

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
[Adapted from Bethel Bible-  
Presbyterian Church, 10 Downing St.  
Oakleigh, Vic, 3166]

## **DHW BIBLE CLASS**

### **LESSON 32**

## **THE BOOK OF GENESIS**

### **Chapter 41**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The greatest moment of Joseph's life had arrived. We can safely say that he did not expect what God had in store for him. God has promised to those who walk with Him, that He is with them and they will prosper and be successful. The beginning might seem difficult or even contrary to what God has promised. Patience bids us to wait upon the Lord who does not lie or change His mind.

Pharaoh dreamed two dreams and was deeply troubled. No one could interpret the dreams, not even the greatest magicians and the wise men of Egypt. In those days, people thought of dreams as ominously significant. Today, there are even some people who regard dreams in a similar way. Who can interpret dreams with complete accuracy? Assuming that the dreams were interpreted, would we dare to act accordingly without concern over disastrous consequences leading to a path of no return?

In this chapter, we learn of the sovereignty and providence of God, who controls the affairs of men in order to fulfil His plan and purpose. While God is in control, it does not mean that man is a robot. Man is responsible for the decisions he makes and the actions he takes. That is the mystery of God's ways with man. He has already declared that His thoughts and His ways are not like man's. It is not possible to compare God with man as they are infinitely light years apart. This fact should humble man and drive him to acknowledge his Creator and God. There are many wonderful and precious lessons that we can learn from this chapter.

#### **OUTLINE**

#### **A. Two Years Later Pharaoh Dreamed Two Dreams No One Could Interpret (41:1-13).**

1. First he dreamed of seven lean cows which ate up seven fat cows (vv.1-4).
2. Then he dreamed of seven thin ears of corn, which ate up seven good ears of corn (vv.5-7).
3. Pharaoh was perturbed and called for his wise men but none could interpret his dreams (v.:8).
4. The butler told Pharaoh of Joseph who could interpret dreams (vv.9-13).

#### **B. Pharaoh Called for Joseph (41:14-24).**

1. Pharaoh sent for Joseph in order to have his dreams interpreted (vv.14-15).

- a. Joseph was prepared to be presented before Pharaoh (v.14).
  - b. Pharaoh asked Joseph whether he could interpret his dreams (v.15).
2. Joseph attributed the power to interpret dreams to God (v.16).
  3. Pharaoh related his dreams to Joseph (vv.17-24)

### **C. Joseph Interpreted the Dreams and Advised Pharaoh (41:25-36).**

1. Joseph interpreted the two dreams to Pharaoh (vv.25-32).
  - a. Joseph explained that the two dreams were actually one and that God intended to show Pharaoh what would happen to Egypt (vv.25, 26).
  - b. God showed to Pharaoh that the seven lean cows and the seven thin ears meant that there would be seven years of famine in Egypt (vv.27, 28).
  - c. God showed to Pharaoh that there would be seven years of plenty in Egypt and that it would be followed by seven years of famine (vv.29-31).
  - d. Joseph explained that the dream was repeated because God would shortly bring to pass these events (v.32).
2. Joseph advised Pharaoh what he should do (vv.33-36).
  - a. Pharaoh should appoint a wise man to oversee the land

of Egypt in the years of plenty (vv.33, 34).

- b. Pharaoh should store up all the food of the good years to be used during the years of famine (vv. 35, 36).

### **D. Pharaoh Recognised The Hand of God Upon Joseph and Appointed Him as His Right Hand Man (41:37-45).**

1. Pharaoh believed Joseph's interpretation (vv.37-39).
  - a. Pharaoh was pleased with the interpretation (v.37).
  - b. Pharaoh acknowledged divine revelation to Joseph (v.38).
  - c. Pharaoh recognised the wisdom of Joseph (v.39).
2. Pharaoh promoted Joseph (41:40-45).
  - a. Joseph was raised to rule Egypt, second in command to Pharaoh (vv.40-44).
  - b. Pharaoh changed Joseph's name and gave him the daughter of an Egyptian priest to be his wife (v.45).

### **E. Joseph Ruled Egypt Effectively (41:46-57).**

1. Joseph set out to work throughout Egypt (vv.46-49).
  - a. Joseph was thirty years old when he started to work in Egypt (v.46).
  - b. He gathered all the food in the seven years of plenty (vv.47-49).

2. Joseph had two sons by Asenath (vv.50-52).
  - a. They were born before the famine (v.50).
  - b. The first son he called Manasseh (51).
  - c. The second son he called Ephraim (v.52).
3. The seven years of plenty were ended in Egypt, followed by the seven years of famine (vv.:53-54).
4. The famine was severe and the people went to Joseph for food (vv.:55-57)
  - a. The people were told by Pharaoh to go to Joseph for food (v.55).
  - b. Joseph sold the corn to the people (v.56).
  - c. People from other lands came to Egypt to buy food because of the severe famine (v. 57).

