

Genesis 41-44 Interpreting Pharaoh's Dreams/Preparing Egypt for Israel

Introduction

God is preparing Egypt to become the location He plans to use to incubate His people. Taken from the lens of God developing and implementing His **plan for redemption**, Israel as a nation will become the vehicle through which the Messiah will come to earth. The family of Israel is the bloodline in this world through which He has chosen to give birth to the King of Kings.

It is interesting to note that Genesis 37-47, the three parshas we are currently studying, are read at Chanukah each year. Chanukah is the eight day Festival of Light which takes place in December and is cited in John 10:22. It is the celebration of the rededication of the Temple after its desecration by the treacherous Greek ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes IV, about 165 years before Christ. The revolt against the Greek domination was led by Mattathias and Judas Maccabee. It was a time when Israel was almost lost, but God raised up valiant men and empowered them to gain freedom for Israel against great odds.

As we read through the scripture reading, think about the four lenses we are viewing the story through and how each of these lenses, or questions might be answered:

1. What does this passage tell us about how God wants His children to live?
2. What can we learn about the nature of God through this passage?
3. Where do we see Messiah pictured in this passage?
4. How is God showing the unfolding of the plan of redemption in this passage?

Similarities in the Joseph and Jesus Story

Enters the world (Egypt) in poverty
poverty

12 years of obscurity (prison)

Emerges in Pharaoh's court

Illuminates truth: interprets dreams

Demonstrates discernment and wisdom (41:39)
power

Restores shalom from chaos (grain)
11:4-6)

Completely favored by Pharaoh

Convicts his brothers of past sin

Saves his brothers from destruction (famine)

Saves the world from destruction
destruction

Enters the world (Bethlehem) in

12 years of obscurity (childhood)

Emerges in God's Temple

Illuminates truth: explains Torah

Demonstrates authority and

(Heb 2:7-8)

Restores shalom from chaos (Mt.

Completely favored by God

Convicts His brothers of sin

Saves His brothers from eternal
destruction

Saves the world from eternal

Chapter 41

Vs 1-5 The chapter begins with Joseph still in jail, in the House of the Chamberlin of the Butcher, the king's jail. According to tradition, Joseph has been in the jail for 12 years - 10 years prior to the freeing of the Cupbearer, and two additional years since the Cupbearer's release.

Pharaoh has two dreams that have disturbed him greatly, both occurring on the same night. In the original script, it says Pharaoh had been "dreaming", suggesting these dreams had occurred regularly and that was part of the vexation felt by Pharaoh - he knew these dreams must be significant and he needed to know what they meant.

- Dream One - Pharaoh was standing near the river, the Nile, and seven cows emerged from the river, fat and sleek, beautiful and robust, and they began to graze in the marshland. Behold, seven more cows emerged from the river, ugly and gaunt, and they stood next to the beautiful cows on the banks of the river. The seven ugly and gaunt cows ate the beautiful, healthy cows, but showed no signs of physical improvement - they were just as ugly and gaunt as before.
- Dream Two - Seven ears of grain were sprouting on a single stalk, healthy and good. And behold seven ears of grain appeared after them, thin and scorched by the east wind. The seven thin ears of grain swallowed the seven healthy and full ears of grain.

Pharaoh was disturbed by these dreams as he sensed they held great meaning for him and all of Egypt.

Vs 6-13 But who will interpret these disturbing dreams? Pharaoh calls his necromancers, his magicians and his wise men, to interpret the disturbing dreams, but none can respond with an interpretation, and Pharaoh was greatly vexed.

Who are these necromancers, magicians and wise men called by Pharaoh?

- Necromancers - men who practice the arts of speaking with the dead. They called upon the spirits of the dead looking for an interpretation.
- Magicians - practitioners of black magic, satanic arts of the underworld.
- Wise men - priests of the pagan gods worshipped by the Egyptians.

