

Pharaoh Had Two Dreams that None Could Interpret

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain and illustrate, from the life of Joseph, that the Lord is the One who is working in our lives to conform us to the image of Christ. This understanding will bring great joy even when we are going through difficult times. In this topic, we will see that Pharaoh had two dreams that no one could interpret.

Genesis 41:1-4 says, “Then, it came to pass, at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh had a dream; and behold, he stood by the river. Suddenly there came up out of the river seven cows, fine looking and fat; and they fed in the meadow. Then 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. And the ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven fine looking and fat cows. So Pharaoh awoke.” Joseph had previously interpreted the dream of the butler, but the butler had forgotten all about Joseph. We see that Joseph spent an additional two full years in the prison. Life in the prison was difficult even though Joseph was in charge of all of the other prisoners. Joseph probably realized that the butler had forgotten him as time passed and nothing changed. However, Joseph was faithful to the Lord as he experienced the trials of the next two years.

Two full years later, Pharaoh was the person who had a dream. He dreamed that he was standing by the river. In Egypt, that would have been the Nile River because the people of Egypt used that as their main source of water. In his dream, as the king stood by the river, he saw seven cows come out of the river. These cows were beautiful looking and fat. Once they were out of the river, the cows went to a field near the edge of the river and began to eat the grass. While these cows were eating in the field, seven other cows came up out of the river. However, these cows were not beautiful. In fact, they were quite ugly. The word translated “gaunt”, in relation to cows, is usually translated *thin* and is used that way five additional times in the second dream of Pharaoh regarding heads of grain. These cows were so thin that it caused them to look very ugly.

In the dream of Pharaoh, these seven thin and very ugly cows ate up the seven fine-looking, fat cows. When Pharaoh told Joseph this dream, he added one important detail that is not mentioned here. Genesis 41:21 says, “When they had eaten them up, no one would have known that they had eaten them, for they *were* just as ugly as at the beginning. So I awoke.” Here, we see that when the thin and ugly cows ate the fat cows in the dream, it did not help them. They still looked just as thin and ugly after they had finished eating the fat cows. This dream was so shocking to Pharaoh that it caused him to wake up from his sleep.

However, he finally went back to sleep. Genesis 41:5-8 says, “He slept and dreamed a

second time; and suddenly seven heads of grain came up on one stalk, plump and good. Then behold, seven thin heads, blighted by the east wind, sprang up after them. And the seven thin heads devoured the seven plump and full heads. So Pharaoh awoke, and indeed, *it was* a dream. Now 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.” We see that he had a second dream after he went back to sleep. This time, the dream was about grain instead of cows. We see that something happened very suddenly in this second dream. As Pharaoh dreamed, he saw a stalk of grain come up out of the ground. It grew very rapidly and quickly developed seven heads of grain on this one stalk. These seven heads of grain were all plump and good. The word translated “plump” is the word that was used in verse two when it said that the seven cows were “fat” as the basic meaning is *fat* or a closely related word.

As Pharaoh dreamed, suddenly, seven very thin heads of grain came up. These heads of grain had been blasted or blighted by a very strong east wind. In the dream, the seven thin heads of grain ate the seven plump and full heads of grain. This dream woke Pharaoh up just like the first dream. Then, he realized this was also a dream. We read that, in the morning, the spirit of Pharaoh was troubled. The word that is translated “spirit” in the Old Testament can refer either to God or man. In Genesis 1:2, we read, “The earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” In this verse, it is clear that the verse is talking about the Holy Spirit. In contrast, Ecclesiastes 12:7 says, “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.” In this verse, we see that the human body will return to the dust and the human spirit will return to the Lord who created that human spirit. In these verses, it is clear that the spirit of Pharaoh is talking about the fact that his human spirit was troubled. His dreams had been so clear and vivid that he could remember all of the details.

That morning, Pharaoh immediately sent for all of the magicians and wise men in the land of Egypt and asked them to interpret his dreams. The word translated “magician” is from a word that means *diviner, magician or astrologer*. The word translated “wise men”, when used in the plural form, as it is here, means *the educated, the astrologers or the shrewd*. As a result, Pharaoh felt that there would certainly be at least a few of these men who could interpret his dreams. Many times, the people of this world will turn to either the highly educated or to those people who are involved in some form of communication with the evil spirits to get an answer to the things that cause their spirits to be troubled. The word translated “troubled” here is used five times in the Old Testament and means *to be disturbed*. The dreams had disturbed Pharaoh and he was determined to find out what they meant.

However, the wise men and magicians were not able to help Pharaoh. These dreams had been given to Pharaoh by God, so only a person who depended on the Lord for wisdom could give a true interpretation. 1 Corinthians 2:14 explains, “But the natural man does

not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.” The wise men and magicians of Egypt were spiritually dead, which made it impossible for them to accurately interpret a dream that had been given by God. They were without spiritual discernment. The interpretation of these dreams required one who had a true faith in the Creator of heaven and earth. The Lord knew that there was only one man in the entire land of Egypt who would be able to interpret that dream.

Suddenly, the chief butler remembered what had happened when he and the chief baker each had a dream while they were in prison two years earlier. Genesis 41:9-13 says, “Then the chief butler spoke to Pharaoh, saying: ‘I remember my faults this day. When Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, both me and the chief baker, we each had a dream in one night, he and I. Each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his *own* dream. Now there was a young Hebrew man with us there, a servant of the captain of the guard. And we told him, and he interpreted our dreams for us; to each man he interpreted according to his *own* dream. And it came to pass, just as he interpreted for us, so it happened. He restored me to my office, and he hanged him.’” The Lord had allowed the butler to forget the fact that Joseph had interpreted his dream. Now was the time for that dream to be remembered, and the Lord reminded the chief butler of Joseph.

The word translated “faults” is used thirty-five times in the Old Testament and means *sin* or *punishment*. Thirty of those times, the word is translated “sin”. This word usually refers to sins against God, although, in this use, the chief butler had been placed in prison because he had disobeyed the rules of Pharaoh. The word is also used in that way in Ecclesiastes 10:4, where it is translated “offenses”. That verse says, “If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your post; for conciliation pacifies great offenses.” The chief butler went on to remind Pharaoh of what Pharaoh had done when he and the baker had broken some of the rules of Pharaoh. He said he and the chief baker had both been placed in prison where they were under the supervision of the captain of the guard. While they were in prison, both of them had a dream the same night. They did not know what their dreams meant, but each dream had its own interpretation.

Like Pharaoh, neither the butler nor the baker understood their dreams. However, there had been a young Hebrew man with them in the prison. That young man was actually a servant of the captain of the guard. When Joseph questioned them, they had told him, in Genesis 40:8, “And they said to him, ‘We each have had a dream, and there *is* no interpreter of it.’ So Joseph said to them, ‘Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell them to me, please.’” Then, the butler said that the two men had told the young Hebrew man their dreams, and he had interpreted the meaning of each dream to the two men. In that way, they found out the meaning of their particular dreams. Then, the butler said the most important thing of all about the dreams of the two men.

The butler said that what the Hebrew servant had told them would happen was exactly what had happened to each of them. Joseph had said that the butler would be restored to his office in three days. That was what had happened and that was why the butler was now in a position that he could tell Pharaoh about a young man who could interpret dreams. In contrast, the Hebrew servant had told the chief baker that he would be hanged in three days and that was exactly what had happened to the baker. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain that when God chose to speak to a person in a dream in the Old Testament, the interpretation of that dream had to be given by God and did not come from human reasoning. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain this to others.