

The Story of Joseph

Seizing the Opportunity

Part 31 – November 4, 2012



Since June 18, 2010, scholars have come to a consensus on an established Egyptian chronology (See: *Dating Joseph*) which allows us to place Biblical timespans into their historical context!

When we left off, Joseph was shaved, changed, and rushed into the private chamber of the restless ruler, Senusret II, a demigod who doesn't know how to decipher what his fellow-gods are warning him about, in his dreams.



Ancient Egyptians were *so troubled* by nightmares that they futilely tried to guard against them with spells and bed headrests decorated with protective spirits (like the deity, Bes who “guarded” King Tut's folding headrest).

Joseph must be stunned to realize that *he* is Senusret's last, desperate hope, as he enters and encounters a stunningly vulnerable king.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I had a dream, and no one can interpret it.” [“I'm a demigod, and my magicians and wise men are high-and-mighty, and you're just a despised Hebrew ... but kid, we can't figure this one out!”] – *Genesis 41:15a NIV*

Nothing rings true. No consensus. No coherence. All confusion and quarrelling. Like the barrage of voices that bombard the lost and dying of this world, who don't know the One True God.

“But I have heard it said of you [by the cupbearer] 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.” – *Genesis 41:15b-16 NIV*

Humility and confidence: an amazingly attractive combination to the lost. His identity is so secure in the Lord, his faith so tried and true, he has *no desire* to manipulate the moment. Young Joseph would've seized the moment to strike a deal: “Yes! I can do it! God speaks to me in dreams and interpretations. And I would do this for you ... but ... my God is reluctant to speak while His holy prophet is unjustly imprisoned.”

But, his true character is revealed. The dungeon has done its job! Joseph's sense of self-worth is now found in the Lord, and *not* in self-promotion. The strength of our witness will always be watered down to the degree we feel we must promote *ourselves*. To those whose self-worth must be self-sustained, whose highest trust is insecurely misplaced in themselves and mankind, the holy union of humility and God-confidence is irresistible.

... “but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.” – *Genesis 41:16b NIV*

Really? Pharaoh “desires” a 7-year famine?! No. Joseph isn’t saying that God is Senusret’s genie; he’s saying that God will settle his troubled mind and heart. He doesn’t know how (he hasn’t even heard the dream), but he knows that God’s truth, even when the truth is hard to hear, sets a troubled soul at ease even in the midst of the turmoil.

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.” – *Genesis 41:17-19a NIV*

Have you ever wondered why Pharaoh’s dreams are repeated twice, word-for-word, so close together? It must be significant because it sure takes up space. It’s so we’ll notice what’s *different*.



Remember when Joseph, on his way into Egypt, passed *this* 3,953-year-old obelisk, in On (later, Heliopolis), the temple city and major cult center of the sun god, Ra? And remember Big Sen, the man who rebuilt Ra’s temple, and wore a bowling pin on his head? One of those statements is false. Big Sen (Senusret I) is Senusret’s grandpa. Senusret’s sphinx was in On. He got Joseph’s wife in On. And he worshipped Ra as the creator and sustainer of the seasons and plants and animals.



And in the Book of the Dead (spells to get to paradise in the afterlife), spell #148 is directed at Ra and his attendants: “I have come before thee, O my Lord Ra. I would make to flourish *the Seven Cows* and their Bull.” And the pharaoh was called the “Son of Ra”, because he was considered to be the manifestation of Ra on earth. And Senusret is shaken by the condition of *his* seven cows! And he adds something when he tells the dream to Joseph that he didn’t dare say to his magicians and wise men ...

“I had never seen such ugly cows in all the land of Egypt.” [It’s an *emotional response!* Joseph is so disarmingly humble that Pharaoh opens up and begins to express the depth of his distress: “This really got to me, kid!”] – *Genesis 41:19b NIV*

Do people clam up when they see you coming? Or is there such a sweet brokenness about you that they can’t help but open up? Fear of *your* judgment and your rejection has power. I wonder how often someone’s fear of you keeps ‘em from the fear of the Lord?

“The lean, ugly cows ate up the seven fat cows that came up first. [Now he adds yet another *new insight!*] But even after they ate them, no one could tell that they had done so; they looked just as ugly as before. [“I’m *so* confused; none of it makes any sense! They were *so* hungry that they ate their *own* kind; but then they were still starving!”] Then I woke up. In my dreams I also saw seven heads of grain, full and good, growing on a single stalk. [Just about every god in Egypt was thanked in some way at harvest time] 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. [And now Pharaoh reveals the depth of his frustration regarding the failings of his own religious interpreters] I told this to the magicians, but none could explain it to me.” – *Genesis 41:20-24 NIV*

And incredibly, remarkably, even miraculously, Joseph keeps his mouth *shut*, and *doesn't* take the bait to bash the magicians! It's a tempting trap that throws us off track when someone opens up and admits a failure of their false belief system. Don't use the opportunity to abuse their trust by trashing their theology! First, build a bridge. Let 'em know you care. Wait; first, *care*, then build a bridge, then share. It's an oldie but a goody: *Nobody* cares how much you know till they know how much you care!

