

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

“Rags To Riches”

Genesis 41:1-57

2003

Introduction

Many people go through life waiting for the “one big break” that will turn their life around and bring them success, riches, fame, and power:

1. Insider scoop on a once-in-a-lifetime stock tip
2. A call from Nashville, Hollywood or the NBA
3. A multi-million dollar lotto ticket

Because of this we might be tempted to think of Genesis 41 as a record of Joseph’s much-deserved “lucky break.” But we would be wrong on three counts:

1. There is no such thing as luck in the kingdom of God.
2. It took Joseph 13 years of obscure service to become an overnight success.
3. God alone determines who will be exalted and who will be humbled in this life.

I Pharaoh Had Two Dreams

God spoke to Pharaoh in two dramatic dreams.

Job 33:14-18 “For God does speak now one way, now another -- though man may not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds, he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, to turn man from wrongdoing and keep him from pride, to preserve his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword.” [or in this case, famine]

A. Pharaoh’s 1st dream: **Cows** [Verse 1-4]

1. 7 sleek, fat cows
2. 7 ugly, gaunt cows

B. Pharaoh’s 2nd dream: Heads of **grain** [Verse 5-7]

1. 7 heads of healthy grain
2. 7 heads of thin, scorched grain

For an Egyptian, these dreams were rather unremarkable with cows cooling themselves by the Nile River and feeding on the lush marsh grass or heads of grain waving in the summer Egyptian breeze. These were familiar sights.

But there was something highly unusual about these dreams:

The thin cows consumed the fat cows and were just as ugly and gaunt as before.

The thin heads of grain consumed the healthy heads of grain and were just as thin and scorched as before. **It just didn’t make any sense!**

C. Pharaoh's response [Verse 8-13]

1. He was **troubled** = Pa` am = "To be agitated" - Dan 2:1

Gen 40:6-7 "When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. So he asked Pharaoh's officials who were in custody with him in his master's house, "Why are your faces so sad today?"

2. He told his magicians and wise men his dreams

These men shouldn't be confused with magicians of our own day. They didn't wear tuxedos and pull rabbits out of hats. They were the wisest, best educated men of Pharaoh's kingdom, schooled in the arts of wisdom and dream interpretation.

a. But no one could **interpret** them

Isa 19:11-13 "The officials of Zoan are nothing but fools; the wise counselors of Pharaoh give senseless advice. How can you say to Pharaoh, "I am one of the wise men, a disciple of the ancient kings"? Where are your wise men now? Let them show you and make known what the LORD Almighty has planned against Egypt. The officials of Zoan have become fools, the leaders of Memphis are deceived; the cornerstones of her peoples have led Egypt astray."

Pharaoh's magicians and wise men were totally baffled, which wasn't really all that surprising considering the two dreams were a revelation from God. And the things of God can only be grasped through His Spirit.

1 Cor 2:14 "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."

b. Until the cupbearer **remembered** Joseph

In the midst of all the confusion, the cupbearer suddenly remembered his experience with Joseph and confessed his oversight to Pharaoh and proceeded to tell him about this unusual Hebrew prisoner who had accurately interpreted his dream two years earlier.

Dan 5:11-12 "There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods ... This man Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means."

II Pharaoh Summoned Joseph

Joseph is immediately summoned, quickly gets ready and is then ushered into the presence of the leader of one of the most powerful nations on earth.

A. Pharaoh explained his dilemma [Verse 14-15]

1. No one could interpret his dreams - Dan 4:4-7

2. But he had heard that Joseph could

Dan 5:14 "I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom." [Nebuchadnezzar]

What an opportunity for Joseph to capitalize upon! He could have used the occasion to make a bargain with the king—his freedom in exchange for the interpretation to Pharaoh's dreams.

But as much as I'm sure Joseph desired to be released from prison, he never brought up the subject. His first concern was not with his own comfort, but with serving God faithfully in the midst of God's divine appointment.

B. Joseph pointed Pharaoh to God [Verse 16]

1. "I can't do it!" - Dan 2:27-28

Pharaoh gives Joseph a golden opportunity to glorify himself, but Joseph refuses to take credit for God's work.

He doesn't present himself as the "Dr. of Dreamology" or the "Dreaminator".

Instead, he freely admits he has nothing to offer in and of himself to Pharaoh when he confessed that interpretations come from God alone.

Application:

1 Cor 4:6-7 "For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?"

2 Cor 3:5 "Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God."

2. But God will give Pharaoh the answer

Gen 40:8 "Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams."

Ps 25:14 "The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them."

C. Pharaoh recounted his dreams [Verse 17-24]

D. Joseph interpreted the dreams [Verse 25-32]

“The dreams are one and the same.”

“The dreams reveal what God is about to do.”

“The dream was given in two forms because the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.” (Isa 46:11)

1. The 7 healthy cows/grain = 7 years of **abundance**

2. The 7 sickly cows/grain = 7 years of **famine**

Once again, Joseph showed that he was not a man to alter God’s message to please his listeners or to curry the favor of the king. Instead, he boldly spoke as God directed; the good the bad and the ugly!

Acts 20:27 “For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.”

Now Joseph could have simply delivered the interpretation to Pharaoh’s dream and walked away. After all, why should he offer any comfort or assistance to the enemy of Israel? But over the last 13 years, Joseph had made it his practice to be a blessing – even to his enemies!

E. Joseph **advised** Pharaoh [Verse 33-36]

Joseph was not only a gifted interpreter – he was also a gifted administrator.

He quickly assessed the situation and proposed a course of action to Pharaoh that would save not only Egypt, but the entire known world.

1. Put a discerning and wise man in charge of Egypt

This is really timeless advice!

Ezek 22:30-31 “I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none.”

