

Adult Sunday Bible Study Lesson

Genesis: The Joseph Narrative

God's Timing

February 17, 2019

Situational Context: Genesis 41:1 (NIV2011) ¹ When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing by the Nile.

Joseph has been busy in prison serving whoever was over him. Joseph found favor with the King's cupbearer by interpreting a dream. Now Pharaoh has a dream. People of the ancient Near East typically viewed kings as chosen representatives of the gods. Royal dreams were seen as particularly significant. Like many other ancient rulers, the Egyptian pharaohs retained sorcerers, dream interpreters, and wise men for counsel in important matters.

Lesson Theme: Pharaoh elevates this Hebrew slave to be his primary advisor. Thus, Joseph becomes the savior of Egypt and advocate for his family with influence when they must relocate to Egypt from Canaan. We must carefully examine all the circumstances that God had to put in place to elevate Joseph for His ultimate divine purposes, the incubation of His chosen, called people.

Genesis 41:37-40 (NIV2011) ³⁷ The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. ³⁸ So Pharaoh asked them, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?" ³⁹ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. ⁴⁰ 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."

1. The Timing of the Dream: Genesis 41:15-21 (NIV2011) ¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." ¹⁷ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile, ¹⁸ when out of the river there came up seven cows, fat and sleek, and they grazed among the reeds. ¹⁹ After them, seven other cows came up—scrawny and very ugly and lean. I had never seen such ugly cows in all the land of Egypt. ²⁰ The lean, ugly cows ate up the seven fat cows that came up first. ²¹ But, 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.

Interpretation: God blesses the Egyptians by virtue of Joseph's presence. The Lord has plans which include the land of Egypt and the will of God to get Jacob and his family down to Egypt. God is going to use a drought to do it. Joseph declares to Pharaoh the Sovereignty of the Lord to control all these things.

Supporting Texts:

Genesis 41:12 (NIV2011) ¹² Now a 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.

Genesis 41:53-54 (NIV2011) ⁵³ The seven years of abundance in Egypt came to an end, ⁵⁴ 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.

Isaiah 41:27 (NIV2011) ²⁷ For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart Him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?

James 1:5 (NIV2011) ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

Discussion Starters:

How did Joseph's actions in jail contribute to his being summoned?

Why did Joseph correct Pharaoh?

Joseph was bringing bad news, what was the risk?

Observe Joseph's attitude before Pharaoh.

2. The Timing of Wisdom: Genesis 41:33-36 (NIV2011) ³³ "And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. ³⁴ Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ 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 that the country may not be ruined by the famine."

Interpretation: Both the dream and its interpretation were from God. Joseph was inspired by God; he did not act as a magician. Neither Pharaoh nor his officials were in control; God and His servant were in charge, as they would be centuries later in the time of Moses.

Supporting Texts:

Luke 16:10 (NIV2011) ¹⁰ “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.

Luke 19:17 (NIV2011) ¹⁷ “ ‘Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’

Discussion Starters:

Why did Joseph offer a solution?

Why did Pharaoh trust this Hebrew slave?

Should we have any expectation as to how God will use our service to Him?

3. The Timing of Elevation: Genesis 41:37-40 (NIV2011) ³⁷ The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. ³⁸ So, Pharaoh asked them, “Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?” ³⁹ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. ⁴⁰ 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.”

Interpretation: The word “spirit” should probably not be capitalized in such passages, since reference to the Holy Spirit would be out of character in statements by pagan rulers.

The pharaoh took Joseph’s advice and decided that Joseph himself should be “ruler over Egypt”. All my people are to submit to your orders, more lit. “at your command all my people are to kiss (you)”—i.e., kiss your hands or feet in an act of homage and submission.

Supporting Texts:

Acts 7:9-10 (NIV2011) ⁹ “Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him ¹⁰ and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

Psalms 33:10 (NIV2011) ¹⁰ The LORD foils the plans of the nations; He thwarts the purposes of the peoples.

Psalms 94:11 (NIV2011) ¹¹ The LORD knows all human plans; He knows that they are futile.

Proverbs 16:1 (NIV2011) ¹ To humans belong the plans of the heart, but from the LORD comes the proper answer of the tongue.

Discussion Starters:

Discuss this progression: Genesis 39:4 (NIV2011) ⁴ Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. Genesis 39:22 (NIV2011) ²² So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. Genesis 39:23 (NIV2011) ²³ The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

How should we think of the assignment of elevated responsibility?