

SESSION #18

- **chapter 41** continues to show us “the wise ways of God” and his ability to “write straight with crooked lines”
 - it’s the story of Pharaoh’s dreams,
 - ...Joseph’s interpretation of them,
 - ...and his subsequent rise to the highest position of power in Egypt
- this is probably a familiar story, but let’s review it quickly

Gen 41:1-8

Then it came to pass, at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh had a dream; and behold, he stood by the river. ²Suddenly there came up out of the river seven cows, fine looking and fat; and they fed in the meadow. ³Then behold, seven other cows came up after them out of the river, ugly and gaunt, and stood by the *other* cows on the bank of the river.

⁴And the ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven fine looking and fat cows. So Pharaoh awoke. ⁵He slept and dreamed a second time; and suddenly seven heads of grain came up on one stalk, plump and good. ⁶Then behold, seven thin heads, blighted by the east wind, sprang up after them. ⁷And the seven thin heads devoured the seven plump and full heads. So Pharaoh awoke, and indeed, *it was* a dream. ⁸Now it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled, and 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 for Pharaoh.

- this **prologue** sets up Pharaoh’s problem: his mysterious dreams trouble him greatly because he knows they are very significant but all the **knowledge of his empire fails him** in understanding what they mean ... “*there was no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh.*”
 - Brueggemann suggests that the main issue here is “a remarkable **inversion of power**” ...the power of this world is revealed to be helpless in the face of God’s power – Pharaoh, though considered divine by Egyptians, must now realize that God alone is divine
- it’s a common scenario in Scripture...
 - Daniel 2 (Nebuchadnezzar’s inability to understand his dream & Daniel’s interpretation by God’s power)
 - Daniel 5 (God’s handwriting on the wall at Belshazzar’s feast, and again Daniel’s interpretation)
 - the plagues in Exodus 7 & 8 frustrating the mighty Pharaoh
 - the drought in the time of Elijah – King Ahab’s inability to do anything about it, because the situation was controlled by God through Elijah
 - Herod at the birth of Jesus – a powerful king thwarted by God’s power
 - and Pilate at the crucifixion, powerless to do what he wanted as God worked out His plan

1 Cor 1:25 tells us that

“the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

And in Luke 10:21 Jesus said,

“I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.

- Robert F. Capon calls this God’s “*left-handed approach to a right-handed world*”
- this “left-handed approach” or “inversion of power” is clearly seen in Pharaoh’s story
- Joseph interprets both of Pharaoh’s dreams, by God’s power, and the grateful ruler promptly pulls Joseph out of prison and promotes him to Prime Minister over all the land of Egypt
- now let’s read the main verses from the **epilogue**:

Gen 41:47-57

⁴⁷ Now in the seven plentiful years the ground brought forth abundantly. ⁴⁸ So he [Joseph] gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities; he laid up in every city the food of the fields which surrounded them. ⁴⁹ Joseph gathered very much grain, as the sand of the sea, until he stopped counting, for *it was* immeasurable...

^{Vs. 53} Then the seven years of plenty which were in the land of Egypt ended, ⁵⁴ and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. The famine was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. ⁵⁵ So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do.” ⁵⁶ The famine was over all the face of the earth, and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians. And the famine became severe in the land of Egypt. ⁵⁷ So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy *grain*, because the famine was severe in all lands.

- this **epilogue** shows Joseph in charge, offering Egypt and the world, life & well-being in place of the death of famine
 - ...a striking picture of Jesus, the “wisdom of God”
 - between the futility of Egypt and the well-being brought by Joseph, there is the main action in the **middle** section: *Joseph*
 - Joseph, speaking to Pharaoh in strongly theocentric language, affirms that **God** – not royal power or planning – will bring about the new future
- ...let’s go back to verse...

Vs. 16

So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, “*It is* not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace.”

Vs. 28 Joseph says,

God has shown Pharaoh what He *is* about to do.

Vs. 32 Joseph tells Pharaoh:

the dream was repeated to Pharaoh twice because the thing *is* established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

- and then in vs. 33, he shows his readiness for concrete **action**

Gen 41:33

"Now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt.

- understanding & believing in God's plan does not mean there is no place for human planning; **God's purpose** becomes the *basis* for such planning which must be faithful & responsive to the divine plan
- the Joseph narrative is one of the greatest stories in the Old Testament; but it's not just about Joseph
- Bill Arnold reminds us: "but above all it is a story about God, the great mover and shaper of history, and about his pleasure in using a single servant who is willing to **submit his life** to God's control."
- 2 Chron. 16:9 tells us that God is still looking for people like that so that He can show Himself strong on their behalf – let US be among them!