

**GENESIS**

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Genesis chapter 41 as we continue our study through the Word of God. In our last study we saw Joseph in prison, falsely accused of attempting to rape his master's wife. In prison God brought to him two servants of Pharaoh, the butler and the baker. You see, Pharaoh uncovered an assassination attempt on his life, he was going to be poisoned, but he was not sure which servant was going to carry out this plot, so he put them both in prison until he could figure it out.

In prison these two men have dreams and Joseph gives them the interpretation of their dreams and Joseph does not take credit for this, he gives glory to God for revealing them to him. For the butler, in 3 days he would be restored before Pharaoh and for the baker, in 3 days he would be put to death for his plan to kill Pharaoh! And Joseph asked the butler to remember him when he is released, to remember him before Pharaoh and tell Pharaoh that he did not belong in prison, he did nothing wrong.

And just as Joseph said would happen, it came to pass. The butler was restored and the baker was put to death and as chapter 40 closed, we read; **“Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.”** Genesis 40:23. That is where we will pick up our study this evening, in Genesis chapter 41, starting in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us this evening as we study His Word!

**GENESIS 41****VERSES 1-7**

1. Doesn't that seem unfair? Joseph is doing God's will, serving the Lord faithfully and once again things go bad. The royal butler forgot about Joseph for two full years! As unfair as that might seem, it was God's perfect timing to fulfill His perfect plan. Any earlier and things would have not worked out. Thus, don't rush God and just because a situation doesn't work the way you want it to, walk by faith and trust in the Lord as Joseph did.

2. At this appointed time, Pharaoh has two dreams in one night. In his first dream seven fat cows came out of the Nile River and grazed along the banks. Then seven gaunt cows came up and ate the seven fat cows. After Pharaoh woke up, he went back to sleep and dreamed another dream. This time seven thin heads of grain devoured seven plump heads of grain. And once again Pharaoh woke up. At this point I would be calling in the new baker and see what he put in the food that evening! For Pharaoh, he knew that these were not normal dreams. How do I know that? Look at the verse 8 and you will see what I mean.

VERSE 8

1. Pharaoh knew that these dreams were not the result of eating a bad pizza that night. They meant something and yet he did not know what they were telling him. Thus, he calls for the magicians and the wise men, these men were into the occult and they could interpret dreams, but they had no idea what these two dreams meant!

VERSES 9-13

1. How lucky is this, what a coincidence, now the butler remembers Joseph and how he correctly interpreted the baker and his dream two years earlier. Folks, it is not luck. There is no such thing as a coincidence with God. This was the plan of God and in His timing; it is now coming to pass!

It is interesting to hear the unsaved speak as if they are in control. God has a plan and He will use man to fulfill His plan, even if they don't know Him or don't believe He is real. He knows what will happen and He will use it to bring about His plan. In Proverbs 16:9 Solomon tells us, "**A man's heart plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps.**" And in Proverbs 19:21 he tells us, "**There are many plans in a man's heart, Nevertheless the Lord's counsel — that will stand.**" You see, even the wicked, the ungodly will fulfill the plan of God!

And folks, no mater what you are going through, God is working and He is aware, nothing escapes His eye. Jesus reminds us in Matthew 10:29-31, **“Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”** May we not forget that even when we are walking in those dark times, He is still working!

#### VERSE 14

1. What was God doing during those two full years that Joseph was in prison after he interpreted those dreams for the butler and the baker? God was working in Joseph so that He could work through Joseph. He was building the character of God in Him. Folks, God is doing the same in us, transforming us into the image of Christ.

Paul, in Philippians 3:17-21 tells us, **“Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame — who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”**

God is working in us so that He can work through us and touch the lives of many for Him!

Now, as much as God is working in us, the Devil is also working to deceive us and he is good. Paul warns us in II Corinthians 11:13-15, **“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.”** Yes, God is working in us, transforming us into the image of Christ but beware. Satan has his false prophets who are nothing more than wolves in sheep’s clothing trying to deceive the sheep and destroy them.

How do we know these false prophets? Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:15-20, **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”**

What is born from their lives, what do they identify with will tell you if they are of God or not. Is their fruit good and when I speak of good I am speaking of it being based in the Word of God. If it is not in the Word of God then they are in error and we are not to listen to them. It is as we are told in Isaiah 8:19-20, **“And when they say to you, ‘Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,’ should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”** May we be aware as we are warned!

