

Genesis 41:1-36

God's Sovereignty: Fact or Fiction?

The human eye is an amazing creation

- It has the ability to focus on things in incredible detail

But as fascinating as the human eye is, there are still deformities and defects

- One of those defects is called myopia

One definition of myopia is, “a refractive defect of the eye in which collimated light produces image focus in front of the retina when accommodation is relaxed”¹

- That makes perfect sense, right?

Myopia is a condition whereby nearby objects are very clear

- But distant objects appear blurry

Of course, glasses or contacts can remedy this problem pretty easily

- As a matter of fact, I wear corrective glasses because my distant vision is very blurry

From a different perspective, many of us suffer from spiritual myopia

- Nearby events are pretty clear
- But seeing items in the distant future is sometimes very hazy

My teaching style can create myopia

- I tend to focus on subtle nuances of the Text
- I enjoy digging into the Text on a narrow scope

But there are times when we need to back up and see the forest

- This morning is one of those times

We have seen bits and pieces of Joseph's life over the past few months

- But this morning we start to see some of the puzzle pieces coming together

Genesis 41 tells us how Joseph came to power

- This is a very pivotal chapter in Genesis

Those dreams that Joseph had back in Genesis 37 are beginning to come to fruition

- This week and next week will highlight how God raises Joseph out of the pit to place him in a position of prominence

Let's read Genesis 41:1-36

This chapter is a great reminder of God's sovereignty

- Pharaoh needed to know that he was not in control of the universe

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myopia>

In the Egyptian mindset, Pharaoh was a god himself

- He was obviously held in high esteem
- But the true and living God wanted to remind Pharaoh that He alone was in control

That this chapter of Genesis focuses on Pharaoh is crystal clear

- Joseph's name is mentioned only 5 times
- Pharaoh's name, however, is mentioned 20 times

Pharaoh needed a healthy dose of God's sovereignty

- And so do we

Specifically, Genesis 41 teaches us three (3) important lessons about God's sovereignty

- God is in control of your thoughts (41:1-13)
- God is in control despite your anxieties (41:14-24)
- God is in control of your future (41:25-36)

I. God is in control of your thoughts (41:1-13)

Now it happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh had a dream.

Joseph has been in Egypt for 11 years

- He was 17 when he was sold to Potiphar (37:2)
- As we will discover next week, Joseph was 30 years old when he stood before Pharaoh (41:46)

Genesis 41 opens up by telling us that it has been two years since the cupbearer was released from prison and the baker was executed

- It has been a long 13 years for Joseph in Egypt

But one thing that has been constant is the presence of the LORD

- Four times we have been told that "**the LORD was with Joseph**" (39:2, 3, 21, 23)

Joseph may have been forgotten by the cupbearer

- But God has not forgotten him
- God has been with Joseph, every step of the way

Two years after Joseph interpreted the dreams for the cupbearer and the baker, we learn that Pharaoh had a dream

- Actually, he had two dreams
- However, they were synonymous with one another

God will make sure that Joseph is in the right place at the right time to interpret the dream for him

and behold, he was standing by the Nile. ² And lo, from the Nile there came up seven cows, sleek and fat; and they grazed in the marsh grass. ³ Then behold, seven other cows came up after them from the Nile, ugly and gaunt, and they stood by the *other* cows on the bank of the Nile. ⁴ And the ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. Then Pharaoh awoke.

The first four verses describe the first dream that Pharaoh had

- There will be a repetition of the number seven throughout these dreams

Genesis 40 had a focus on the number 3

- But Genesis 41 switches to focus on the number 7

Pharaoh dreams that “**he was standing by the Nile**”

- The Nile River was the “life line” of Egypt

Without the Nile River, there would be no constant source of water

- The rainfall in Egypt was insufficient for the crops²

If the Nile was supplying the area, there would be grain

- If there was grain, the livestock would flourish
- If the livestock flourished, then life was good³

Out of the Nile River came “**seven cows, sleek and fat**”

- These were healthy cows, obviously well fed

The cow was revered as a god in Egypt

- It represented the god of fertility⁴

Pharaoh dreams that the cows “**grazed in the marsh grass**”

- They had plenty to eat
- The Nile River had provided lush vegetation for the animals

But verse 3 introduces a strange sight

- Pharaoh sees seven other cows who came from the Nile
- The second set of seven cows were “**ugly and gaunt**”

What a contrast between these two sets of cattle

- One was healthy and well fed
- The other was unhealthy and malnourished

Verse 4 records the fact that “**the ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows**”