There was no answer for Pharaoh's dreams to be found in the wisdom of man, the wisdom of the ages found in the dead, or from the pagan gods commonly worshipped and revered in Egypt at that time.

Note: Even today, when something is of God, we cannot find answers or direction by seeking the dark and satanic wisdom of this world. God provides answers in His inspired word and through His precious Holy Spirit.

The Chief Cupbearer observes Pharaoh's vexation and the failure of the king's court of dark world practitioners, and he remembers his friend from the prison, Joseph. The Cupbearer recounts for Pharaoh the time Pharaoh became angry with him and put him in jail. While in jail, the cupbearer met a young Hebrew slave (note the negative connotation - Hebrew **slave**). He is not a "worthy Egyptian"), who rightly interpreted dreams for the Cupbearer and the Baker. So Pharaoh calls for Joseph to be brought in from jail to interpret.

Vs 14-24 When summoned from jail, Joseph still looked very much like a Hebrew prisoner, hairy and dirty. After a good bath and shave, probably face and head, a new set of clothes, Joseph was presented to Pharaoh.

Pharaoh tells Joseph that he has heard it is within Joseph to interpret dreams, but Joseph makes it clear it is not in him, **but that only Yahweh, the One and True Living God can interpret dreams.** This is a bold statement, an important proclamation that there is but one Living God, Yahweh. None of the king's magicians could divine the meaning of the dream through the power of the false gods or underworld, only the God of Heaven, the Great Provider (Yira).

Pharaoh recounted his dreams for Joseph. Joseph replies that the dreams are essentially the same, and God has given two dreams to indicate this is really important and the events represented in the dreams are about to take place and immediate action is required on behalf of Pharaoh. Again, Joseph gives all credit to Yahweh, God, for the interpretation and the power over the events that are soon to occur. This is a deliberate statement of opposition to the false gods of Egypt, including Pharaoh, himself.

The Interpretation

Vs 25-37 The dreams are one and the same and they call for immediate action. The beautiful cows and the healthy ears of grain represent seven years of amazing grain production throughout the land of Egypt. The ugly skinny cows and the dried up heads of grain represent the following seven years of severe drought, not only in Egypt but throughout much of the world. The drought will swallow up the magnificent production of the previous seven years. The outcome will be that the harshness of the drought will leave Egypt, and the entire world, looking very gaunt and downtrodden.

God has given Pharaoh the dream twice to emphasize the importance of the matter and to indicate this will all occur immediately.

Contrast between Yahweh and the god River Nile

The sages make much of the contrast between these dreams and the dream Jacob had on Mount Moriah when fleeing his brother, Esau. Here, Pharaoh is standing over his god, the River Nile, and the god River Nile is producing good followed by evil. Pharaoh must find a man with discernment and wisdom to save the people. In Jacob's dream, Yahweh is standing over his subjects and blessings are descending a ladder as Yahweh speaks blessings and protection of His servant Jacob, promising protection against all harm that may come his way, promising to bring Jacob back to this very place after he survives and perseveres through danger and trial.

The Recommendation: Pharaoh should look for a man of discernment, full of wisdom, and appoint him over the land of Egypt. Pharaoh should appoint overseers across the land and let them charge every farmer one-fifth of all the grain produced to be stored up in the cities Pharaoh specifies, and the grain should be guarded from thieves. The stored up grain will preserve the nation through the seven years of drought, and Egypt will not be lost during this time, but will actually prosper.

The proposal seemed good to Pharaoh and his servants.

Joseph Appointed by Pharaoh

Vs 38-45 Pharaoh inquires of his servants, *“Can we find a man like this, in who is a divine spirit?”*

Finding no one else, Pharaoh appoints Joseph for this incredible role: *“Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you. See I have set you over all the land of Egypt.”*

- Pharaoh gave Joseph his own signet ring.
- Clothed Joseph in garments of fine linen.
- Put a gold necklace around his neck.
- Pharaoh had Joseph ride in the chariot behind his own.
- Had servants proclaim, “Avech!” (Bow the knee, or father, counselor or mentor to the king)
- Set Joseph over the land.
- Conferred total authority over the land, no one could come in or leave without Joseph's permission.
- Pharaoh gave Joseph a royal name, Zaphenath-paneah (he who explains what is hidden).

