

CAPITOL STUDIES

FEBRUARY 22, 2023 • WEEK 7



JOSEPH: THE CIVIL SERVANT FROM EGYPT

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Verse of the Week

Genesis 41:16

Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."

Success in the Making



MAYBE YOU'RE THINKING, "This Bible study is purely theoretical for me. I'll never be successful like Joseph." But even though not many of us will experience the dramatic success that God granted to Joseph, we all can learn much from his story. Joseph recognizes and clings to God's presence, His love, and His wisdom. Because of that, he is honorable (honest) in his daily work. Joseph is faithful in the little things. Philippians 4:8 tells us to think on "whatever is honorable." When you look at the "Wisdom Angel" on the rotunda ceiling, remember what Charles Spurgeon said: "God is too good to be unkind, too wise to be mistaken, and when you cannot trace His hand, you can trust His heart."¹ **Make wise choices, be honorable in every little thing you do, and God will return that honor to you.**

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INTRODUCTION

Joseph has endured imprisonment for at least three years. More than 1,000 days have passed since he stood so firmly in the face of temptation and subsequently became the first person in the Bible to suffer imprisonment for righteousness' sake. During this time, the Lord has encouraged Joseph with His presence, with favor in the eyes of the keeper of the prison, and at last with a glimmer of hope represented in the restored butler whose dream he interpreted. As in Potiphar's house, Joseph has demonstrated that the path of preparation for larger service is faithfulness to lesser tasks. Though his responsibility in the prison has increased and he likely is doing better than at the beginning of his imprisonment, any hope Joseph has had of being released has been deferred.

At the very point that it would be most natural for man to believe that God may have forsaken His promise, God chooses to open the way for His promises to be fulfilled. God does not allow Joseph to endure imprisonment any longer than is good for him. God knows exactly how long His people need His discipline and instruction. He knows when they are ready for the task for which He has been preparing them. "God only knows what degree of trouble is necessary for His people, and how long it is proper [that] they should continue under its pressure."²

I. GOD USES CRISIS TO SHOW A NEED

Genesis 41:1-8

Now it happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh had a dream, and behold, he was standing by the Nile. ²And lo, from the Nile there came up seven cows, sleek and fat; and they grazed in the marsh grass. ³Then behold, seven other cows came up after them from the Nile, ugly and gaunt, and they stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. ⁴The ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. Then Pharaoh awoke. ⁵He fell asleep and dreamed a second time; and behold, seven ears of grain came up on a single stalk, plump and good. ⁶Then behold, seven ears, thin and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them. ⁷The thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Then Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream. ⁸Now in the morning his spirit was troubled, so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh.³

Pharaoh's dream creates the crisis. Pharaoh is troubled (literally "beaten, disturbed"). He seems to sense that the overall message of his dream is a message of impending trouble, likely economic or agricultural disaster. (The cows are described later in Gen. 41:19 as worse off than any he had ever seen before in the land.)

The Failure of Traditional Helps

Pharaoh's immediate response is to send and call for *all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men*. These would have been the Pharaoh's most



trusted advisors. They actually held their own school. In Exodus we see that they demonstrate an amazing proficiency of magical (demonic) power. When Aaron casts down his rod and it becomes a serpent, they simply imitate the feat (Ex. 7:11). The Egyptians also prided themselves on their ability to interpret dreams and had a school of oneiromancy (divination through dreams) in which you could study to become proficient in the art of oneirocriticism (interpreting dreams). “The very skills in which they prided and trained themselves were insufficient to discern God’s simple message. In one respect it seems almost as miraculous that the Egyptians could not interpret the dream as it does that God provided Joseph with the interpretation.”⁴

Genesis 41:9-13

Then the chief cupbearer spoke to Pharaoh, saying, “I would make mention today of my own offenses. ¹⁰Pharaoh was furious with his servants, and he put me in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, both me and the chief baker. ¹¹We had a dream on the same night, he and I; each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his own dream. ¹²Now a Hebrew youth was with us there, a servant of the captain of the bodyguard, and we related them to him, and he interpreted our dreams for us. To each one he interpreted according to his own dream. ¹³And just as he interpreted for us, so it happened; he restored me in my office, but he hanged him.”

