

## The Book of Genesis

### Chapter 41

**41:1** *When two full years had passed* [1695 B.C.], *Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing by the Nile,* (NIV)

#### Pharaoh

This Pharaoh, Amenemhat III, began his reign in 1709 B.C.

**41:2-8** *when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. After them, seven other cows, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank. And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up. He fell asleep again and had a second dream: Seven heads of grain, healthy* [NKJ: "plump"] *and good, were growing on a single stalk. After them, seven other heads of grain sprouted—thin and scorched by the east wind. The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven healthy, full heads. Then Pharaoh woke up; it had been a dream. In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him.* (NIV)

#### Dream Interpretation

Centuries later the same scenario would unfold when Nebuchadnezzar vainly sought out the wise men of Babylon—magicians, astrologers and soothsayers—to interpret his dream (DAN 4:7).

**41:9-13** *Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "Today I am reminded of my shortcomings. Pharaoh was once angry with his servants, and he imprisoned me and the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard. Each of us had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. Now a young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream. And things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was hanged."* (NIV)

#### Butler's Story

The butler had not told Pharaoh about Joseph for two whole years even though the event was undoubtedly etched in his mind. There are two plausible reasons: either he had not seen an opportunity to personally benefit from relating the story until now, or God had caused him to forget since the timing of Joseph's release was critical to His plan.

**41:14-21** *So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires* [similar to Daniel's reply to Nebuchadnezzar (DAN 2:27-28)]."

***Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile, when out of the river there came up seven cows, fat and sleek, and they grazed among the reeds. After them, seven other cows came up—scrawny and very ugly and lean. I had never seen such ugly cows in all the land of Egypt. The lean, ugly cows ate up the seven fat cows that came up first. But even after they ate them, no one could tell that they had done so; they looked just as ugly as before . Then I woke up. (NIV)***

Since both types of cattle came up out of the Nile, it is immediately known that the causes of both the years of plenty and years of famine were to be connected to that river.

***41:22-31 "In my dreams I also saw seven heads of grain, full and good, growing on a single stalk. After them, seven other heads sprouted—withered and thin and scorched by the east wind. The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven good heads. I told this to the magicians, but none could explain it to me." Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do. The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads of grain are seven years; it is one and the same dream. The seven lean, ugly cows that came up afterward are seven years, and so are the seven worthless heads of grain scorched by the east wind: They are seven years of famine. "It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do. Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land. The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the famine that follows it will be so severe. (NIV)***

### Harvest

In Egypt, the outcome of the harvest hinged on the amount of the overflow of the Nile, the amount of rich silt brought by the water and the length of time of the overflow. If the Nile did not flood high enough and stay flooded for a specific amount of time, the ground would not be adequately saturated and the crops would not mature properly. If it rose too high and remained too long, the time of seed-sowing would pass and the crops would not have time to mature during the growing season.

### Historical Record

The overflow hinged on the amount of rain at its headwaters. God was about to provide perfect rains for exceptional harvests for seven years and torrential rains for the following seven years which would make planting impossible. According to the available records of the flood levels of the Nile, higher than normal water levels were experienced after the first decade of the reign of Amenemhat III. These levels would have brought extra silt and deposited it in a wider-than-normal area, making expanded cultivation possible. However, the records also reveal that around the twentieth year of his rule, the Nile rose to record levels—almost thirty feet above the optimum flood level. From the harvest year 1688-1687 B.C. through 1682-1681 B.C. the Nile floods brought three to four times the normal amount of water to Egypt. During this period, the land was so saturated the planting of crops was impossible.

***41:32 The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon. (NIV)***

### God's Decision

Joseph reveals an important principle: when God states something once, He has firmly decided it should be done; when He restates it, He will shortly take action.

***41:33-36 "And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine."(NIV)***

### Joseph's Role

Joseph's role was different from Daniel's later role in that Daniel only revealed the meaning, whereas Joseph also advised how to react to the meaning of the dream. The advice he gave was a principle for all time, which was summarized later by the apostle Paul in ROM 12:21: "*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*" Joseph's ability to discern between good and evil is a point that is strongly emphasized in relation to his wisdom.

***41:37-38 The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. So Pharaoh asked them, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?"(NIV)***

### Spirit of God

This is the first reference in the Bible, and the only one in the book of Genesis of someone having the spirit of God. The same reference is later made about Daniel by Nebuchadnezzar (DAN 4:8).

***41:39-43 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you." So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt." Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and men shouted before him, "Make way!" Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt. (NIV)***

### Translations

For "*Make way,*" NKJ and NRS have "*Bow the knee,*" based on the possibility that the original word was a derivation of the Hebrew "barakh" which means "to kneel." The word is left untranslated in TAN, "*Abrek,*" since its translators do not know if it is an Egyptian word of unknown meaning, or a compound Hebrew word. Adam Clark speculates it to be a compound of either "*ab'* [father] + "*rach'* [tender] or "*ab'* [father] + "*barech'* [blessing]. Either would emphasize endearment of the people for what Joseph was doing for them: "father of care" or "father of blessings." Most likely the word stood for his title of office, which later we find was "father of Pharaoh" (45:8).

**41:44-45 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt." Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah [interpreted as "Revealer of Dreams," "Receiver of Secrets," and even "Savior of the World"] and gave him Asenath ["Worshipper of Neith"] daughter of Potiphera [not Potiphar], priest [can also be translated "prince"] of On [LXX: "Heliopolis" = "city of the sun"], to be his wife. And Joseph went throughout the land of Egypt. (NIV)**

### Neith

*"NEITH, the very ancient and important goddess of Sais, the Greek Athene. On the earliest monuments she is represented by a shield transfixd by arrows. Later she wears the crown of Lower Egypt, and carries in her hands a bow and arrows, a sign of her warlike character...was given many cosmogonic attributes, including the title of mother of Re (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed.).*

### Adam Parallels

In certain respects, Joseph parallels the first Adam:

- Both were dependent on God for the knowledge of good and evil.
- Both were given dominion to rule over all the land.
- Adam was made in God's image before being allowed to rule while Joseph was given the signet ring and dressed exactly like the chief ruler of the land before he began ruling.
- Adam was given a wife by God while Joseph was given a wife by the chief ruler.

But there was also a major difference between them. While Adam was given the opportunity to rule the earth as its ideal king and failed because he decided to discontinue relying on God to discern good and evil, Joseph ruled Egypt as an ideal king and succeeded because he continued to look to God for the knowledge of good and evil.

So, although the example of Joseph looks back to the first Adam reflecting on what could have been, even more importantly, the example of Joseph looks forward to the second Adam for what will be.

**41:46 Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh's presence and traveled throughout Egypt.**

He was probably selecting sites for granaries as well as selecting and teaching capable and dependable managers for his famine preparation program.

**41:47-57 During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. In each city he put the food grown in the fields surrounding it. Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure. Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering." The seven years of**

***abundance in Egypt came to an end, and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in all the other lands*** [a drought extended all along the eastern Mediterranean coastal areas], ***but in the whole land of Egypt there was food. When all Egypt began to feel the famine, the people cried to Pharaoh for food. Then Pharaoh told all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph and do what he tells you." When the famine had spread over the whole country, Joseph opened the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe throughout Egypt. And all the countries came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the world*** [NKJ: "lands"]. (NIV)

#### A Savior

Joseph now becomes a "savior" to lands affected by the famine, making him a type of the One referred to in the promise made to Abram in 12:3, where God said that "*all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*"