2. Before Joseph could come before Pharaoh he had to get cleaned up and shaved. He was a prisoner and probably dirty, filthy and unshaved. According to Wilkinson, “the custom of shaving the head as well as beard was not confined to the priests in Egypt, but was general among all classes.” Thus, Joseph was cleaned and new clothes were given to him so he could stand before the king!

#### VERSES 15-16

1. Did you see how Joseph once again points people to the Lord, even Pharaoh! He could have taken the glory, Pharaoh was ready to give it to him but Joseph gave glory to God for He alone can interpret dreams. You see, God was working in Joseph and now He is working through Joseph!

#### VERSES 17-24

1. Pharaoh tells Joseph his dreams and he fills in some more details. The seven fat cows come up out of the Nile River and were feeding on the richest fodder by the River. Then seven ugly, gaunt, emaciated cows came up and ate these fat cows and when they were done, they still looked emaciated!

I don't know how many of you saw the John Candy movie, *The Great Outdoors*, but it was very funny. In it he plays Chet Ripley and he comes to a restaurant on vacation with his family and orders a 96-ounce steak. You see, if you ate the whole thing, it was free! As he takes that last bite of steak, barely able to chew it down, the 400-pound cook comes up to him and says, "You have to finish the grizzle, too." I bet he unbuckled his belt a few notches by the time he was done, but these cows, nothing. They did not change their outward appearance even though they devoured these plump cows!

2. His second dream was no different; seven thin heads ate seven plump heads of grain. And as troubled as Pharaoh was over this, no wise man, no magician, those who could interpret dreams, they could not tell Pharaoh what they meant. The only one in the land that could was a Hebrew slave named Joseph who served the true and living God!

VERSES 25-32

1. What God showed Pharaoh in his dreams was what He was about to do. The seven plump cows and the seven plump heads of grain represented the same thing, seven bountiful years of harvest in the land. The seven gaunt cows and the seven thin heads of grain represented the same thing, seven years of terrible famine in the land. And I believe the reason Pharaoh saw this dream in two different ways was to show him that this was going to take place, it was not just a bad dream, this was a reality that was coming upon the land shortly. It is as we are told in Deuteronomy 19:15, **“One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.”** That in a sense is what we see here, two witnesses in these two dreams!
  
2. Also, as you read this you get a sense of urgency. This is going to happen and it is going to happen shortly. The seven good years of harvest are coming soon and they will be followed by seven years of severe famine in the land. I guess Joseph was released from prison just in time, in fact it was the perfect time, God’s perfect timing. It is as Paul said, **“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”** Romans 8:28.
  
3. Now, is there any evidence or documentation that there were seven bountiful years of harvest in the land that was followed by seven years of famine in the land? Is there a historical record of this? You bet there is! In Grant Jeffrey’s book, The Signature of God, he tells us:

A fascinating inscription confirming the Bible's account of the "seven years of great plenty" followed by the "seven years of famine" (Genesis 41:29, 30) was discovered during the nineteenth century in southern Saudi Arabia. This inscription was found on a marble tablet in a ruined fortress on the seashore of Hadramaut in present-day Democratic Yemen. An examination of the writing suggests that it was written approximately eighteen hundred years before the birth of Christ, a time that corresponds with the biblical narrative about Jacob and his twelve sons. This inscription was rendered in Arabic by Professor Schlens and was later translated into English by Rev. Charles Forster.

This is his translation of this ancient inscription:

We dwelt at ease in this castle a long tract of time;  
 nor had we a desire but for the region-lord of the vineyard.  
 Hundreds of camels returned to us each day at evening,  
 their eye pleasant to behold in their resting-places.  
 And twice the number of our camels were our sheep,  
 in comeliness like white doves, and also the slow moving kine.  
 We dwelt in this castle **seven years of good life**  
 - how difficult for memory its description!  
**Then came years barren and burnt up:**  
**when one evil year had passed away,**  
**Then came another to succeed it.**  
 And we became as though we had never seen a glimpse of good.  
 They died and neither foot nor hoof remained.  
 Thus fares it with him who renders not thanks to God:  
 His footsteps fail not to be blotted out from his dwelling.

This ancient poem records the devastation of the years of famine and barrenness that followed the seven years of plenty. The language of the poem implies that the famine also lasted seven years. This account from Ancient Arabia provides independent evidence confirming the accuracy of the biblical account of the seven years of plenty in the Middle East followed by seven years of famine that occurred during the rule of Joseph as prime minister of Egypt.