- What a disturbing sight!
- It was so unusual that Pharaoh awoke from his sleep

I think we can relate to Pharaoh, at least partially

- I think we have all had a weird dream that seemed very realistic
- So we woke up to end the dream

⁵ And he fell asleep and dreamed a second time; and behold, seven ears of grain came up on a single stalk, plump and good. ⁶ Then behold, seven ears, thin and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them. ⁷ And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Then Pharaoh awoke, and behold, *it was a dream.*

Pharaoh was soon fast asleep again

- But he had another dream
- This dream was very similar to the first dream

² Leon J. Wood, *A Shorter Commentary on Genesis*, 132.

³ Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing*, 640.

⁴ Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 576.

In his second dream, Pharaoh didn't see two sets of seven cows

- He saw two sets of seven ears of grain

Grain symbolized food

- Food that was needed for the nation of Egypt

The first seven ears of grain that the king of Egypt saw “**came up on a single stalk, plump and good**”

- Once again, the first visual image in Pharaoh's dream was healthy and nourished

But then verse 6 introduces the second set of seven elements

- Another set of seven ears of grain were “**thin and scorched by the east wind**”
- They were not healthy ears of grain

They had also been “**scorched by the east wind**”

- This wind was known to have caused severe damage to crops⁵
- Therefore, this would have been very devastating to the food supply for that particular year

In both dreams of Pharaoh, the second set of seven items devoured the first set of seven

- The sickly cows consumed the healthy cows
- The thin ears of grain consumed the healthy ears of grain

Once again, this was so disturbing that it caused Pharaoh to awake from his dream

- It was very realistic

⁸ Now it came about in the morning that his spirit was troubled, so 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 to Pharaoh.

We are not told whether or not Pharaoh went back to sleep after the second dream

- We do know that in the morning Pharaoh's spirit “**was troubled**”

With a vast array of resources at his disposal, Pharaoh “**called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all its wise men**”

- These were the individuals who were skilled at various arts

These individuals were thought to have been a high rank of priests⁶

- They used various methods of divination to interpret dreams

Even with all their expertise and training, the magicians and wise men could not help Pharaoh

- The end of verse 8 records some pretty discouraging news, “**there was no one who could interpret**” the dreams to Pharaoh

⁵ Derek Kidner, *Tyndale OT Commentaries, Genesis*, 195.

⁶ Wood, 131.

⁹ Then the chief cupbearer spoke to Pharaoh, saying, “I would make mention today of my *own* offenses. ¹⁰ Pharaoh was furious with his servants, and he put me in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, *both* me and the chief baker. ¹¹ And we had a dream on the same night, he and I; each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his *own* dream.

The chief cupbearer was a close friend of the king

- He was one of the men who was closest to the king
- He had unique access to the king
- After all, he served as the first line of defense against someone’s plot to poison the king

Perhaps the cupbearer had heard the predicament of Pharaoh

- The cupbearer suddenly remembers Joseph!
- This is what Joseph requested back in 40:14-15

Notice how deliberately and carefully the cupbearer tells the Pharaoh about Joseph

- He has to set the context of when he came into contact with Joseph in prison

Many of the details about why the cupbearer was thrown into jail are skipped

- This is because they weren’t important at the time
- Two years had passed – no use in bringing up details of the past

The cupbearer relays to Pharaoh how he and the baker had a dream on the same night

- Each dream had its own interpretation

Do you see that the cupbearer is setting the stage?

- He was in a similar position as Pharaoh
- Having a dream, but not knowing its interpretation!

¹² Now a Hebrew youth *was* with us there, a servant of the captain of the bodyguard, and we related *them* to him, and he interpreted our dreams for us. To each one he interpreted according to his *own* dream. ¹³ And it came about that just as he interpreted for us, so it happened; he restored me in my office, but he hanged him.”

The cupbearer tells of “a Hebrew youth” who was with them

- Look back at 40:15 – Joseph told the cupbearer, “I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews”

Joseph is further described as “a servant of the captain of the bodyguard”

- This goes back to Genesis 39 where he was serving in the house of Potiphar

To make matters short, the cupbearer told Pharaoh that Joseph was capable of interpreting dreams

- Verse 13 records the accuracy of Joseph’s interpretative abilities, “And it came about that just as he interpreted for us, so it happened”

This is the person that Pharaoh needs!

- This is the solution to the problem!

