

# GENESIS

## Chapter 41

### *Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dreams*

After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, 2 and behold, there came up out of the Nile seven cows, attractive and plump, and they fed in the reed grass. 3 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. 4 And the ugly, thin cows ate up the seven attractive, plump cows. And Pharaoh awoke. 5 And he fell asleep and dreamed a second time. And behold, seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. 6 And behold, after them sprouted seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind. 7 And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump, full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream. 8 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. 9 Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "I remember my offenses today. 10 When Pharaoh was angry with his servants and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, 11 we dreamed on the same night, he and I, each having a dream with its own interpretation. 12 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. 13 And as he interpreted to us, so it came about. I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged." 14 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. 15 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." 16 Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." 17 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Behold, in my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile. 18 Seven cows, plump and attractive, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass. 19 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. 20 And the thin, ugly cows ate up the first seven plump cows, 21 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. 22 I also saw in my dream seven ears growing on one stalk, full and good. 23 Seven ears, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprouted after them, 24 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." 25 Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. 26 The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. 27 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. 28 It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. 29 There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt, 30 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, 31 and the plenty will be unknown in the land by reason of the famine that will follow, for it will be very severe. 32 And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about. 33 Now therefore let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. 34 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. 35 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. 36 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."

**41:2** *out of the river there came up seven cows.* Cattle often submerged themselves up to their necks in the Nile to escape sun and insects. (CSB)

Central to Egypt's agriculture and economy, the Nile River represented Egypt's power and wealth. (TLSB)

*fed in the reed grass.* Land flooded by the Nile was used as pastureland after the water receded. (TLSB)

**41:5** The second dream complements the first, as in ch 37. (TLSB)

*growing.* Same Hbr word as used for the cows that "came up" (vv 2, 3). (TLSB)

*on one stalk.* Symbol of abundance. Like the cows, the grain depended on the Nile for life. (TLSB)

**41:6** *thin.* Same Hbr word as used for the cows (vv 3, 4). (TLSB)

*blighted by the east wind.* The Palestinian sirocco (in Egypt the khamsin), which blows in from the desert (see Hos 13:15) in late spring and early fall, often withers vegetation (see Isa 40:7; Eze 17:10). (CSB)

**41:8** *his spirit was troubled.* See 40:6–7. (CSB)

*magicians.* Probably priests who claimed to possess occult knowledge. (CSB)

Term used only for Egyptian and Babylonian men who specialized in occult practices. Cf Dt 18:10–14. *wise men.* In this context, the term refers to pagan diviners skilled in magic and the occult. (TLSB)

*none could interpret them.* See Da 2:10–11. (CSB)

**41:12** *young Hebrew.* At the time he interpreted the dreams, Joseph was c 28 years old. Cf v 46. (TLSB)

**41:13** *so it came about.* Because his words were from the Lord (see Ps 105:19). (CSB)

**41:14** *Pharaoh sent for Joseph.* Effecting his permanent release from prison (see Ps 105:20). (CSB)

*pit.* Or, "dungeon," same Hbr word used for the pit Joseph was in before being sold into slavery (37:20). Thus his 13 years of misery began by being thrown into a pit and ended by being brought out of one. (TLSB)

*shaved.* Egyptians were normally smooth-shaven, while Palestinians wore beards (see 2Sa 10:5; Jer 41:5). (CSB)

Egyptian men shaved their heads and beards. Joseph dressed in appropriate clothing. (TLSB)

**41:16** *it is not in me ... but God will give Pharaoh the answer.* See 40:8; Da 2:27–28, 30; 2Co 3:5. (CSB)

Luther: "He means to say, 'I am not the one who has interpreted or could interpret the dream. It is God who can do for you as He has done for me.' He gives glory to God, but nevertheless does not deny his

[i.e., Joseph's] ministry" (WA DB 8:165). *God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.* Lit, "an answer of peace." I.e., the interpretation will satisfy Pharaoh. (TLSB)

**41:25** *one.* The dreams have the same meaning. (TLSB)

*God has revealed.* In Hbr, "the" precedes "God," emphasizing the one true God. (TLSB)

**41:27** *seven years of famine.* See Ac 7:11. Long famines were rare in Egypt because of the regularity of the annual overflow of the Nile, but not uncommon elsewhere (see 2Ki 8:1). The great famine in the time of Elijah lasted three and a half years (Jas 5:17), thus half of seven years; it had been cut short by Elijah's intercession (1Ki 18:42; Jas 5:18). (CSB)

Egypt suffered when the flow and flood of the Nile abated, as described in some Egyptian texts. (TLSB)

**41:30** *famine will consume the land.* All the food supplies would be used up. (TLSB)

**41:1–36** Pharaoh's fortune-tellers and sorcerers cannot help him understand the dreams that God sent. Therefore, Joseph is brought up from the dungeon. Giving all the glory to God, he interprets the dreams and warns of the coming famine. The devil's tools—fortune-tellers and sorcerers—are powerless in divine matters. Like Joseph, we should praise God for any good thing we have. Let us also not be afraid to share good advice in a spirit of humility when such words would help our neighbor. The best thing we have is God Himself—speaking to us through His Word, redeeming us through His Son, and bringing us to Himself through His Sacraments and Spirit. • O Lord, our times are in Your hands. When the opportunity comes for us to help others, give us wisdom and strength to do so. We praise You for Your mercy, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (TLSB)

