



Revealed

God reveals His plans when we trust Him.

GENESIS 41:14-21,33-37

Marco Polo is a popular game kids play in swimming pools. The player who is “it,” either blindfolded or with closed eyes must try to tag someone else in the pool. When the person who is “it” shouts “Marco,” everyone else shouts “Polo” so that the person who is “it” gets a sense of direction to tag someone. But everyone in the pool is trying to keep that person from knowing which direction they should go. When we are trying to discern God’s will, we may feel like that person who is “it” in Marco Polo. Yet God wants us to know His plans, and He reveals His plans to those who trust Him.

How have you struggled to know God’s will?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**


GENESIS 40:1–41:57

Chapters 40–41 show how Joseph ascended from Pharaoh’s prison to become the most powerful man in the Egyptian empire, second only to the Pharaoh himself. Joseph’s purity and integrity had been tested in Potiphar’s home, and Joseph showed himself to be exemplary in every way under the duress of sexual temptation, false accusation, and undeserved imprisonment (Gen. 39:1-20).

Two things point to Joseph’s persevering faith in God. First, when God extended kindness to him in the king’s prison by granting him favor with the warden, Joseph was willing to take on all the responsibilities the warden gave him (39:21-23). He did not give up. Second, Joseph demonstrated his faith in God by his willingness to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh’s cupbearer and the baker. With a rhetorical question, Joseph stated that interpretation of dreams “belong to God.” Joseph would not have offered to interpret their dreams if he no longer believed God was speaking through them. Just as God would fulfill what the dreams of these two men revealed about their futures, Joseph believed God would faithfully bring to fruition the fulfillment of his dreams too.

The dreams of the cupbearer and baker predicted their futures, just as Joseph’s dreams as a young man were predictions of his future. So, when their dreams were fulfilled, they confirmed to Joseph that God would fulfill his dreams also, even if his present situation appeared to offer him no hope for his future.

Joseph’s willingness to interpret the cupbearer’s dream led to his invitation to interpret the Pharaoh’s dreams. This is what happens when believers trust God to do the right thing. Ultimately, all the dreams in the Joseph story, including the Pharaoh’s dreams, demonstrate that the Lord God is sovereign over the affairs of individuals and nations. Joseph’s rise to power happened because of the plans and power of God.

 **Read Genesis 41:14-21,33-37. How did God prepare Joseph to be used by Him? How might believers today prepare themselves to be used of God?**

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

CREDIT GIVEN (GEN. 41:14-16)

¹⁴ Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and they quickly brought him from the dungeon. He shaved, changed his clothes, and went to Pharaoh.

¹⁵ Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said about you that you can hear a dream and interpret it.” ¹⁶ “I am not able to,” Joseph answered Pharaoh. “It is God who will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.”

VERSE 14

Pharaoh’s cupbearer and baker had been incarcerated in Pharaoh’s prison along with Joseph, and both had dreams during that time. Joseph interpreted the cupbearer’s dream to mean that, after three days, he would be restored to his position in Pharaoh’s court. Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him when he got out of prison. When the baker related his dream to Joseph, God revealed to Joseph that Pharaoh would have the baker hanged in three days. Both of Joseph’s interpretations happened as he said, but the cupbearer forgot about Joseph (Gen. 40:1-23).

Two years later, Pharaoh had two vivid dreams, which were troubling to him. He summoned his wise men and counselors to interpret his dreams, but none were able to do so. It was then that the cupbearer recalled how “a young Hebrew, a slave of the captain of the guards” had correctly interpreted his and the baker’s dreams when they were in the king’s prison (vv. 1-13). When Pharaoh learned what Joseph had done, he immediately summoned Joseph to his court. As quickly as they could, Pharaoh’s servants transformed Joseph’s appearance from that of a Hebrew slave to one dressed appropriately to enter into the Pharaoh’s court.

DID YOU KNOW?

In the Old Testament, only Joseph and Daniel engaged in dream interpretation. When they did, the Scriptures make clear that they did not do so through their own wisdom. Rather, they could only interpret dreams because God revealed the interpretation to them (Gen. 40:8; Dan. 2:27-30).