Moses recorded the history of the Egyptian famine and the wise preparations that Joseph made to gather up the surplus grain during the seven years of plenty to provide against the coming years of famine. “So 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; he laid up in every city the food of the fields which surrounded them” (Genesis 41:48). Again, Moses recorded: “Then the seven years of plenty which were in the land of Egypt ended, and the seven years of famine was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. . . . The famine was over all the face of the earth, and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians. And the famine became severe in the land of Egypt. So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine was severe in all lands” (Genesis 41:53-57). As the book of Genesis recorded, the seven-year famine was so severe in Egypt that Joseph, as the chief administrator, had to be very careful in selling food from the precious grain reserves to satisfy the hunger of all the inhabitants of the surrounding countries. Joseph could not sell the grain reserves of Egypt for gold and silver to everyone because of the danger that the grain would run out. When the famine was at its peak, grain was much more valuable than gold or money.

Explorers during the last century discovered a number of other fascinating ancient inscriptions in the Middle East that provided confirmation of facts recorded in the sacred Scriptures. Ebn Hesham, an Arab from Yemen, showed the English explorer, Mr. Cruttenden, a rich tomb of a wealthy Yemenite woman who had died during the time of the Egyptian famine recorded in Genesis 41. This Yemenite tomb was fortunately discovered around 1850 after being exposed following a flood that uncovered the grave site.

The tomb contained the body of a rich noblewoman who was covered in beautiful jewels. Seven collars of pearls surrounded her neck; her hands and feet were covered with seven bracelets, armlets, rings, and ankle-rings displaying costly jewels. In addition, her tomb contained a coffer filled with rich treasure.

However, the greatest treasure of all was a fascinating engraved stone tablet bearing her final inscription which confirmed the biblical account of Joseph's careful management of the remaining food reserves during the seven years of famine in Egypt.

### **A Yemenite Inscription About a Famine During the Time of Joseph**

In thy name O God, the God of Hamyar,  
I Tajah, the daughter of Dzu Shefar, **sent my steward to Joseph,**  
And he delaying to return to me, I sent my hand maid  
With a measure of silver, to bring me back a measure of flour:  
And not being able to procure it, I sent her with a measure of gold:  
And not being able to procure it, I sent her with a measure of pearls:  
And not being able to procure it, I commanded them to be ground:  
And finding no profit in them, I am shut up here.  
Whosoever may hear of it, let him commiserate me;  
And should any woman adorn herself with an ornament  
From my ornaments, may she die with no other than my death.

( Italics added)  
(reported in Niebuhr's Voyage en Arabie, PL. LIX.  
Translation by Rev. Charles Forster).

This ancient inscription reveals a Yemenite Arab noble woman's sincere complaint that she could not purchase Egypt's grain with her gold. It also reveals Joseph's determination to resist any appeal from a stranger offering gold in return for Egypt's precious grain reserves. This determination reminds us of Joseph's similar resolve earlier in his life when he resisted the attempt of Potiphar's wife to destroy his virtue. The tragic history of famines often recorded the bartering of the most precious of metals and luxuries in trade for the smallest amount of food available.

- Grant Jeffrey, *The Signature of God*, pp. 42-45

So there is historical evidence of this event, this famine, which once again supports what the Bible says took place!

#### VERSES 33-36

1. I like what Joseph does here. He not only tells Pharaoh what is coming, he also tells Pharaoh what needs to be done during this time, he has a plan. There are many people out there who are good at complaining but don't know how to resolve the situation or they don't want to assist in resolving the situation. Folks, don't just complain about something, but you also need to come up with a plan to resolve that problem. For Joseph, this was an urgent call to action and Pharaoh needed to appoint someone to administrate this plan. But who will that be? We will find out shortly and I think you can already guess who it is going to be!

2. Within the plan of Joseph there would be a 20% tax on the produce of the land during the seven bountiful years of harvest and the reason is simple. There was also coming seven years of famine and this was to offset those bad years. It is as Joseph said, “**Then that food shall be as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish during the famine.**” Genesis 41:36.

#### VERSES 37-44

1. Think about what just took place here. It is a rag's to riches story you might say. And as you look at it you might think in one day Joseph was raised from the pit to the pinnacle. Actually, it took 13 years for that to take place, he is now 30 years old and he was sold into slavery when he was 17 years old! Yes, his life did change overnight, but there were 13 years of God working in Joseph to get to this point!