- Pharaoh gave Joseph a wife, Asenath, daughter of Potiphera, Priest of On. (Tradition records Potiphera is the same as Potiphar. By marrying Potiphar's daughter, Joseph is vindicated in the eyes of all Egyptians from the charge that he assaulted Potiphar's wife).

Note: Joseph was favored by his father, given lavish gifts, and held in greater esteem by his father than any of his brothers. His brothers hated him because of this favoritism, but the favoritism seems to be greater than the discomfort of disdain of his brothers. Now Pharaoh has elevated Joseph above all the rest of his cabinet, counselors, advisors and chieftains. Tradition records stories of agreement by these loyal courtiers of Pharaoh that Joseph should lead the process of collecting grain, etc, but how much rancor was there among the ranks, those jealous or envious of Joseph? Joseph had great training to prepare for this royal treatment and potential disdain by all the rest of the courtiers.

Vs 47-49 We get a sense that the plan of God for seven years of abundant harvest began immediately and Joseph responded by beginning immediately to collect and store the abundant grain. Grain was stored in every city, collecting the grain harvested around the city. Initially the grain being stored was measured but eventually it became such a great volume that it could no longer be measured.

Joseph fulfilled his new responsibilities with great vigor and great integrity.

Vs 50-52 The first year of the famine Joseph became a father, not of one child, but two sons. Joseph named the first son, Manasseh, *"For God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household"*. He named his second son, Ephraim, *"For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction"*.

Vs 53-57 As the famine set in, it has completely spread over Egypt and to all the world. But Egypt had bread. When the land of Egypt felt hunger, the people were directed to Joseph who designed and managed a distribution process. Joseph opened the store houses as needed, with great controls. And all the people of the world came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, for the famine was great across the nations.

Chapter 42 Jacob sends to Egypt for grain.

Vs 1-5 Hunger strikes Jacob's household. *"Behold, why are you staring at one another? Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down there and buy some for us from that place, so that we may live and not die"*.

So, Jacob sent Joseph's 10 older brothers to Egypt, but did not send Benjamin, lest something tragic happen to him.

Vs 6-7 An early dream comes true. Everyone who comes to buy grain must buy from Joseph. Obviously, there is much grain commerce and Joseph cannot oversee every transaction. Logically, Joseph knows this famine is very wide spread, and sooner or later, the likelihood his brothers will come buy grain, is great. Logic would say that the city or cities that would be most likely for them to buy grain, Joseph posted observers to look for them. When they arrived, Joseph made sure they would come before him, which they did, **and they bowed low to their brother Joseph**, though he was not known to them. “We are from Canaan and we have come to buy food”.

Joseph recognized his brothers and spoke harshly to them, demanding to know where they had come from.

Vs 8-17 Joseph recognized them but they did not recognize him. Scripture says that Joseph remembered the dreams he had as a boy and Joseph pressed on his brothers:

- *“You are spies, come to look at the undefended parts of our land”*
- He presses them for family information and uses the information to confound them.
- When asked about family they respond, *“No, my Lord. We are your servants who have come to buy food. We are all sons of one man. We are honest men; your servants are not spies. Your servants are twelve brothers in all, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold the youngest is with our father today, and one is no longer alive”*.
- Joseph insists they are spies and the only way they can prove otherwise is if their youngest brother comes to Egypt and presents himself to Zaphenath-paneah (Joseph).
- Joseph places them in prison for three days.

Vs 18-25 After the three days in prison, Joseph gives them an opportunity to return to Canaan, but one of them must remain in prison and they must return to Egypt with Benjamin. He speaks with them through an interpreter, protecting his identity as it is not time to reveal himself to them.