## COMMENTARY

### Through Patience, Inherit the Promises

Joseph's faith and patience was tested again. He had requested the butler to put a good word on his behalf to Pharaoh that he had done nothing to deserve his imprisonment. But the butler forgot Joseph. Two years then passed without any news from the authorities about his case (41:1). How Joseph must have waited and hoped! His faith and

patience had been tested. Had he given up on his own dreams? We can safely say that he had not; otherwise, he would not have interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's butler and baker. Would the two years of waiting go to waste?

Paul, the Apostle, encouraged the Christians in Rome who were facing persecutions for their faith as follows: *"but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that **tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope**"* (Romans 5:3-4). Echoing him, James wrote, *"Knowing this, that **the trying of your faith worketh patience. 4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing**"* (James 1:3-4). It was a time of preparation for Joseph. God knew what He had in store for him. Joseph did not and he was in for a great surprise! God was preparing him to be humble always and not to give way to pride; to persevere when circumstances became difficult and demanding, and to perform well when given the task even though the job was demanding and exacting.<sup>1</sup>

We ought not to grumble or feel bitter that events do not happen the way we expect. God has a reason and purpose for happenings in our lives, if we have been walking uprightly before him. Like Joseph, trust the Lord and be patient. People do not simply grow and bear the fruit of the Spirit. It takes seven years for a durian (a favourite fruit among Malaysians and Singaporeans) tree to bear its fruit, but it takes tens of years to make a man! Wait upon the Lord our God, and at the appointed time, we will reap the fruit of our faith and patience.

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<sup>1</sup> Getz, 94.

### God Is Still In Control

God's appointed time had finally come for Joseph to be freed so that wheel of His plan and purpose for His people will continue to turn and not be stopped by man. Pharaoh had two God-given dreams. He was perturbed by these dreams which were about two main supplies of food for the people - cows and corn. He sought to know the meaning of his dreams. He called all the magicians and the wise men in Egypt to interpret the dreams, but they could not. How could they, for the dreams were so strange - lean cows ate fat cows, and thin ears of corn devoured full ears of corn! The dreams were such that it was not so plain that Pharaoh's magicians and wise men could understand them, let alone interpret them. God had intended it for Joseph' sake and it required Joseph to interpret the dreams.

When Pharaoh could not find anyone to interpret the dreams, the butler remembered Joseph who interpreted his dream and that of the baker. He told Pharaoh of Joseph. The butler's report to Pharaoh was brief and to the point. Joseph had interpreted their dreams and his interpretation was accurate. The events took place according to his interpretation. Pharaoh heard and immediately called for Joseph.

Before Joseph could be presented before Pharaoh, he needed to be shaved. It was the custom of Jews to wear a beard, whereas the Egyptians were clean shaven. Moreover, it would be improper and disrespectful for Joseph to appear before the king in shabby prison clothes. There is a precious lesson we can learn here. How do we present ourselves before the God Almighty and the Lord Jesus Christ, the

Kings of all kings? When we have a meeting with the CEO of our company or some government dignitaries, we always put on our best, both in character and clothes. Should we not do the same, to ask the least, when we present ourselves before God every Lord's Day when we come to worship Him? The answer is a resounding "Yes"! In the old days, we put on our Sunday best. It is a good custom or tradition. This is certainly approved of God and pleasing in His sight if we do it to honour Him and not to show off. What has happened to this custom? Let us not be found wanting in this grace.

Pharaoh put to Joseph that he heard that Joseph could understand and interpret dreams. Joseph's reply to Pharaoh is not only descriptive of his exemplary character but also instructive. Joseph disclaimed any ability to understand and interpret the dreams. This self-renouncing spirit is most remarkable. Indeed he was tempted to say that he could and gain the favour of Pharaoh and bargained for his freedom. But in the depth of his heart, he knew that such knowledge and wisdom he possessed were the gifts of God. He attributed his ability to God. God's servants must display such faithfulness to God. How many times it has been heard that certain persons have contributed much to the church and that they have done all the things for God! In reality, the work of the church is a spiritual work, and we are indeed nothing but vessels, which God condescends to use for His purpose and glory. Let not the servants of God boasts of their achievements. It is God who prospers and gives the increase in everything! An additional thing that can be learned is that Joseph was prepared to tell Pharaoh whatever God told him to

say without fear and favour of men, even Pharaoh. He was prepared to tell the whole counsel of God. How the servant of God must remember this. He must be faithful to preach, teach, and declare the Word of God without compromise or fear. The person who is aware of what God has done in and through him is “humble and fearless at the same time.”<sup>2</sup>

Joseph interpreted the dreams. He explained that the dreams although two were actually one. The dream was repeated because God wanted to reveal to Pharaoh what He was about to do (v.25) and that of a certainty it would happen. So Joseph continued that the seven fat and lean cows and seven ears of full and thin corn were seven years of agriculture prosperity in Egypt which would be followed immediately by another seven years of famine. Immediately Joseph took upon himself to advise Pharaoh what was the logical thing to do - harvest and store the food in the seven years of plenty in order to provide food for the years of famine. And Pharaoh ought to find a man who was “discreet and wise” to take charge of the whole operation (vv.33-36).