2. Also, did you notice what this pagan king saw in Joseph? He saw the Spirit of the living God working in and through Joseph! When people look at your life, what do they see? Do they see the Spirit of the living God working in your life, manifested in the things that you are doing? If not, maybe it is because you are not allowing the Spirit of God to work in you, you are not submitting to the Spirit's leading in your life and if you will not allow the Spirit of God to work in you, He will not work through you!

Paul, in Ephesians 5:15-21 tells us, **“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.”**

Paul is saying that we need to be continually being filled with the Spirit of God. Yes, the days are evil out there, but greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world, so don't use that as an excuse! You see, as you are continually filled with the Spirit of God, as you submit to His will and not yours, you will have joy in your heart that will overflow with thanksgiving to God and a submission to others, you won't lord over people! In other words, the fruit of the Spirit will flow from your life and others will see that God is not only working in you, but through you!

VERSE 45

1. I think we will just call him Zap-Pa! It is much easier, don't you think? Interestingly enough, his name means God speaks and he lives! Pharaoh recognized that God spoke through Joseph and God not only preserved Joseph all these years but He is going to preserve his people from perishing during this coming famine upon the land! What a powerful witness Joseph was and my prayer for you and for me is that others would see that God speaks through us by His Spirit in accordance to His Word and our God preserves our lives, He sees us through various situations of life that from a human perspective, we should not make it and yet He takes care of things for His glory and our witness of Him!

2. Pharaoh also gave Joseph a wife; her name was Asenath who was the daughter of the priest in On. On was a city seven miles north of Cairo and it was the center of sun worship, the god Ra was the name of this god. And, as we saw in a previous study, On was also called by its Greek name, Heliopolis.

VERSES 46-49

1. The usual Egyptian tax was 10% on grain but with the coming famine, Joseph raises it to 20% or one-fifth of their harvest was to be given back to Joseph to prepare for this coming famine. There needed to be enough grain stored away to last those seven years of famine to preserve the people!

VERSES 50-52

1. Joseph has two sons and he gives them Hebrew names. You see, he did not forget the faith of his fathers even though he was living in a pagan society. Thus, he names his firstborn Manasseh, which means “forgetfulness.” Why would he name his firstborn Manasseh? Because Joseph did not let the situations he faced these past 13 years to cause him to be bitter, angry, hateful, and-so-on. He did not hold onto the past or should I say he did not let the past hold onto him! He forgot those things and focused on the Lord and thus, he names his firstborn Manasseh! His second born son is named Ephraim, which means “fruitfulness.” Here, away from home, in difficult situations, God was still able to make Joseph fruitful. As a slave, as a prisoner, as second in command over all of Egypt, God was working because Joseph was walking with the Lord. And in that God blessed. Joseph was fruitful! Thus, his second son is named Ephraim!

2. Paul picks up on this in Philippians 3:12-14 and tells us, “**Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**”

The Living Bible puts these verses like this. Listen closely to what it says, **“I don't mean to say I am perfect. I haven't learned all I should even yet, but I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ saved me for and wants me to be. No, dear brothers, I am still not all I should be, but I am bringing all my energies to bear on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God is calling us up to heaven because of what Christ Jesus did for us.”**

In other words, Paul couldn't change the past and he realized he is not all that he should be, but he also realized that he could change the present and work towards the future by focusing on Christ and not the past. He looked to finish the race by focusing on the finish line, by focusing on Jesus and that is what we must do. The race is long and it may be difficult at times and we can lose sight of where we are going. Get refocused upon the Lord and run with joy, move towards the upward calling by which you have been called! Press on is the point that Paul is making and we must do that – ***PRESS ON!***

#### VERSES 53-57

1. As you read this story you can see the hand of God working here. Now the seven years of famine have begun and it is bad. People don't have food but because of what Joseph did, people came to Egypt to buy food. Now this is not only affecting Egypt, but also the land of Canaan. Who is living in Canaan? And don't say, “Bob, Steve, Sue . . . ! Living in the land of Canaan is Israel (Jacob) and his sons and they too will be affected by this famine and we will see that next time how the hand of God is working to preserve His people!

2. As I close this evening, let me leave you with the words from Paul in Philippians 2:12-16, as he tells us, **“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.”**

We don't work for our salvation but the work that God has done in us, saving us, is then worked out in the things that we do, how we live out our faith. And thus, the work that God is doing and has done in us will eventually be worked out in our lives as He not only has prepared the work for us, but He has prepared us for the work just as He has done in the life of Joseph!