years you'll have seven fifths, obviously.

Obviously. That's what you do, Pharaoh. Appoint a wise man.

Get him to store away grain. Appoint these overseers underneath him so that the land might survive. One of the most interesting phases in a football club is whenever the manager's been sacked.

Because after the manager's been sacked, unless they had someone ready lined up to go, they'll appoint a caretaker manager. And that caretaker manager phase is a fascinating phase because it offers you a glimpse.

[27 : 30] It shows you of what life could be like if this person were to become the full-time manager. It shows you what formation they might like to play. It shows you what different players they might utilize.

It gives you a glimpse of the future under this manager. And that's what Joseph's doing here. He's giving Pharaoh a glimpse of what he would do. He's giving Pharaoh a brief snapshot of what he would do if he were appointed to the role.

I would appoint Pharaoh, I would appoint a wise man over the land. And if I were that wise man, then this is what I would do. This is how I would act. These are the things that I would implement.

I would store away food during the good years so that we have something for the bad years. God has so ordered all of the events of Joseph's life to lead him to this point.

Think about that. God has so ordered all of the events of Joseph's life to raise him at just the right moment. To be in a sense the savior of Egypt.

[28 : 40] all that time in prison certainly over two years anyway leading to this point. All of that hatred by his brothers leading to this point.

All that time in Potiphar's house leading to this point. That false accusation of rape leading to this point so that he can be the savior of Egypt.

But think about that. We know the end of the story. We're privileged in a sense that we're reading the middle of the story knowing the end. We're reading the middle of the story knowing what God will do at the end.

Think about Joseph in that pit. Could he foresee it? Of course not. But he got on. He persevered trusting God. He was faithful even in the midst of difficulty.

You see often time friends I think we fall into the same trap. That we're guilty of trying to discern what God is doing from the midst of the pit. From the midst of the pain and struggle of daily life.

[29 : 51] We can struggle to see what God is doing. But friends this evening we have that assurance that whatever the pit we're in whatever the pain whatever the difficulty whatever the suffering of life that we're in at the moment that God has begun a good work in us and will bring it to completion in his son Jesus Christ.

So keep on. Keep on pressing on in faith. Keep on pressing on in trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Keep on being faithful day by day to the promises of God.

keep on looking to Christ as the only savior from sin. Keep on pressing on even in the midst of pain and difficulty.

And know that one day we will rise from the pit. Know that one day we will hear those words well done good and faithful servant.

Enter into my rest. because when we hear those words friends when we're welcomed by our savior none of the pit will matter.

[31 : 11] One day when those tears are wiped away from our eyes the pain of the pit won't matter.
Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.