God was displaying His sovereignty to Pharaoh

- Even with all his resources, the king of Egypt had a problem that he couldn’t solve
- Even with all his wise men and magicians, the king of Egypt had a dream without an interpretation

Pharaoh was made to realize that he was not sovereign

- The king of Egypt may have been idolized by the Egyptians
- But he was subject to the Almighty God

God was sovereign over Pharaoh's thoughts

- Nothing was kept secretive from God

That is a lesson that we need to learn as well

- You can't hide anything from God
- He is Lord of all – He knows everything (thoughts, motives, choices)

God is sovereign over your life

- He is in control of your thoughts (41:1-8)

II. God is in control despite your anxieties (41:14-24)

¹⁴ Then Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh.

After hearing of Joseph's abilities to interpret dreams, Pharaoh demanded to see this young Hebrew for himself

Of course, Joseph was off in prison

- He was still suffering unjustly

In an instant, Joseph went from being a nobody to a somebody

- He went from being a convicted criminal to a valued resource to the king

The king's servants "**hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon**"

- Certainly Pharaoh couldn't be kept waiting for long

We are also told that Joseph "**shaved himself and changed his clothes**"

- The Egyptians had a high regard for cleanliness

After these preparations, Joseph was ushered into the very presence of Pharaoh

- This was the most powerful man in Egypt

¹⁵ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."

No words of introduction or greeting are exchanged between the two

- The king of Egypt cuts the smalltalk

Pharaoh states his problem, "**I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it**"

- Ok, no pressure, Joseph

You have interpreted two dreams – one for the cupbearer and one for the baker

- Now Pharaoh thinks you are an expert

If you were Joseph, what would you say?

- Verse 16 tells us exactly what Joseph said...

¹⁶ Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, “It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.”

In a word, Joseph told the king, “I can’t interpret dreams!”

- What?

That’s right

- Joseph doesn’t take credit for the ability to interpret dreams

Let’s hear him out, “**It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer**”

- Joseph can’t interpret dreams
- But God can

Joseph’s focus is on the glory of God, not himself⁷

- He is not promoting himself

There is an interesting dialogue that takes place throughout Genesis 41 using the title God⁸

- Joseph oftentimes uses “**God**” with the direct article
- We might translate this, “the God” – obviously signifying the One and True God, *Elohim*

But Pharaoh refers to god using a little “g”

- In other words, Joseph’s God was merely one of the many gods that Egypt had as its disposal
- Egypt was clearly a polytheistic nation

Over and over, Joseph points to Elohim as having the power and ability to do the humanly impossible

- The king’s magicians and wise men can’t interpret Pharaoh’s dream
- Joseph can’t interpret Pharaoh’s dream
- But God can interpret Pharaoh’s dream

This is because God is Sovereign

- Not Joseph
- Not Pharaoh

Joseph is fully convinced that God will provide the answer to Pharaoh’s dream

¹⁷ So Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, “In my dream, behold, I was standing on the bank of the Nile; ¹⁸ and behold, seven cows, fat and sleek came up out of the Nile; and they grazed in the marsh grass. ¹⁹ And lo, seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and gaunt, such as I had never seen for ugliness in all the land of Egypt; ²⁰ and the lean and ugly cows ate up the first seven fat cows. ²¹ Yet when they had devoured them, it could not be detected that they had devoured them; for they were just as ugly as before. Then I awoke.

So Pharaoh begins to tell Joseph his dream

- As we compare Pharaoh’s retelling of the dream, we can see that he has added some commentary to the dreams

⁷ W.H. Griffith-Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*, 391.

⁸ Victor P. Hamilton, *NICOT, Genesis 18-50*, 496.

- In other words, there are some elements in the second version of the dreams that were not included in the first telling

By noting some of these additions and differences, we can see what made an impact on Pharaoh

- We can also see what made Pharaoh anxious and fearful

Notice verse 19, “**And lo, seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and gaunt, such as I had never seen for ugliness in all the land of Egypt**”

- Pharaoh elaborates and exaggerates the ugliness of the second set of seven cows
- He had never seen anything so disturbing in his life

Pharaoh also adds in verse 21 that after the ugly cows devoured the healthy cows, there was no visible change in the form of the ugly cattle

- This greatly perplexed and disturbed Pharaoh

²² I saw also in my dream, and behold, seven ears, full and good, came up on a single stalk; ²³ and lo, seven ears, withered, thin, and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them; ²⁴ and the thin ears swallowed the seven good ears. Then I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me.”