They not only put Joseph in proper attire but also **shaved** him. As a rule, Egyptian men shaved their heads and faces. Beards were associated with the gods. Only the Pharaohs would adorn a beard because they were considered gods in Egypt. The fact that Hebrews wore beards is probably just one more reason among many that the Egyptians found Hebrews detestable. For Hebrews, shaving one's head was an outward expression of shame or grief (see Amos 8:10). But if Joseph had not completely shaved off all of his hair from the neck up, it would have been an affront to Pharaoh.

Pharaoh's servants brought Joseph **from the dungeon**. The Hebrew word for *dungeon* is the same word for "pit" in Genesis 37:24. Joseph's brothers threw him into a pit before selling him into slavery. This is the second time Joseph was thrown into a pit, only to be brought back out of it. Joseph's enemies could not thwart God's plans for him.

KEY DOCTRINE: God

God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. (See Psalm 147:4; Isaiah 46:9-10.)

VERSES 15-16

Pharaoh's demeanor and words echoed those of the cupbearer and baker when Joseph met them in prison. Just as the cupbearer and baker were distraught (40:6), Pharaoh was troubled (41:8). Just as the cupbearer and baker had told Joseph there was no one to interpret their dreams (40:8), Pharaoh informed Joseph no one was able to interpret his dream. He had summoned him because he had heard Joseph was able to interpret dreams.

Joseph was quick to correct what Pharaoh said concerning Joseph's ability: **I am not able**. He disclaimed any innate ability to interpret dreams. Joseph said that the only one able to provide an interpretation was God. The statement, **It is God who will give Pharaoh a favorable answer**, does not mean that God would necessarily give Pharaoh a pleasant answer. It means God would give Pharaoh the correct interpretation of his dreams. Joseph made these assertions about God regarding Pharaoh's dreams without having any idea what Pharaoh had actually dreamed.

○ What keeps a person from giving God the credit He is due?

COWS CONSUMED (GEN. 41:17-21)

¹⁷ So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile, ¹⁸ when seven well-fed, healthy-looking cows came up from the Nile and grazed among the reeds. ¹⁹ After them, seven other cows — weak, very sickly, and thin — came up. I’ve never seen such sickly ones as these in all the land of Egypt. ²⁰ Then the thin, sickly cows ate the first seven well-fed cows. ²¹ When they had devoured them, you could not tell that they had devoured them; their appearance was as bad as it had been before. Then I woke up.”

VERSE 17

Pharaoh’s dreams are recorded in verses 1-7. His first dream began with him standing on *the bank of the Nile*. All of Egypt’s life both economically and socially was connected to the Nile. It was the most prominent geographical feature of Egypt, and most Egyptians lived within a four-mile distance of its water system, including the delta in Lower Egypt where Jacob and his family would eventually settle. The northern delta region was called Lower Egypt and the southern section of Egypt was called Upper Egypt because the Nile flows from south to north, dumping into the Mediterranean Sea.

The Egyptians utilized dams and canals along with natural irrigation to best utilize the Nile for the crops and herds. If its water level was too high, it would flood and delay the sprouting of crops, causing them to be susceptible to the scorching winds of summer. On the other hand, if the Nile’s water level was too low, then there was not enough water to sustain the crops. So if the water levels got either too high or too low, they brought about droughts. Given the Nile’s importance to all of Egypt, it was significant that Pharaoh’s dream began with him standing on its bank.

VERSE 18

Pharaoh saw in his dream what would have been a common sight. He saw *well-fed, healthy-looking cows* standing partially submerged in the Nile to seek relief from the heat and flies, then coming up out of the water to graze *among the reeds*.

Cows were prominent in Egypt and were a symbol of fertility as well as a prominent religious symbol. One of the most powerful goddesses of Egypt was Hathor. This goddess of love and beauty was believed to be the daughter of Ra and wife of Horus. She was depicted as either wearing a headdress of cow horns or actually having the head of a cow. Nut, the goddess of the heavens, was sometimes depicted as a celestial cow. Also, the fertility goddess Isis was sometimes depicted with the head of a cow. Pharaoh saw **seven** cows. Hathor occasionally took the form of “Seven Hathors,” with the number seven symbolizing fate or fortune telling. Perhaps Pharaoh was troubled because he recognized his dream had something to do with the future.

