

Lesson 47
Joseph Rises to Power

Genesis 41:1-57

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The life of Joseph is a “from rags to riches” story, but this was all made possible by the grace of God. Only the sovereign workings of God could bring a slave to be the prime minister of Egypt.

B. The life of Joseph is also a story to illustrate the providential dealings of God in the lives of His own and how we should view all circumstances in life. From the human side, Joseph suffered much injustice at the hands of his brothers, was framed by Potiphar’s wife, and forgotten by the butler. Yet, from the divine side, these events were permitted for the purpose of training and preparing Joseph for the Lord’s work. NOTE. If we look at life from a human viewpoint, we will become irritated and frustrated, but if we take a divine viewpoint we will see God in everything and realize that all things are working for our own good (Gen. 50:20 cf. Rom. 8:28).

II. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF JOSEPH IN EGYPT 41:1-57

A. The Dreams of Pharaoh (41:1-7). After two full years Pharaoh had a dream. From the time the butler promised to mention Joseph to Pharaoh two whole years had passed. These were not wasted years, for God was training Joseph in patience so as to make him a good ruler (Rom. 5:3). Pharaoh dreamed that seven fat cows appeared followed by seven lean ones. Later he dreamed of seven good ears of corn on a stalk followed by seven poor ones. Why were there two dreams? The doubling of the revelation was designed for special emphasis upon the certainty that God would bring this to pass (41:31-32). NOTE. Apparently in common grace God gave this dream to Pharaoh who was an unbeliever (cf. 41:25,28,32).

B. The Wisemen Could Not Interpret the Dreams (41:8-13)

1. Pharaoh’s magicians were unable to interpret his dream. Why? God brought this dream, and one who knew God had to interpret it. Worldly wisdom and spiritual wisdom are two different things, and one needs to be “born again” to understand spiritual phenomena (1 Cor. 1:25 cf. 2:14).

2. Then the opportunist butler’s memory suddenly returned (41:9). When he suggested Joseph, the Pharaoh summoned the prisoner immediately. NOTE. This simple remark by the butler was a link in the chain of circumstances by means of which God fulfilled His purposes for Joseph.

C. Joseph Interprets the Dreams (41:14-32). Joseph tells Pharaoh that his dreams reveal seven years of plenty and seven years of famine for Egypt and the surrounding areas.

1. Joseph tells Pharaoh that God will give the answer to this dream and Joseph alone will be the interpreter (41:16). He gives all the glory to God for his interpreting ability. NOTE. Joseph made a strong stand before Pharaoh who was a rank rejecter of the true God. Utterly regardless of what happened to him, Joseph had one thought the glory of God. The supreme thought in Joseph’s mind was God (Philip. 3:10).

2. Who brought the famine? God did (41:25, 28, 32). In His sovereignty, God permitted much suffering to humans. Yet, this was all part of God’s plan for His own people.

D. Joseph Gives Advice to Pharaoh (41:33-36). Joseph tells Pharaoh that he must appoint a wise leader and set up a special staff to prepare for the coming famine. NOTE. Joseph does not mention himself for the job. He is totally unselfish.

E. Joseph is Made Overseer of the Land of Egypt (41:37-44): Pharaoh's selection for the job of preparing for the famine is Joseph. It is obvious to him that God is with this man (41:30), and that he is the wisest man in Egypt (41:39). Pharaoh as the ruler of all Egypt establishes Joseph, second only to himself (41:40). NOTE. Pharaoh recognized that Joseph knew God. While Pharaoh did not believe in Joseph's God, he recognized that He was real to Joseph. Joseph did not compromise his position before Pharaoh and God blessed him for his stand. NOTE. Joseph began to rule when he was 30 years old (41:46). God had prepared Joseph for 13 years for this position and he came to power as a relatively young man. He ruled for 80 years until his death at 110 (50:26). NOTE. God placed Joseph in this position, but perhaps one reason Pharaoh was ready to receive Joseph is that at this time the Hyksos kings were on the throne of Egypt. They were not native Egyptians, but were Bedouins from the Arabian Desert. Pharaoh was actually closer in nationality to Joseph than the Egyptians and this gave him confidence in Joseph. The Hyksos kings were later repelled from Egypt and we read in Exodus 1:8, "Now there arose up new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph."

F. Joseph Marries Asenath (41:45-53). Pharaoh fully naturalized Joseph by giving him the Egyptian name Zaphnath-paaneah (revealer of secret things) and gave him Asenath, the daughter of the priest of On, for a wife.

1. Joseph married an Egyptian. Did he break the Bible teaching on marriage by marrying an unbeliever? There were no clear lines of separation between the Hebrews and other nations at this time. There are some biblical cases where Israelites did marry Gentiles in the will of God (Ruth and Boaz). Apparently Joseph felt that the Lord intended this marriage. Sensitive to God's leading, he took it as His will. It is only reasonable to assume that Joseph led his wife to the Lord, for God was in all his thoughts.

2. Two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath - Manasseh and Ephraim. Manasseh means "forgetting" and Joseph named him this because God had made Joseph forget the injustice of his brothers, the mistreatment by Potiphar, the years in an Egyptian jail and the lonesomeness for his family in the Promised Land. God in grace removed his unpleasant thoughts of the past and put love in his heart. Ephraim means "fruitful." God blessed Joseph mightily and he was fruitful in all he did. He could have been bitter, hard and critical about life but God removed his bad thoughts of the past and blessed him with a whole new life with great authority. God blessed Joseph and Joseph made the best of his circumstances and rose to the top of the heap. Why? He believed God. NOTE: In the names of Joseph's two sons, we see the spiritual attitude of a trusting saint, "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before (Philip. 3:13).

3. Joseph was only 30 years old when he was made prime minister of Egypt (41:46). He had great power but did not forget his God. It did not go to his head, for he knew how to trust God in prosperity as well as adversity. NOTE. It takes much more grace to serve God in prosperity than it does in a time of crisis. Joseph had learned some of the deepest lessons of life while in prison. NOTE. Joseph rose to power by trust in God, good ethics, resourceful energy and good use of his mind. He did not come to power by blackmail, dishonesty, trickery, or flattery, but by pure honesty before God and men.

G. Joseph Becomes the Most Powerful Man of His Time (41:54-57). This famine was in Egypt and all over the Middle East (41:56). Every Egyptian was dependent upon Joseph and the survival of surrounding countries rested in Joseph's ability to feed them (41:57). NOTE. Joseph was a great man but his greatness was related to his humility. The person with great authority needs Divine grace to keep him humble (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

Our plans may be disjointed,

What though we seem to stumble?

But we may calmly rest;
What God has once appointed
Is better than our best.

He will not let us fall,
And learning to be humble
Is not lost time at all.