2. Appoint commissioners over the land

These commissioners were a key part of Joseph’s suggested chain of command.

Illustration: There will always be a need for men and women of this caliber!

Moses in the wilderness: Ex 18:21-22 “But select capable men from all the people--men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain--and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.”

The apostles in the early church: Acts 6:3 “Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.”

3. Take **20%** of grain harvest during abundant years

Like any government, Egypt required tax revenue in order to provide the community with essential services and necessary infrastructure. In the case of Egypt, the normal grain tax was about 10%. So in essence, Joseph suggested doubling that tax over the next seven years.

He knew that 20% was an amount people would be willing to sacrifice to survive.
Any more than that could have easily led to a revolt among the people.

4. Hold this food in reserve for the famine
These surpluses would be brought into the cities for safe-keeping for later distribution during the 7 years of famine.

Application: Financial tip: Hold in reserve 3 months of income for emergencies
Prov 6:6-8 “Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest.”

III Pharaoh Appointed Joseph

- A. Pharaoh liked what he saw in Joseph [Verse 37-38]
Prov 22:29 “Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men.”

1. He liked Joseph’s **plan**
Prov 14:35 “A king delights in a wise servant ...”
Prov 16:13 “Kings take pleasure in honest lips; they value a man who speaks the truth.”

2. He liked Joseph’s **divine** connection - Dan 4:18
“Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the Spirit of God?”

Application:

Acts 1:8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

3. He liked Joseph’s discernment and wisdom
Ps 111:10 “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding.”
Ps 119:99-100 “I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.”

- B. Pharaoh **elevated** Joseph [Verse 39-40]

1. He put Joseph in charge of his palace
Ps 105:21-22 “The king sent and released him, the ruler of peoples set him free. He made him master of his household, ruler over all he possessed, to instruct his princes as he pleased and teach his elders wisdom.”

- a. All his people were to submit to his orders
- b. Only Pharaoh would be greater

Job 36:7 “He does not take his eyes off the righteous; he enthrones them with kings and exalts them forever.”

2. He put Joseph in charge of all of Egypt [Verse 41]

Acts 7:10 “He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh King of Egypt; so he made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.”

Application: Hannah’s prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of Samuel

1 Sam 2:8 “He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor.”

3. He provided Joseph with royal status [Verse 42-45]

a. He gave him royal **clothing** - Dan 5:29

Signet ring, fine linen robes and a gold chain

b. He gave him a royal position

He had him ride in a chariot with a runner crying out, “Bow the knee!”

c. He gave him royal **authority**

Second in command only to Pharaoh!

d. He gave him a royal name

Zaphenth-Paneah = “The Savior of the world”

Uncertain meaning, but obviously a token of Pharaoh’s deep respect and admiration for this former Hebrew slave.

e. He gave him a royal **family**: **Asenath** = “He whom RA, the sun god, has given”

Application: God has given believers royal status, transferring us from “rags to riches.”

1. He has given us royal **clothing**

Isa 61:10 “He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”

b. He has given us a royal position

Eph 2:6-8 “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus ...”

c. He has given us royal **authority**

Dan 7:27 “Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High.”

d. He has given us a royal name

Application: New name for believers

Rev 3:12 “Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.”

e. He has given us a royal **family**

John 1:12 “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

Rev 19:7-8 “Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride [the church] has made herself ready.”

IV Joseph’s Diligence

A. He **stored** up grain during the 7 years of abundance [Verse 46-49]

Just as Joseph had predicted, the next seven years were marked by great abundance. The land produced such a vast quantity of grain that it was beyond measuring.

Application:

Prov 12:24 “Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor.”

“Opportunity is missed by most people because it is often dressed in overalls and looks like work.”

Joseph was a man who had mastered the art of doing common things uncommonly well.

B. He had two sons: [Verse 50-52]

1. Manasseh = “To make to forget”

For Joseph, the naming of his firstborn son was an expression of gratitude to God: “For God has made me forget all my trouble, and all my father’s household”

And Joseph certainly had a lot to forget:

The hatred of his brothers

The memories of hearing his brothers negotiate his sale to the Midianites

The 11 years of serving as a slave in Potiphar’s house

The false accusations of Potiphar's wife

The two years unjust imprisonment in Potiphar’s’ dungeon.

Isa 43:18-19 “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.”

2. Ephraim = “Fruitfulness”

“For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction”

Ps 84:5-7 “Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of

springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.”

C. He **distributed** the grain for 7 years during the famine [Verse 53-57]

At the end of the seven years of plenty, the famine hit Egypt just as Joseph had predicted! The people came to Pharaoh requesting bread, and he sent them to Joseph, telling them to do whatever Joseph said. Joseph opened the storehouses and began to sell grain to the Egyptians and to those from other lands, some of whom would be his own brothers.

Gen 12:2-3 “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Conclusion

The story of Joseph teaches us a number of important lessons:

1. If we want to be used greatly by God, we must be servants of God (gladly serving Him in whatever circumstances we find ourselves).
2. If we want to be used greatly by God, we must be greatly prepared (most often in relative obscurity and under adverse circumstances)
“Success occurs when opportunity meets preparation.” - Zig Ziglar
3. If we want to be used greatly by God, we must be found faithful in the small things.
The Duke of Wellington:
“The secret of success lay in embracing every opportunity of being useful ... and doing your duty in that station of life to which God is pleased to call you.”
Col 3:23-24 “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”
4. If we want to be used greatly by God, we must be empowered and led by the Holy Spirit.
5. If we want to be used greatly by God, we must make our goal His glory and praise!
Ps 34:1-3 “I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. 2 My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.”

Future glory and reward of the saints:

Matt 16:27-28 “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.”

Rev 22:12-13 “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.”

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