II. GOD HONORS UNASHAMED TESTIMONY FOR HIM

Genesis 41:14-17a, 24

Then Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh. ¹⁵Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.” ¹⁶Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, “It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.” ¹⁷So Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, “In my dream.... ²⁴Then I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me.”

Joseph prepares himself so as not to be an offense to the Pharaoh. The Hebrews cut their hair and shaved only in times of mourning or with people they had taken captive. The Egyptians only let their hair grow and went unshaven when they were in distress. Joseph rightly removes this offense before standing before Pharaoh.⁵ Joseph’s testimony makes an impression on Pharaoh. Pharaoh begins talking about God (Gen. 41:38)! The Devil would have us to believe exactly the opposite—that to speak for God would set us back or hurt our chances. In Gen. 41:16, Pharaoh intimates that Joseph is the oneirocritic. But Joseph corrects him and attributes the interpretation entirely to God (Gen. 41:16, 25, 28, 32). Joseph is careful not to give offense in any way, except in his unabashed testimony for God. **When God gives you any measure of**





success, be careful to honor Him by remembering that He is the source of all success and by bearing witness of His enabling and His sovereignty. As Paul says to the Corinthians, “What do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Cor. 4:7).

III. GOD BRINGS HIS MAN INTO THE VACUUM

Genesis 41:25, 29-36

Now Joseph said to Pharaoh, “Pharaoh’s dreams are one and the same; God has told to Pharaoh what He is about to do.... ²⁹Behold, seven years of great abundance are coming in all the land of Egypt; ³⁰and after them seven years of famine will come, and all the abundance will be forgotten in the land of Egypt, and the famine will ravage the land. ³¹So the abundance will be unknown in the land because of that subsequent famine; for it will be very severe. ³²Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, it means that the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about. ³³Now let Pharaoh look for a man discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. ³⁴Let Pharaoh take action to appoint overseers in charge of the land, and let him exact a fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven years of abundance. ³⁵Then let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and store up the grain for food in the cities under Pharaoh’s authority, and let them guard it. ³⁶Let the food become as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land will not perish during the famine.”

God prepares the place. **It is our individual responsibility to make sure the man is prepared when God is ready to use him.** (In a much later situation recorded in the book of 1 Samuel, the Philistine Goliath challenged Israel for 40 days. His unanswered challenges demonstrated that Israel was suffering a tremendous leadership vacuum. The ones appointed to lead and fight failed to do so, and it provided the opportunity for David to enter. In an even later example in Babylon, Daniel’s experience on the night of the handwriting on the wall was similar. Any of the ones to whom Belshazzar would normally turn for help failed him. This vacuum provided the opportunity for Daniel.)

Joseph doesn’t know exactly what God has for him until the day it happens. That day in the dungeon begins the same as every day has for the past two or three years. And yet by day’s end, he is second in the land to Pharaoh. That would not have happened if Joseph had not been prepared for it. As he walks with God, he develops godly character that makes him ready for the success God eventually grants him. **Because Joseph honors God and is diligent in his work, he is able and ready to walk through the door that God opens for him.** You, too, can make God look good in your everyday life (glorify Him—1 Corinthians 10:31). Do your work and service at the Capitol “heartily as to the Lord” (Colossians 3:23), and you will be ready to walk through the doors of success that God opens for you.



IV. GOD WEAVES OBEDIENCE TOGETHER FOR GOOD

Genesis 41:37-40, 44b

Now the proposal seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his servants.

³⁸Then Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man like this, in whom is a divine spirit?" ³⁹So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. ⁴⁰You 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.... ^{44b}Though I am Pharaoh, yet without your permission no one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."

All of this success and blessing happens because one day, for the sake of God, Joseph resists a temptation to do one act of sin. All this happens because one day, Joseph, for the sake of God, obeys his father's wishes to go inquire of his bothers. **Success is the combination of many small right choices which God works together for His ultimate purposes,** even when He puts us in places over which we have no control. Though we may not be able to effect a change, God continues to weave seemingly incompatible things together for our good. And then, as He did for Joseph, suddenly and dramatically the Lord brings success!