Not knowing Joseph could understand them, they began to argue amongst themselves. They feel the guilt of selling their brother Joseph into slavery and the guilt is coming back on them as the cause of this current circumstance. They argued over their roles and hard heartedness in selling Joseph, and Reuben asserts that he adjured them, “do not sin against the boy”.

Joseph turned away from the brothers and wept. When he turned back he selected Simeon, bound him before their eyes, and retained him while the others were freed to leave Egypt.

Joseph had their donkeys loaded with grain and sent them on their way. One brother discovered his money had been replaced in his sack and fear gripped all of them. Eventually they would discover that each of them had his money placed in his feed sacks. *“What is this that God has done to us?”*

Why was Simeon held back by Joseph?

Tradition says it was Simeon who placed Joseph in the pit, the beginning process of bringing great grief on Jacob, their father. This was a grief Jacob never overcame. **Luke 2:25** records another Simeon, righteous and devout, in the Temple, an old man who was looking for the consolation of Israel. Simeon, brother of Joseph was in jail, not knowing he was about to witness the consolation of Israel, Jacob reunited with his beloved son Joseph. The old man Simeon is watching for the coming Messiah, the spiritual consolation of Israel.

Vs 29-38 Returning home was a mixed reception. There had to be some joy because there was food. However, the same brothers who had to tell Jacob that Joseph had earlier perished now have to report the detainment of Simeon and the demand that Benjamin must travel to Egypt to secure the release of Simeon. Further, fear swells as each brother realizes his money had been returned.

Reuben regarding taking Benjamin to Egypt: *“You may put my two sons to death if I do not bring him back to you.”*

Jacob’s reply:

“My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should befall him on the journey you are taking, then you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow.”

Jacob lost his beloved Rachel on the road back to the Promised Land, as they reached Bethlehem. Jacob sent his beloved son Joseph on the road to check up on the brothers tending the flocks near Shechem, and he was lost. He is not willing to send his young son Benjamin on the road to Egypt for fear he too will be lost, and Jacob will die a very sorrowful and broken man.

Chapter 43 Judah takes Benjamin to Egypt

Vs 1-10 The famine continues to rage on, just as foretold in Pharaoh’s dreams. As would be anticipated, the food the brothers brought back for Egypt was coming near an end. Jacob ordered them to return to Egypt to buy more food. Judah reminds Jacob that unless they take Benjamin with them, they will not be able to purchase food, and Simeon will remain incarcerated. This sorrowed and scared Jacob, and frustrated him terribly. How could he send his beloved Benjamin to Egypt, the son of his old age, the sole remaining son of his beloved Rachel? Life is incredibly unfair!

Judah: *“Send the lad with me and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, we as well as our little ones. I myself will be surety for him; you may hold me responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame before you forever. For if we had not delayed, surely by now we could have returned twice.”* We see a very different Judah in this verse. Different from the one who said, *“Let’s sell our brother”*; and different from the Judah who left his family and lived as a Canaanite for 22 years.

Vs 11-15 Israel agreed, and commanded them to take some of the finer products of Canaan to Egypt with them (hospitality): balm, honey, aromatic gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. Also, take double money to cover what was purchased before and what will be purchased on this trip.

Jacob agreed for Benjamin to travel with Judah and the brothers and sent them off with a prayer, *“May God Almighty grant you compassion on the eyes of the man; so that he will release to you your brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.”*

Vs 16-25 Joseph reunites with Benjamin. When Joseph sees Benjamin after so many years, he plans a special feast for himself and all the brothers at his own home. The brothers were afraid because of this treatment. They surmised they were brought here because of the money that they had found in their sacks. They presumed some trickery was at play here, and surely the Egyptian would fall on them and make them all slaves of Egypt. They spoke to the steward who met them at the door and tried to explain the discovery of the money in their sacks from the previous trip.

