

Comments on Genesis 41

After the connections made in prison some two years earlier, Joseph's gift of interpreting results in him being placed in a position of considerable power. These events set the stage for the ultimately fulfillment of the predictions foretold in the dreams Joseph had more than ten years earlier.

Some questions arise which are not dealt with directly in the text. While Joseph is a slave and prisoner it is plain as to why he does not or cannot make contact with his family. However, once in such a position of authority as he finds himself in this chapter, he still makes no effort whatsoever to contact his family. Why?

One possibility is he is embittered and feeling rejected. Given the history of rejection through the family line (Ishmael the first-born son is rejected, Esau the favored and first-born son is rejected) perhaps he sees himself as falling in with them. It is plain that at the point where he last sees his brothers they were conspiring against him, could Joseph suspect his own father Jacob was conspiring along with them after his predictions they would all bow down to him? Perhaps suspicions he had were fueled by the lack of rescue by his father. However, this seems unlikely given Joseph's comments in 40:14-15 where he casts himself as being kidnaped rather than expelled and appears to be seeking release so he can return home as he identifies himself as a foreigner.

Or, perhaps his aspirations to live up to the visions he had when he was 17 (cf. 37:5-11) drive him to succeed on his own. Did some of the vanity of his youth linger into his adult years?

Another possibility is he realizes his purpose of being placed in Egypt in this position very early on, much earlier than his statement some nine years later in 45:5-8. In this case, the statement in 45:5-8 would only be a revelation to the rest of the family, something which he had realized when he had taken the position with Pharaoh. Given his being apprized of the extent of the famine when interpreting the dream (v. 31) this does not seem unreasonable. Perhaps Joseph made the connection between Pharaoh's dream of the ears of grain (v. 22-23) and his own original dream of the family likened to sheaves of grain (cf. 37:7). But, if Joseph fully perceives all of this some nine years in advance, why does he act the way he does in ch. 42-44 where he is testing and haranguing his brothers? This behavior doesn't make sense if the Lord had enlightened Joseph as to the ultimate purpose.

Finally, the name he gives his first son, Manasseh, and the interpretation given "For God...hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house" indicate Joseph just wants to forget

about his past. Not only the years he spent in slavery and prison, but even his first family. Had Joseph realized the purpose discussed in 45:5-8 early on it is doubtful his feelings towards his family would be such as his eye would be forward to their future reunion and his role in saving them. Instead, this suggests Joseph himself has lost sight of his own original dreams of family leadership (cf. 37:5-11).

Clearly, it was the Lord's intent to have Joseph placed where he was, but Joseph himself does not appear to realize this until 45:5-8. There is nothing in the text to suggest there was any overt revelation telling Joseph if he waited patiently his family would come to him, and the evidence there indicates Joseph would rather forget about the hard times and his old family and focus on his new life in Egypt.

1 AND it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed: and, behold, he stood by the river. 2 And, behold, there came up out of the river seven well-favoured kine and fat-fleshed; and they fed in a meadow. 3 And, behold, seven other kine came up after them out of the river, ill favoured and leanfleshed; and stood by the [other] kine upon the brink of the river. 4 And the ill favoured and leanfleshed kine did eat up the seven well favoured and fat kine. So Pharaoh awoke.

5 And he slept and dreamed the second time: and, behold, seven ears of corn came up upon one stalk, rank and good. 6 And, behold, seven thin ears and blasted with the east wind sprung up after them. 7 And the seven thin ears devoured the seven rank and full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and, behold, [it was] a dream.

8 And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof: and Pharaoh told them his dream; but [there was] none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh.

v1-8 Two years pass with Joseph still serving in the prison. However, the means of his delivery is put into place when Pharaoh has two disturbing dreams in one night. In his first dream he is standing by the Nile (v. 1) and he sees seven healthy cows (v. 2) overtaken and consumed by seven emaciated cows (v. 3-4a). He is so disturbed by the imagery he wakes up (v. 4b). He gets back to sleep but he has another dream where he sees seven full healthy ears of grain grow on a single stalk (v. 5). But, he then sees another seven poor ears of grain grow (v. 6) and overtake the healthy ears. He is again so shaken by the dream he wakes from it (v. 7). The next morning he summons all of the wise men in Egypt to him to interpret the meaning of the dreams, but they cannot (v. 8).