CONCLUSION

Waiting on the Lord is a most difficult spiritual discipline. But let us remind ourselves that God is always working. We are not waiting on Him to work, but we are waiting on His timing for our involvement in His work. God is working in the life of each believer just as specifically as we have witnessed His work in Joseph's life. **Each of God's children is born for a purpose ("for such a time as this," Esther 4:14), and God is constantly working to bring it about.** Our responsibility is not to frustrate ourselves by trying to figure out exactly what God is going to do and WHEN, but to content ourselves with trusting His timing and give our attention to the tasks He has presently set before us.



May you remember these thoughts as you wait on the Lord for His timing and success:

1. Think of Delays as God's Opportunity to Prepare Circumstances for His Timing

While Joseph waits, God is working to prepare the backdrop for the stage on which He will have Joseph to enter. It is mentioned in 1 Kings 6:1 that it was in the 480th year after the Exodus that Solomon began building the Temple. We know this date precisely (966 B.C.); therefore, we also can determine the date of the Exodus (1446 B.C.) According to Exodus 12:40-41, the Exodus came 430 years after Joseph's family





entered the land (1876 B.C.). In Genesis 45:1, Joseph tells his brothers that there are five more years of famine left and encourages their move to Egypt. If five years are left, then nine of the 14 years represented in Pharaoh's dream have passed. Joseph therefore stands before the Pharaoh in 1885 B.C. (Genesis 41:46).

Egyptian history records that Senusret II (Sesostris II) is the Pharaoh who had these strange and troubling dreams. This particular Pharaoh wished to reform the country economically and agriculturally. He was largely responsible for gold-mining operations in Africa, ambitious irrigation projects along the Nile, and other such plans to bolster the economy of the country. At the point of his dreams, he has already been ruling for about twelve years. During the course of his reforms, he continually encounters opposition from many in the class of the nobility. The Nile River (the life blood of the nation), livestock, and produce are in the dreams. When Joseph is able to provide the interpretation of the dream, this Pharaoh is glad to appoint Joseph overseer of the country for two primary reasons. First, this Pharaoh's interest is obviously in the economic stability of the country; and secondly, by appointing Joseph, he actually is able to bypass the nobility and undermine their political resistance to some of his reforms.

2. Think of Delays as God's Opportunity to Complete My Preparation

"Joseph needed to be in the prison in order to further prepare for the responsibilities he would later face. As he conversed with the political prisoners and listened to their grievances, he could hardly fail to become acquainted with the leading statesmen of the day and with the peculiar currents and dangers of public life. The prison was one of the best schools of political training, especially for such a young man as Joseph, with his candid, deep-searching, luminous intellect."⁶

3. Think of Delays from God's Perspective

It has been 13 years (4,745 days) since Joseph was sold into slavery. His entire life since the reception of his dreams has been one long wait. "Wait" is the hardest answer for us to receive from God. Yet from God's perspective, the amount of time is not very long at all. Peter presses home this very truth to believers who are suffering as they wait for God to fulfill His promise to return. "But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day" (2 Peter 3:8). 365,000 days are as one day to God! God is in no hurry. Time is of no element to Him. Time is given for man to repent. When the opportunity of repentance is past, time will be no more. We, on the other hand, are consumed with time and quickly grow impatient when God's ways are a mystery to us. God is not inactive during the seeming delay. The delay is only from my perspective. God's promises may be long delayed, but they never come too late.

Pastor Arin Hess

Questions to Consider:

- How can a Christian harmonize career success with biblical values? Is it wrong to seek career success?
- Is it possible for you to balance the hours necessary to succeed in your career with a desire to honor God in your home/family life?
- Is it wrong for a Christian business owner or employee to pursue the company's "bottom line" of profit? Is this serving mammon?

FOOTNOTES

1. <https://www.wisefamousquotes.com/quotes-about-god-is-too-wise-to-be-mistaken/>
2. George Lawson, *The Life of Joseph*, Banner of Truth, 1972, p. 32.
- 3 All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*.
- 4 Thomas Kirk, *Life of Joseph*, Andrew Eliot Publisher, 1900, p. 119.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 121-22.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

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Some of this material is adapted from Pastor Steven Cole's work found at <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-69-coping-success-genesis-411-57>.



Theme Verse

Philippians 4:8

*Finally, brethren,
whatever is true,
whatever is honorable,
whatever is right,
whatever is pure,
whatever is lovely,
whatever is of
good repute,
if there is any
excellence
and if anything is
worthy of praise,
dwell on these things.*



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