Commentary on Genesis 41:37-45, 50-52
International Bible Lessons
Sunday, January 8, 2012
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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday, January 8, 2012**, is from **Genesis 41:37-45, 50-52**. Five **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse by verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. The **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, which are also available on the Bible Lesson Forum, will aid teachers in class preparation and in conducting class discussion. For additional **International Bible Lesson Commentaries**, see the complete and comprehensive International Bible Lessons Commentary Index. The weekly International Bible Lesson is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught at http://InternationalBibleLessons.org and in *The Oklahoman* newspaper.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Genesis 41:37-45

(Genesis 41:37) The proposal [by Joseph] pleased Pharaoh and all his servants.

Joseph was the only person in all of Egypt who could interpret Pharaoh's dreams, which was a message

from God that there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. God also gave Joseph an excellent solution to what could have been a disaster leading to many deaths. God showed Joseph the future so he could provide a sound plan for the nation to survive.

(Genesis 41:38) Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find anyone else like this—one in whom is the spirit of God?"

Pharaoh expected his servants to agree with him—that there was no one else like Joseph in Egypt. Joseph had already told Pharaoh that his knowledge had come from God to him. Many translations, properly in my opinion, capitalize "Spirit." This translation indicates the probable limited knowledge of God that Pharaoh might possess, since he worshiped the idols of Egypt. Pharaoh acknowledged that the Spirit of God indwelt Joseph, and Joseph probably taught him more about the true God as the years went by and God proved Joseph correct in his dream interpretations. Joseph could save many Egyptians physically and spiritually.

(Genesis 41:39) So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you.

Pharaoh agreed with Joseph that God had revealed the solutions they needed to Joseph. Joseph was the

most discerning and wise among them, because God had chosen Joseph as the person He would reveal the future to as well as the solutions to their problems. Joseph was wise enough to serve the true God no matter what situation he found himself in, and God made him wise enough to discern God's work in Pharaoh's dreams as God's words of warning.

(Genesis 41:40) You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you."

Pharaoh emphasized and made explicit the authority that he gave Joseph so no one would ever question any command given to them by Joseph. Joseph was first over the whole house of Potiphar, then over the prison (as a prisoner or trustee), and finally over the whole of Egypt (under only one person, Pharaoh). Joseph proved himself faithful over smaller areas of administration and responsibility (which were also periods of training for him) before God placed him over larger areas of responsibility. In this way of moving up to greater responsibilities, Joseph gained valuable administrative experience and prepared himself for ever greater responsibilities.

(Genesis 41:41) And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt."

Just as the LORD kept Abimelech from sinning against Abraham and Sarah (see Genesis 20), God could easily move Pharaoh to place Joseph over the entire land of Egypt. However, God only did so after He had prepared Joseph to lead and after Joseph had proved his value to others, especially to Pharaoh and his entire court. God helped Joseph immediately when he interpreted Pharaoh's dream, but God took many years to prepare Joseph to rule over all the land of Egypt. Joseph became a ruler because he had demonstrated his wisdom and worth over time.

(Genesis 41:42) Removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand; he arrayed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain around his neck.

Pharaoh gave Joseph some visible signs of his authority. The royal signet ring could be used to make an impression or "seal of authority" in clay, wax, or ink on official documents to prove the order came from Pharaoh, who had given decision making responsibilities to Joseph and who wore the ring on his hand. The fine garments and the gold chain could be seen from a distance, so Joseph's royal authority would be recognized immediately. Surely, Joseph's change from prison rags to royal clothes would have been impressive to him and everyone.

(Genesis 41:43) He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command; and they cried out

in front of him, "Bow the knee!" Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt.

This could have been a public installation service and royal parade in the capitol city to announce Joseph's appointment. Everyone needed to see that Pharaoh himself had placed Joseph as second-in-command. Even though Pharaoh was the king of Egypt, he actually became only a figurehead with Joseph making all the important decisions. Only God could have raised a Hebrew slave to this place of authority over all the land of Egypt. The people would bow to Joseph as to a king.

(Genesis 41:44) Moreover Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."

Once Pharaoh knew that God was with Joseph and God's Spirit indwelt Joseph, Pharaoh gave Joseph what would almost amount to the power of God over the people. Rather than rule as a cruel dictator, Joseph ruled with the benevolence of God to save many from starvation. Only by Pharaoh's requiring strict obedience to Joseph could he be assured that Joseph's wise commands would be carried out and no one would interfere with what was the best for all the people.

(Genesis 41:45) Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, as his wife. Thus Joseph gained authority over the land of Egypt.

Joseph had to have his name changed from a Hebrew name to an Egyptian name for him to maintain the respect of everyone. His name was changed by Pharaoh, and this would indicate that Pharaoh had adopted him into the Egyptian royal court. His name may have meant "the one who furnishes the nourishment of life," which he did through his decisions as "the chief steward of the realm" (another possible meaning of the name). His name might also have meant "the revealer of secrets." The name "On" was the name of an Egyptian idol, and Pharaoh probably thought that one in whom the Spirit of God dwelt should marry the daughter of a priest. Joseph was in no position to disobey Pharaoh, and there were no Hebrew women for him to marry. The priest's daughter would probably have been prepared by God to learn about the true God from Joseph so they could pass on the knowledge of God to their descendants. She would certainly learn about the power and wisdom of the true God as opposed to the powerlessness of the idols of Egypt, and she could teach these insights to their children.

Genesis 41:50-52

(Genesis 41:50) Before the years of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him.

Joseph had two sons born to him during the seven fruitful years of plenty in Egypt. These two sons had so many descendants that by the time of Moses they had become two tribes of Israel. As sons of Joseph and a priest's daughter, they were born to positions of high privilege in Egypt, but over time their descendants lost this place of honor and were enslaved by a later Pharaoh.

(Genesis 41:51) Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house."

Joseph forgot his bad experiences and focused his attention on the administrative challenges he faced. After suffering much hardship, he gave God the credit for blessing his life to such a great extent. When believers get to heaven the blessings of being with the LORD will be so great that they will "forget" or put their earthly hardships behind them. Giving the name Manasseh to his firstborn son was Joseph's way of putting the past truly behind him.

(Genesis 41:52) The second he named Ephraim, "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes."

By giving the name Ephraim to his second born son, Joseph truly turned from the past to focus on the future and the fruitfulness he enjoyed in the land of Egypt (which he had known up to this time as "the land of my misfortunes." Joseph acknowledged the grace of God in the names of both of his sons. God made Joseph fruitful with the birth of his sons and the success of his endeavors as second only to Pharaoh in Egypt during the seven years of plenty and the seven years of drought and famine (which led to the enrichment of Pharaoh).

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What qualities in Joseph made Pharaoh recognize that the Spirit of God was within him?

2. What qualities would a person have today for someone to recognize that the Spirit of God was within them?

3. What difference does it make for leaders and people when the leaders are people who are discerning and wise because the Spirit of God is within them?

4. Why was it important for Pharaoh to give Joseph as much authority as he did?

5. Why do you think Joseph's wife may have looked up to him as a person who could teach her the truth about the true God?

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