

### Joseph Was Asked to Interpret the Dream of Pharaoh

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain the fact that when God gave a dream to someone in the Old Testament, the interpretation of that dream had to come from God and did not come from human reasoning. In our topic today, we will see that Joseph was asked to interpret the dream of Pharaoh to him.

Pharaoh was excited when the butler told him that there was a young Hebrew servant in the prison who could interpret dreams. He had just seen that none of his magicians or wise men were able to interpret his two dreams. However, the dreams had been so clear and specific that he desperately wanted to know the meaning of those dreams. Now, he had just heard that there was still one other person who might be able to interpret his dreams. Genesis 41:14-16 says, “Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him quickly out of the dungeon; and he shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I have had a dream, and *there is* no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that you can understand a dream, to interpret it.’ So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, ‘*It is* not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace.’” We see that Pharaoh immediately sent someone to go get Joseph.

Here, we see that Pharaoh was very eager to learn, as soon as possible, the meaning of his dreams. We read that Joseph was brought out of the dungeon quickly. We mentioned in an earlier topic that the word translated “dungeon” meant a *deep open pit*. That also meant the prisoners in it were exposed to both the heat and the cold. Joseph had spent several years in this dungeon. As a result, he had to prepare before he could go talk to the Pharaoh. First, he had to shave. The Egyptians were clean-shaven so that was necessary before Joseph was taken into the presence of Pharaoh. In addition, the clothing he had been wearing in the dungeon was certainly not the kind of clothing that would be worn in the presence of a ruler. This meant that he changed his clothes probably into something much fancier than the clothing he had worn in prison.

Once Joseph was ready to appear before Pharaoh, he was immediately taken into the presence of Pharaoh. Pharaoh began their conversation by saying, “I have had a dream, and *there is* no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you *that* you can understand a dream, to interpret it.” After telling Joseph that he’d had a dream, Pharaoh said that there was no one who could interpret his dream. Then, Pharaoh added that he had heard that Joseph could understand dreams so that he knew how to interpret them. Joseph knew that he was not able to understand the meaning of dreams from his own wisdom or understanding. Joseph immediately made it clear to Pharaoh that he did not have that ability. He said that only God could give Pharaoh an answer of peace. This was a very important statement to make to Pharaoh because it meant that the

understanding and interpretation of dreams is not possible for any human being. Instead, only God can interpret dreams and give an answer of peace. This made it clear to Pharaoh that Joseph could not depend on himself. Instead, he had to depend on the Lord to give Pharaoh an answer.

However, he did give Pharaoh a wonderful promise that came from the Lord. Joseph said the Lord would give Pharaoh an answer of peace. This meant that Joseph knew the Lord is able to interpret dreams. The Lord is able to give peace to those who are troubled. As a result, Pharaoh felt free to tell Joseph his dream. Genesis 41:17-21 says, “Then Pharaoh said to Joseph: ‘Behold, in my dream I stood on the bank of the river. Suddenly seven cows came up out of the river, fine looking and fat; and they fed in the meadow. Then behold, seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and gaunt, such ugliness as I have never seen in all the land of Egypt. And the gaunt and ugly cows ate up the first seven, the fat cows. When they had eaten them up, no one would have known that they had eaten them, for they were just as ugly as at the beginning. So I awoke.’” Since Joseph said the only answer that could be given to Pharaoh had to come from God, Pharaoh knew the only person who could give him an accurate interpretation was a person who knew the true and living God.

Pharaoh said that in his dream he was standing by the bank of the river. As we saw in the last topic, to talk about the river, in Egypt, was to talk about the Nile River. It was the main source of water for much of Egypt. Then, Pharaoh went on to tell Joseph about the cattle he had seen in his dream. He probably would not have remembered the details of his dream if the dream had just been about seven fat cattle coming up out of the river and eating in the field. The thing that made his dream so vivid was the fact that they were followed by seven extremely ugly cows. Pharaoh said he had never seen such ugly cows in the entire land of Egypt. In areas where there is a large river, people who live near the river are used to seeing cattle that have been well-fed. The fact that these thin ugly cows came up out of the river meant they had been near the river for a period of time and should have been well-fed like the first seven cows.