The steward replied, *“Be at ease, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks. I had your money placed in your sacks.”* Then Simeon was restored to them.

Fodder was provided for their donkeys, the brothers were brought into the house and their feet were washed. So the brothers prepared the gift for Joseph as he was to arrive at noon.

Vs 26 - When Joseph arrived, the brothers presented him with the gift from Canaan and bowed low to him. Joseph asked about the welfare of their father, was he well and is still alive? They responded on Jacob’s welfare and bowed again. Joseph lifted his eyes and saw Benjamin. *“Is this your youngest brother of whom you spoke?”* And Joseph said to Benjamin, *“May God be gracious to you my son.”*

Joseph rushes out of the room as he loses emotional control and does not want his brothers to see him in tears. When he had gained control, washed his face, he returned and the meal began. Joseph sat at table by himself, his servants at a table of their own, and the brothers were seated together at a table, for it was loathsome to Egyptians to eat bread with Hebrews. The brothers were amazed to find they had been seated according to age and birthright, from oldest to youngest. Food was served from Joseph's table, and Benjamin received five times as much as the others. The brothers were amazed at this but feasted and drank freely with Joseph.

Because the brothers do not recognize Joseph as anything other than a great king in Egypt, and certainly not their little brother, and Joseph knows their history and family so well, they assume he is practiced in the art of divining, the use of magic. Joseph uses this perception to his advantage as he further confounds his brothers, testing them to see what their hearts are like.

Chapter 44: 1-18 Benjamin is detained in Egypt

Vs 1-5 Joseph prepares to send the brothers back to Canaan. He ordered:

- Fill their sacks with as much grain as they can carry
- Put each man's money back in his sack
- Put my silver cup in the mouth of the sack of Benjamin, the youngest.

And the servant did as Joseph had commanded. As soon as it was light the brothers were sent off back to Canaan.

As soon as the brothers cleared the city gates Joseph sent his steward after them and commanded him to say these things: *"Why have you repaid evil for good? Is this not the cup from which my Lord drinks and which he indeed uses for divination? You have done wrong in this."*

Vs 6-13 The brothers deny they have done anything wrong, even reminding the steward that they returned the money that had been placed in their sacks from the first trip to Egypt. *"How could we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we will be my lord's slaves."* We should be reminded of the words of Jacob to Laban regarding the issue of the idols stolen by Rachel - *"Let him die who has stolen your objects of worship."*

Joseph's servant replies, *"Let it be according to your words; he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and the rest of you shall be innocent."*

The search ensues, beginning with Reuben and going from brother to brother, oldest to youngest, and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack of grain. The brothers tore their clothes, loaded their donkeys and returned to the city.

Vs 14-18 When **Judah** (not Reuben as leader of the brothers) and his brothers returned to Joseph's house, he was still there.

Joseph addressed the brothers:

- What is this you have done?
- Don't you know I can practice divination?

Judah speaks:

- What can we say my lord? What can we speak?
- How can we justify ourselves?
- God has found out the iniquity of your servants, behold we are your slaves, both we and the one in whose possession the cup has been found.

Joseph responds:

- Far be it from me to enslave you all.
- The man in whose possession the cup was found will be my slave.
- **The rest of you may go in peace to your father.**

Jacob's worst fears are about to become a reality - the loss of his beloved Benjamin. Judah is at a very difficult place in life - he has pledged total responsibility for his youngest brother, and Jacob has trusted him. How could the brothers return to Jacob's house in peace if Benjamin is retained as a slave in Egypt?

So, as we leave the drama at a cliff hanger point, let's go back to the questions we started with:

1. What does this passage teach us about how God wants His children to live?
2. What do we learn about the nature of God through this narrative?
3. Where do we see the picture of Messiah in this story?
4. How does this passage show us the unveiling of God's plan of redemption for lost man?