#### *Joseph Rises to Power*

**37** This proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. **38** And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?" **39** Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are. **40** You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you." **41** And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." **42** Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain about his neck. **43** And he made him ride in his second chariot. And they called out before him, "Bow the knee!" Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. **44** Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." **45** And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphenath-paneah. And he gave him in marriage Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On. So Joseph went out over the land of Egypt. **46** Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went through all the land of Egypt. **47** During the seven plentiful years the earth produced abundantly, **48** and he gathered up all the food of these seven years, which occurred in the land of Egypt, and put the food in the cities. He put in every city the food from the fields around it. **49** And Joseph stored up grain in great abundance, like the sand of the sea, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured. **50** Before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph. Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, bore them to him. **51** Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh. "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house." **52** The name of the second he called Ephraim, "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction." **53** The seven years of plenty that occurred in the land of Egypt came to an end, **54** and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. There was famine in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. **55** When all the land of Egypt was famished, the

**people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph. What he says to you, do.” 56 So when the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. 57 Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth.**

**41:42** Three symbols of transfer and/or sharing of royal authority, referred to also in Est 3:10 (signet ring); Est 6:11 (robe); and Da 5:7, 16, 29 (gold chain). (CSB)

With several ceremonial acts, Pharaoh conferred power on Joseph. These gifts well fit the Egyptian context during this era. *signet ring*. Official seal for validating documents. *garments of fine linen*. Clothing of the finest quality. *gold chain*. One of Egypt’s highest distinctions. (TLSB)

**41:43** *second chariot*. Beside the royal chariot. (TLSB)

*bow the knee*. The Hebrew here may be an Egyptian imperative of a Semitic loanword, meaning “Bow the knee!” (CSB)

**41:44** *I am Pharaoh*. Stating his authority to confer this power on Joseph. (TLSB)

*lift up hand or foot*. No one could take any action without Joseph’s permission. (TLSB)

**41:45** *gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah*. As a part of assigning Joseph an official position within his royal administration. Pharaoh presumed to use this marvelously endowed servant of the Lord for his own royal purposes—as a later Pharaoh would attempt to use divinely blessed Israel for the enrichment of Egypt (Ex 1). He did not recognize that Joseph served a Higher Power, whose kingdom and redemptive purposes are being advanced. (The meaning of Joseph’s Egyptian name is uncertain.) (CSB)

Possibly means “revealer of hidden things” or, more likely, “the god speaks and he lives.” (TLSB)

*Asenath*. The name is Egyptian and probably means “She belongs to (the goddess) Neith.” (CSB)

Means “belonging to [the goddess] Neith.” (TLSB)

*Potiphera*. Not the same person as “Potiphar” (37:36; 39:1); the name (also Egyptian) means “he whom (the sun-god) Ra has given.” (CSB)

Not to be confused with Potiphar. Means “he whom [the sun god] Ra has given.” (TLSB)

*On*. Located ten miles northeast of modern Cairo, it was called Heliopolis (“city of the sun”) by the Greeks and was an important center for the worship of Ra, who had a temple there. Potiphera therefore bore an appropriate name. (CSB)

May have been the high priest in the worship of Ra (also written Re). The city of On was later called Heliopolis, “city of the sun.” Joseph’s connection with this idol-worshiping family did not mean he was involved in such worship. His role in the kingdom was political and economic. Centuries later, Pharaoh Akhenaton (1379–1362 BC) declared the god Aton, earlier known as Re-Akhenaton, to be the only true god (monotheism). However, the pharaoh after Akhenaton overturned this belief. (TLSB)

**41:46** *thirty years old*. In just 13 years (see 37:2), Joseph had become second-in-command (v. 43) in Egypt. (CSB)

C 13 years had passed since Joseph was sold into slavery (cf 37:2). (TLSB)

*went through all the land.* To arrange the gathering of grain during the years of plenty (v 47). (TLSB)

**41:48** *put the food in the cities.* In granaries. (TLSB)

**41:49** *like the sand of the sea.* A simile also for the large number of offspring promised to Abraham and Jacob (see 22:17; 32:12). (CSB)

**41:52** *Ephraim.* The meaning of the name reflects the fact that God gave Joseph “two” (see v. 50) sons. (CSB)

*land of my affliction.* Even in his prosperity, Joseph spoke of Egypt in this way, an indication that he longed for the Promised Land. (TLSB)

**41:54** Ancient records refer to seven-year famines, usually because of drought. To affect all Egypt, the drought would have included the Upper Nile, minimizing yearly floods downstream. Grain disease may also have caused the famine, as not all livestock and pastureland were destroyed. (TLSB)

**41:57** *all the earth.* The known world from the writer’s perspective (the Middle East). (CSB)

**41:37–57** After years of frustration, Joseph is exalted to oversee the storage and distribution of Egypt’s great harvests. As the years of famine begin to take their toll, there is enough surplus to share with those in need throughout all the earth. In hard times, those who have should share with those who have not. Here is comfort: after long periods of suffering, at just the right time, the Lord will give help to His people, just as He did for Joseph. Through His Son, Jesus, God rules over us and gives us what we need: pardon, provision, and peace. • Heavenly Father, give us this day our daily bread, and deliver us from evil, for Jesus’ sake. Amen. (TLSB)