However, what happened next was the thing that caused Pharaoh to be troubled. Suddenly, the very thin cows ate the fine-looking fat cows. Cows are not meat-eating animals. They eat grass and other similar things. This meant that when Pharaoh dreamed that the thin, ugly cows ate the fat and beautiful looking cows, his dream was about something he had never seen happen in real life. That was the thing that was not possible for him to understand because he had never seen anything like it before. The same was also true for all of the magicians in the land of Egypt. They could not interpret something they had never seen and that was impossible to happen from their knowledge of the eating habits of cattle.

However, there was still one more detail that was even more difficult for the magicians to try to explain. After the ugly thin cows ate up the fat cattle, the thin cattle looked just as ugly and thin as they had looked previously. In the dream, they had eaten fat cattle that

were much larger than themselves. Even though it was a dream, Pharaoh at least expected the thin cattle to grow larger when they ate the fat cattle. Instead, they had remained just as thin and ugly as they were before. That was why the dream was so shocking that it caused Pharaoh to waken from his sleep. In fact, he probably laid awake for a period of time before he even went back to sleep. Then, when he went back to sleep, Pharaoh had a second dream. Genesis 41:22-24 says, “Also I saw in my dream, and suddenly seven heads came up on one stalk, full and good. Then behold, seven heads, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprang up after them. And the thin heads devoured the seven good heads. So I told this to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me.” Here, we see that when he did go back to sleep, he had a second dream which was similar to the first dream.

In the second dream, he dreamed that he saw a stalk of grain grow up from the ground. In this dream, the stalk grew very suddenly and developed seven beautiful heads of grain on the stalk. This dream would probably have also been forgotten even though it developed these seven beautiful heads of grain very suddenly. However, it was what happened next that caused Pharaoh to remember this dream in vivid detail. Pharaoh described these heads of grain as withered, thin and blighted by the east wind. The word that is translated “withered” is only used in this verse and means to *dry up, harden and wither*. Such a head of grain could not even be eaten by a person. We also see that the second seven heads of grain were thin or small.

A third thing we see about these heads of grain is that they were blighted by the east wind. Jonah 4:8 describes this east wind when it says, “And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah’s head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, ‘*It is better for me to die than to live.*’” This same type of east wind will sometimes blow for two or three days at a time in Israel and Egypt. It comes from the Arabian Desert to the east. This wind is so destructive that it can wither grass, flowers or standing grain in just a day. However, in the dream of Pharaoh, these seven heads of grain suddenly appeared on the stalk and looked withered by the east wind from the moment they appeared. Then, these heads of grain did one more thing Pharaoh had never seen or heard of before. The thin, blighted heads of grain quickly ate the seven good heads of grain.

Then, Pharaoh told Joseph one more thing about his dreams. He said he had told the dreams to the magicians of Egypt and none of them had been able to explain to him what the dreams meant. Pharaoh had been troubled by these dreams from the time he woke up. It was very upsetting to him that none of the magicians could explain the meaning of those dreams to him. However, before Joseph even heard the dreams, Joseph told Pharaoh, in Genesis 41:16, “So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, ‘*It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace.*’” Here, we see that Joseph told Pharaoh he could not answer those dreams with his own abilities. Instead, Joseph said that God would be the One who would give Pharaoh an answer. In addition, Joseph said the interpretation God would give Pharaoh would result in giving him peace. That was exactly what

Pharaoh wanted, because his heart was very troubled when he woke up that day and he was still just as troubled when Joseph came.

Many people are like Pharaoh. They are very troubled for many different reasons. However, they are looking for answers to the problems that are troubling them. That is why we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to help people find answers to their problems from the Word of God, because the Lord is able to meet every need of a troubled heart. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to find the answers to those problems from the Word of God.