The imagery first of the livestock and then of the grain being struck was intended to show the severity of the famine. In

famine conditions the people feed themselves first and then the livestock. Thus a moderate famine would be an affliction to the livestock, but not necessarily be all that bad to the people. However, the second dream makes it clear the famine will be very bad because not only will the livestock be devastated, the grain which feeds both livestock and human alike will be devastated. The second vision serves to emphasize the severity of the drought.

v1 "the river", i.e., the Nile, the primary source of the water in Egypt. If the Nile dries up, all of Egypt is in jeopardy.

v7 It would appear that after the second dream Pharaoh did not go back to sleep as he did after the first one.

v8 It isn't that they couldn't provide interpretations at all, they didn't produce ones that satisfied him.

9 Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying, I do remember my faults this day: 10 Pharaoh was wroth with his servants, and put me in ward in the captain of the guard's house, [both] me and the chief baker: 11 And we dreamed a dream in one night, I and he; we dreamed each man according to the interpretation of his dream. 12 And [there was] there with us a young man, an Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard; and we told him, and he interpreted to us our dreams; to each man according to his dream he did interpret. 13 And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was; me he restored unto mine office, and him he hanged.

14 Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved [himself], and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh. 15 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and [there is] none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, [that] thou canst understand a dream to interpret it. 16 And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, [It is] not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.

v9-16 When none of Egypt's wise men can provide a suitable answer to the dreams, the cup bearer remembers back when he was in prison with Joseph (v. 9-12) and he correctly interpreted his dream (v. 13). When Pharaoh hears this he sends for Joseph and he is taken out of the prison and cleaned up and brought in (v. 14). Pharaoh tells Joseph he has a dream which none can interpret, and informs him he has heard he can interpret dreams (v. 15). Joseph confesses the interpretations are from God and not from himself (v. 16).

v9 "I do remember my faults this day", the cup bearer is more

likely confessing to Pharaoh that he should have told him earlier about this Joseph person, as opposed to confessing he failed to follow through on Joseph's request in 40:14-15. In identifying his faults, the cup bearer is probably also acting deferentially to Pharaoh in making reference to the events that landed him in prison, so as to not stir any bad feelings from those events.

v14 "he shaved himself, and changed his raiment", having been in prison for years Joseph was certainly not up for an appearance before nobility. The Egyptians observed a custom of completely shaving their heads, so Joseph had to observe this in order to meet Pharaoh.

v16 Compare 40:8 and contrast 37:5-11.

17 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, In my dream, behold, I stood upon the bank of the river: 18 And, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine, fat-fleshed and well-favoured; and they fed in a meadow: 19 And, behold, seven other kine came up after them, poor and very ill favoured and leanfleshed, such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt for badness: 20 And the lean and the ill favoured kine did eat up the first seven fat kine: 21 And when they had eaten them up, it could not be known that they had eaten them; but they [were] still ill favoured, as at the beginning. So I awoke. 22 And I saw in my dream, and, behold, seven ears came up in one stalk, full and good: 23 And, behold, seven ears, withered, thin, [and] blasted with the east wind, sprung up after them: 24 And the thin ears devoured the seven good ears:

and I told [this] unto the magicians; but [there was] none that could declare [it] to me. 25 And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh [is] one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he [is] about to do. 26 The seven good kine [are] seven years; and the seven good ears [are] seven years: the dream [is] one. 27 And the seven thin and ill favoured kine that came up after them [are] seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine. 28 This [is] the thing which I have spoken unto Pharaoh: What God [is] about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh. 29 Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt: 30 And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land; 31 And the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following; for it [shall be] very grievous. 32 And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; [it is] because the thing [is] established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

v17-32 Pharaoh relates the two dreams to Joseph (v. 17-23) and then indicates none of his wise men were able to interpret them (v. 24). Without deliberating at all Joseph responds and informs

Pharaoh the two dreams are in fact of the same thing, which is seven years of bounty to be followed by seven years of very bad famine (v. 25-27). The interpretation given by Joseph is what God is about to do (v. 28), seven years of plenty (v. 29) followed by seven years of famine (v. 30). The famine will be so bad it will consume anything left from the previous year's bounty (v. 31). The dream was given to Pharaoh to show him it was God's work and was imminent (v. 32).

v32 The two separate dreams appear to have been given so as to convince Pharaoh it was a revelation from God. Pharaoh was upset by the first dream, but went back to sleep. He then had another similar dream which was more emphatic, and after that he does not appear to have gone back to sleep. God had to emphasize His point to Pharaoh in order to convince him it was not just his imagination.

33 Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. 34 Let Pharaoh do [this], and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years. 35 And let them gather all the food of those good years that come, and lay up corn under the hand of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. 36 And that food shall be for store to the land against the seven years of famine, which shall be in the land of Egypt; that the land perish not through the famine.