VERSES 19-21

After the seven well-fed, healthy-looking cows came up from the Nile, they were followed by **seven other cows—weak, very sickly, and thin**. They came up next to the first group of cows. The unsightly cows were a stark contrast to the healthy cows they stood beside. In fact, the second group was so unusually scrawny that Pharaoh exclaimed to Joseph that he had never before witnessed cows in such a poor condition in all of Egypt.

As Pharaoh scrutinized the seven healthy cows next to the seven sickly cows, the seven sickly cows **devoured** the seven healthy cows. As if that wasn't astonishing enough, when the seven sickly cows had finished eating, Pharaoh saw that they looked as awful as they did before they ate the seven healthy cows. The consumption of the healthy cows didn't alter the appearance of the scrawny cows one bit. That was the end of Pharaoh's first dream.

Pharaoh's second dream involved the same theme with seven full and good heads of grain that sprouted up, followed by seven withered and thin heads of grain that swallowed the good ones (vv. 22-24).

In verses 25-32, Joseph told Pharaoh that both dreams meant the same thing, and that through these dreams God had revealed to Pharaoh what He was about to do. The seven cows and heads of grain represented seven years. Accordingly, seven years of abundance were going to be followed by seven years of severe famine that would consume the plenty. Furthermore, since God revealed these matters to Pharaoh in two dreams, it affirmed that the matter was established by God and that these things were about to happen soon.

- Can people rely on dreams alone to know the will of God? Explain your answer.

- How does the way God revealed the future to Pharaoh compare to other ways God reveals His plans?

BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible concordance to learn more about a biblical event.

Look up the words “dream(s)” and “dreamed” in a Bible concordance. After reading the Scripture references you find listed under these terms, note individuals in the Bible other than Joseph and Pharaoh who received God-given dreams. Focus on the following Scripture passages that record the dreams of Jacob (Gen. 28:10-17), Solomon (1 Kings 3:4-15), and Joseph (Matt. 2:13-15). Use a study Bible if needed to explore the significance of each of these dreams. What revelation did God provide to the recipient through each dream?

PLAN DEFINED (GEN. 41:33-37)

³³ “So now, let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and set him over the land of Egypt. ³⁴ Let Pharaoh do this: Let him appoint overseers over the land and take a fifth of the harvest of the land of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. ³⁵ Let them gather all the excess food during these good years that are coming. Under Pharaoh’s

authority, store the grain in the cities, so they may preserve it as food. ³⁶ The food will be a reserve for the land during the seven years of famine that will take place in the land of Egypt. Then the country will not be wiped out by the famine.” ³⁷ The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants,

VERSES 33-37

Joseph not only told Pharaoh what God was about to do, he also gave wise counsel concerning what Pharaoh should do in preparation for what was about to happen. This would be such an enormous task that Joseph advised Pharaoh to **look for a discerning and wise man and set him over the land of Egypt**. This person could give all of his efforts toward implementing a strategy that would save the lives of Pharaoh’s people. It was also important that this appointee have the full weight of Pharaoh’s authority as he expedited the plan Joseph was about to recommend.

Joseph wisely exhorted Pharaoh to have this leader **appoint overseers** throughout Egypt to collect twenty percent of the harvest during the first seven years of abundance and store the excess grain in storage cities throughout the land so that they may preserve it. Preserving the excess grain in storage cities throughout Egypt would help expedite its distribution to the people when the famine finally struck. Joseph explained that implementation of this plan would avert the annihilation of the nation and guarantee its survival.

Joseph’s plan made sense to Pharaoh, and he and his royal servants were pleased when Joseph shared it with them. In fact, Pharaoh was so impressed that he appointed Joseph second in command and gave him authority over all of Egypt to implement the strategy Joseph had proposed to him (vv. 38-44).

 **What is the difference between identifying a problem and identifying a solution?**

 **What is the value of proposing a plan when facing a challenge?**

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers can point others to God when asked about past actions.
- + Believers should pay attention to ways God reveals His plans.
- + Believers can demonstrate trust when responding to God's plans.

○ **What role can your Bible study group play in helping one another discern God's will for their lives? How can the group corporately seek God's will?**

○ **How can you demonstrate your trust in God when He reveals His plans to you? How do you demonstrate your trust in Him when you are unable to discern His will?**

○ **Memorize Genesis 41:16.**

Prayer Needs