[Joseph must be absolutely overjoyed when, once again, just like with the cupbearer, the meaning of the dreams seems so obvious] Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. [Pharaoh's dream team wouldn't have known this unless and until they found both dream's individual pun-meanings, and then compared them. The confused and muddled systems and schemes of this world obscure the profound beauty of simple, obvious truth] God [literally, "The God". Joseph is now saying that *his* God is *The* God, but it's not said in an offensive manner – just the opposite] has revealed to Pharaoh what he [The God] is about to do." [He's saying, the One True God is *speaking to you*, and He wants to settle your troubled heart and mind] – Genesis 41:25 NIV

Keep this in mind. It's true of *everyone* we encounter: God is speaking to them and He wants to ease their troubled hearts and minds. And He speaks to them in familiar ways that they can understand. The cows and grain provide a picture of God's gracious readiness to meet us wherever we're at (and we should try to do the same).

"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: ["Just in case you missed it the first time"] [The] God has shown Pharaoh what he [The God] is about to do. [In repeating the statement twice, Joseph is subtly emphasizing that the king has no control, no power unto himself, he can only *respond* to what the One True God as revealed. *This* is a scene that *only* God could orchestrate: an incarcerated Hebrew slave, in the private chamber of the most powerful demigod on earth, explaining the workings of the Lord! Poor Potiphar must be having a coronary!] 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. The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by [The] God, and [The] God will do it soon." [He's saying: "Let's face it, I'm no magician, and you're no god" And this is where Potiphar faints!] – Genesis 41:26-32 NIV

But this *rings true*. The pieces fit. It all makes sense. And it seems so simple, *because* God had been preparing Pharaoh's heart. There'd been a legendary, historically recorded, 7-year-drought during the 3rd Dynasty reign of Djoser. [Zoser] The famous Famine Stela¹ on Sahel Island at Aswan records, in part:



"I was in mourning on my throne ... my heart was in great affliction. Because Hapi [the river god] had failed to come in time in a period of seven years. Grain was scant, kernels were dried up, scarce was every kind of food. Every man robbed his twin ... Children cried, youngsters fell, the hearts of the old were grieving; legs drawn up, they hugged the ground, their arms clasped about them. Courtiers were needy, temples were shut, shrines covered with dust, everyone was in distress."

¹ wikipedia.org/wiki/Famine_Stela

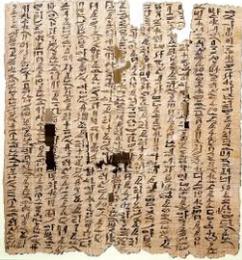
It's not just about seizing the moment to speak truth, but also to offer hope. In fact, if you're not willing to offer the hope, you're not prepared to correct or warn.

“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 [That's 20%, a doubling of the grain tax] of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance.” – *Genesis 41:33-34 NIV*

If Joseph is correct, Pharaoh will be seen as a prophetic hero and the entire nation will be saved. And if Joseph is wrong, he'll be rich with the seven years' worth of grain to sell!

“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.” – *Genesis 41:35-36 NIV*

And the people will gladly, willingly pay the extra, because they will fear, and they can well remember, the recent famine under Big Sen. 42 years earlier, under grandpa's rule, a plantation owner named Heqanakht² wrote about being unprepared for a famine that left him without income or food.



But, the nomarch/governor Ameni boasts, in his tomb, about being well *prepared* for it: “No one was unhappy in my days, not even in the years of famine, for I had tilled all the fields of the nome of Mah up to its southern and northern borders. Thus I prolonged the life of its inhabitants and preserved the food which it produced.”³



So, when Joseph unknowingly proposes they do the very same thing Governor Ameni did during grandpa's famine, Sensusret has been primed to recognize the wisdom of it.

The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. [Which likely included the cupbearer and the quickly reviving Potiphar] – *Genesis 41:37 NIV*

We can't know how God is working in the lives of others, speaking, revealing, and preparing them to embrace His salvation. We can only seize each opportunity to offer *His* hope and *our* help. Pharaoh will need to find a steward who can oversee this kind of wealth, handle this kind of power, without being corrupted *by* it, someone whose self-worth isn't found in self-promotion. And based on what he's heard from Potiphar and the cupbearer, and now seen with his own eyes, he has already found him.

So Pharaoh asked them, “Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?” [And Joseph said, “Huh?!”] – *Genesis 41:15-38 NIV*

And this is where we have to close God's story for today.

² Metropolitan Museum entry: <http://208.47.228.196/Collections/search-the-collections/100001927#fullscreen>
Full translation: <http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/texts/heqanakht.htm>

³ *Egypt under the Pharaohs*, by Brugsch, p. 158