The fact that Joseph advised Pharaoh to appoint some one whose qualities he had described showed that Joseph believed without a doubt that the interpretation of the dreams would happen as he had explained. This is another evidence of his continual and complete trust in the Lord and in the interpretation of his own dreams in Canaan. Joseph had never wavered in his faith in God. By now, he had learned to be patient and wait upon the Lord.

The next interesting part is that Pharaoh believed him. For Pharaoh to believe a Hebrew who was his prisoner and slave is beyond explanation. Moreover, he not only believed Joseph’s interpretation of his dreams, he even readily accepted the advice of this insignificant prisoner and slave. Then he did another thing, which is hard to explain. He was so pleased with Joseph that he appointed him to be the man to take charge of the whole operation. He gave his reasons why. Pharaoh observed three things about Joseph: 1) that the Spirit of the God whom Joseph worshipped was upon him; 2) that Joseph was discreet or understanding; and 3) that Joseph was wise or prudent. And the climax of Pharaoh’s response is that he promoted Joseph to be the most powerful man in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. Accordingly Pharaoh gave his seal ring to him, which was the sign of his authority. Then he clothed Joseph with the typical white robe of nobility, and gave him a gold chain for him to wear round his neck as the mark of power, and allowed him to ride on his second chariot. When he moved among the people, they were to bow on their knees to him! That was not all. Pharaoh gave him a wife. It was a natural act at that time for the master to give a wife to his servant. This lifting up of Joseph was beyond the imagination and expectation of Joseph. In all probability, he began to see that God was fulfilling His promise to him.

One glaring principle we learn about God’s dealings with His people is that what comes in the end counts and not what happens along the way. It is the final destination and not the hardships along the way. So it is with all Christians. Our Christian path may be strewn with adversities and difficulties.

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<sup>2</sup>Ross, 641.

But if we remain faithful and obedient to Him, like Joseph we will be in for a great surprise. As Paul exclaimed, *“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:18).

Joseph was thirty years old when God raised him to be the Prime Minister of Egypt. Joseph carried out his work conscientiously and thoroughly. In the seven years of plenty, God blessed him with two sons. Joseph named the elder, Manasseh, and the younger, Ephraim. The names indicated that Joseph was happy and he praised God. God had given him such great joy that his toil in those trying years seemed forgotten, and his prosperity was all God’s gracious gifts (vv.51, 52). The famine came. All the land had no food but in Egypt, there was plenty. The people came to Joseph to buy their provisions.

### SUMMARY

We can now understand why God put Joseph through those difficult times. God was moulding his servant for the position, which He had reserved for him. In this chapter, Joseph's humility and faith stands out prominently. To be a great leader and a servant of God, he must have these two qualities. Pride will bring the downfall of a person. Faith in God is to believe God’s Word wholeheartedly without compromise. God demonstrated that He was in control of the destinies of people and nations in order to protect His covenant people. God is still in control. Let us believe in God and do His will. AMEN

## DHW BIBLE CLASS

### LESSON 32

## THE BOOK OF GENESIS

### Chapter 41

## DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION

### QUESTIONS

#### Daily Readings

Monday: Genesis 41:1-13; James 1:2-8; Isaiah 55:8-11.

Tuesday: Genesis 41:14-24; Psalm 113:1-9; 1 Samuel 2:27-36; Philippians 4:11-13.

Wednesday: Genesis 41:25-36; Proverbs 21:1-2; Daniel 4:34-35; Ephesians 1:3-12.

Thursday: Genesis 41:37-45; Colossians 3:22-24; Ephesians 5:8-21.

Friday: Genesis 41:46-57; 1 Corinthians 3:4-7; John 15:1-5.

#### Discussion Questions

1. Was Joseph anxious daily concerning his release from prison, after he had asked the butler to intercede on his behalf? How many years did he have to wait? How was God preparing him?

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2. Why do you think Pharaoh was perturbed by his dreams?

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3. How did Joseph's sudden opportunity of being freed come about?

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4. What in his cupbearer's testimony impressed Pharaoh?

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5. When Pharaoh remarked to Joseph that he heard that Joseph could understand and interpret dreams, Joseph could be tempted. How?

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6. What character trait(s) did Joseph show in his reply to Pharaoh's remark concerning his ability to understand and interpret dreams?

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7. How did Joseph's interpretation of the dreams and his counsel to Pharaoh demonstrate discernment and wisdom?

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8. Describe Joseph's new position and responsibilities as the second most powerful man in Egypt?

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9. How had God prepared Joseph in the thirteen years in Egypt prior to his appointment as the second most powerful man in Egypt?

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10. Why would Pharaoh so willingly accept Joseph to be his right hand man?

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11. When Joseph was exalted, do you think he remembered his dreams in Canaan? What would he have thought?

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12. What did God accomplish by the famine in all the land?

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13. During the seven years of plenty what happened to Joseph's life?

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14. What does the statement "and all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn" (v.57) suggest?

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