37 And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants. 38 And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find [such a one] as this [is], a man in whom the Spirit of God [is]? 39 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, [there is] none so discreet and wise as thou [art]: 40 Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou. 41 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. 42 And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; 43 And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him [ruler] over all the land of Egypt. 44 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I [am] Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt. 45 And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-paaneah; and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On. And Joseph went out over [all] the land of Egypt.

v33-45 Recognizing the importance of the dreams Joseph suggests Pharaoh organize and appoint men to take advantage of the seven years of bounty to stock up against the seven years of famine (v. 33-36). Pharaoh and his stewards recognizes the wisdom in doing

so (v. 37) and then says Joseph is the man for the job because he is clearly inspired by God (v. 38-39). Joseph is to be second only to Pharaoh himself (v. 40-44) and he gives him an Egyptian name and wife. Joseph's power and influence extends over all of Egypt (v. 45).

v37-42 Joseph must be overwhelmed and dumbfounded at Pharaoh's assignment. Naturally, Joseph saw his interpreting Pharaoh's dream as a way out of jail (cf. 40:14), but surely this is not what Joseph had in mind. Notice the way the text presents Joseph as quite talkative when interpreting the dream and giving advice but then completely silent while Pharaoh gives him the commission, suggesting he was literally dumbfounded.

Also, consider Pharaoh's motives here. What safer person to pick for such a high profile position? He was eminently disposable in the event things went bad as he had no connections to nobility and was a foreigner. And, he was completely cut off from any of the local political intrigue of the court which was clearly a problem given the events of ch. 40. Pharaoh was also probably having a crisis of confidence in his own wise men given their lackluster performance (v. 1). Plus, Pharaoh genuinely appears to be a God-fearing man.

v38 "Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?", on this the Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary on Genesis states:

This is the first biblical mention of one so endowed. In Exodus 31:3 and 35:31, Bezalel is described as another who is endowed with God's spirit and therefore has "skill, ability and knowledge." Belshazzar similarly describes Daniel, "I have heard about you that you have the spirit of the gods in you, and that illumination, knowledge, and extraordinary wisdom are to be found in you" (Dan. 5:14). Generally, possession of the "spirit of God" impels one to undertake a mission (Num. 27:18), imparts extraordinary energy and drive (Judges 3:10; 11:29), and produces uncommon intelligence and practical wisdom.

v45 "Zaphnath-paaneah", the meaning of the name is obscure. It may mean "God speaks and He lives" alluding to Joseph's interpretive and revelatory gift and the fact that the revelation affirms God's existence and His communicating with humans. Or, it may mean "creator and sustainer of life" which would refer to Joseph's new position as overseer of the stores. The latter would be more contextual given Joseph's new position which accompanies the name change.

46 And Joseph [was] thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt. 47 And in the seven plenteous years the earth brought forth by handfuls. 48 And he gathered up all the food of the seven years, which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities: the food of the field, which [was] round about every city, laid he up in the same. 49 And Joseph gathered corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until he left numbering; for [it was] without number.

50 And unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, which Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On bare unto him. 51 And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, [said he], hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house. 52 And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.

53 And the seven years of plenteousness, that was in the land of Egypt, were ended. 54 And the seven years of dearth began to come, according as Joseph had said: and the dearth was in all lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. 55 And when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread: and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do. 56 And the famine was over all the face of the earth: And Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold unto the Egyptians; and the famine waxed sore in the land of Egypt. 57 And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy [corn]; because that the famine was [so] sore in all lands.

v46-57 Joseph was thirty years old when he appeared before Pharaoh and then took over as the head steward (v. 46). In the seven years of bounty Joseph collects and stockpiles so much grain it is impossible to count it (v. 47-49). During this time Joseph has two sons, named Manasseh and Ephraim, and he considers them a blessing from God (v. 50-52). Once the seven years of bounty end (v. 53) the predicted drought starts and spreads throughout Egypt and all the surrounding lands (v. 54-56), such that everyone must come to Egypt to buy grain (v. 57).

v46 Joseph is identified as seventeen years old in 36:2 when he goes into slavery, here he is thirty. Some considerable time has passed, about twelve years in prison, depending on how long he was at Potiphar's house. It took twelve years to move Joseph from being a spoiled brat at home into the position where he could accomplish the things revealed to him in the dreams of 37:5-10. Joseph bragged to his family about the dreams twelve years earlier, but what brought about the ultimate fulfilment of those dreams has completely separated them and has left Joseph wanting to forget about his past.

v50 Note the sons are born of Joseph and an Egyptian woman, not

a Hebrew woman, yet they are still considered suitable heirs to the covenant (cf. 48:9-20). When considering matters of lineage in an ancient setting they are dictated by patriarchy and not matriarchy as is practiced among modern Jews.

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