Pharaoh relays the second dream to Joseph

- Of this, this was the same content expressed in a different visual image

Step by step, Pharaoh was being confronted with the complexity of his dreams

- His own men couldn't interpret the dreams
- But a Hebrew slave claimed that his God could

It is clearly obvious that the king of Egypt was a powerful man

- But it is also clear that Pharaoh was a fearful man

As the king of Egypt relayed the content of his two dreams to Joseph, we can see what he emphasized

- The lean cows eating the healthy cows was very disturbing
- The thin ears of grain devouring the full ears was also disturbing

But he didn't know what it meant

- Was this dream about the king?
- Was this dream about the nation of Egypt?

Pharaoh was anxious

- He had lost sleep over this matter

Fear and anxiety are universal problems

- We all struggle with worry, to some extent
 - o Worry about our job
 - o Worry about our family
 - o Worry about our finances
 - o Worry about our nation
 - o The list is endless

Pharaoh was brought to the end of his abilities

- He was forced to realize that neither his money nor his resources held the answer to interpreting the dream
- He was at a loss as to what these dreams meant

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus spoke about anxiety

- He knew that it is very natural and common for humans to worry about things

Listen to His words that should bring a measure of comfort to your anxious hearts this morning, “**For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, *as to* what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, *as to* what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and *yet* your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a *single* cubit to his life's span? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, ²⁹ yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *do so for* you, O men of little faith? ³¹ Do not be anxious then, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘With what shall we clothe ourselves?’ ³² For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. ³⁴ Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. *Each day has enough trouble of its own*” (Mt 6:25-34)**

- Remember that you are more precious than the birds and the grass of the field
- If God takes of them – since God takes care of them – He will take care of you

Realize that God is in control of everything

- Creation
- Your body
- Your job
- Your family

Pharaoh needed to hear that God was in control

- In control of his thoughts
- In control despite his anxieties

III. God is in control of your future (41:25-36)

²⁵ Now Joseph said to Pharaoh, “Pharaoh's dreams are one *and the same*; God has told to Pharaoh what He is about to do.

Joseph boldly speaks to Pharaoh about his dream

- He doesn't seem to waste much time in interpreting the king's dream

Joseph is quick to point out that the two dreams are really “*one and the same*”

- Although there were two different dreams with different elements, the message of the dreams was the same

Furthermore, Joseph tells Pharaoh that through these dreams “**God has told to Pharaoh what He is about to do**”

- God was telling the future through these dreams
- God was in control!

²⁶ The seven good cows are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one *and the same*. ²⁷ And the seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven thin ears scorched by the east wind shall be seven years of famine.

The first elements of both dreams dealt with seven good years of abundance

- The seven good cows
- The seven good ears of grain

Joseph repeats the truth that “*the dreams are one and the same*”

- Both dreams expressed the same truth

Likewise, the second elements of both dreams dealt with seven years of famine

- The seven lean and ugly cows
- The seven thin ears

This is further confirmation that both dreams really tell the same story

- There will be seven great years of abundance
- But immediately following the seven good years will be seven years of famine

²⁸ It is as I have spoken to Pharaoh: God has shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do.

Joseph is confident about his interpretation of the dreams, “*It is as I have spoken to Pharaoh*”

- Joseph is blunt and to the point, “*God has shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do*”

Once again, Joseph stresses the sovereignty of God over the future

- Pharaoh, even though he was a powerful king, did not have power over the future
- For that matter, Pharaoh was rendered powerless to interpret his own dream

²⁹ Behold, seven years of great abundance are coming in all the land of Egypt; ³⁰ and after them seven years of famine will come, and all the abundance will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine will ravage the land. ³¹ So the abundance will be unknown in the land because of that subsequent famine; for it *will be very severe*.

Joseph reiterates the important points about the dreams

- There will be seven good years of abundance “*in all the land of Egypt*”
- But there will also be seven years of famine

The famine will be so severe that “*all the abundance will be forgotten in the land of Egypt*”

- This is what was inferred by the seven lean cows eating the healthy cows
- This is what was inferred by the seven lean ears of grain devouring the healthy ears of grain

The end of verse 30 tells us, “*the famine will ravage the land*”

- A disaster was coming to Egypt!

Notice that there is more focus placed on the years of famine than the years of abundance⁹

- The seven years of famine would be so severe that it would make the seven years of abundance pale in comparison

⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol 2*, 393.

The finality of verse 31 is shocking, “**So the abundance will be unknown in the land because of that subsequent famine; for it will be very severe**”

- However good the seven years of abundance were, they will be forgotten in the midst of the famine

This wasn't the only seven year famine that is recorded in the history of Egypt

- Listen to this account that chronicles the desperate times of the Egyptians during another seven year famine, “...the Nile had not come in my time for a space of seven years. Grain was scant, fruits were dried up, and everything which they eat was short. Every man robbed his companion...The infant was wailing; the youth was waiting; the heart of the old men was in sorrow, their legs were bent, crouching on the ground, their arms were folded.”¹⁰

³² Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, it means that the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about.

To make matters crystal clear to Pharaoh, God had repeated the dream twice

- Joseph states that the twofold repetition of the dreams indicates “**that the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about**”

There was no time for a second opinion

- There was no time for second guessing

This was a time for action!

- God was making clear what would take place in the near future

God was declaring the certainty and imminence of the famine¹¹

³³ And now let Pharaoh look for a man discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. ³⁴ Let Pharaoh take action to appoint overseers in charge of the land, and let him exact a fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven years of abundance.

Notice that Joseph goes beyond merely interpreting the dream of Pharaoh

- He actually proceeds to counsel Pharaoh
- He tells the Pharaoh what to do!

Can you imagine the scene?

- Here is Joseph, a 30-year-old slave telling the king of Egypt what to do!
- What right did he have giving Pharaoh advice?

Joseph was speaking for God

- God was gracious to warn Egypt about the coming famine
- Preparations needed to be made

First, a man needed to be put in charge over the land of Egypt

- This man needed to be “**discerning and wise**”

Second, Pharaoh needed “**to appoint overseers in charge of the land**”

- There is no way that one man could do all the work

¹⁰ John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison*, 275.

¹¹ Hamilton, 498.

In essence, Joseph was putting forth the resume of the man who should be in charge of this huge project¹²

These overseers would help to gather 20% of the abundance and set it aside for storage

- During the seven years of abundance, one-fifth (20%) of the abundance would be saved for the future

The interesting aspect about Joseph's proposal is the fact that Pharaoh has no one who fits this model!¹³

- His best magicians and wise men were not able to interpret the dream
- How can they can be trusted to save enough grain for the coming famine?

³⁵ Then let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and store up the grain for food in the cities under Pharaoh's authority, and let them guard it. ³⁶ And let the food become as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish during the famine."

Once this huge quantity of food was gathered, it was to be stored in various cities throughout the area

- Of course, these storehouses needed to be guarded, since there was the possibility for theft and looting in dire times

This stored food would be the means from which Egypt would survive during the seven awful years of famine

- If they failed to put aside a substantial amount of storage, then the land would perish

Little did Joseph realize that God was bringing his dreams to fulfillment before his very eyes

- God would raise up Joseph to be a savior for Egypt
- And not only for Egypt, but for the entire world

People would come from miles and miles around to obtain food

- And who would they have to answer to?
- None other than Joseph

Spiritual myopia can affect all of us

- We oftentimes can't see why God is doing various things in our lives
- We become discouraged, thinking that God has forgotten us
- In reality, God is merely setting the stage for future events

This morning, Genesis 41 is the corrective lens for myopia

- By looking at this Text, we are reminded of God's purposes for Joseph

God knew exactly what He was doing in Joseph's life

- Every single step was ordained by God Himself
- This is because God is in control!

We have noticed God's control in Genesis 41

- God's control of your thoughts
- God's control despite your anxieties
- God's control of your future

¹² Kenneth A. Mathews, *NAC, Vol 1B*, 761.

¹³ Hamilton, 499.

Countless individuals have been forced to acknowledge God's sovereignty¹⁴

- Pharaoh here in Genesis 41
- Pharaoh during Moses' day
- King Herod who could not stop the birth of Jesus
- Governor Pilate who had limited power over Jesus' life

But there is someone else that has to bow before God's sovereign control

- That person is you

Do you acknowledge God's sovereignty in your life?

- Have you come to understand that you are not in control?
- Have you submitted yourself to the authority and power of God?

The Bible instructs us on a number of occasions, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Jam 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5)

- How long will you attempt to stand against the almighty power of God?
- How long will you attempt to avoid the reality of God's sovereignty?

Joseph's life is an excellent illustration of the truth of 1 Peter 5:6, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time"

- Joseph humbly and patiently waited on God's timing
- In God's perfect timetable, He exalted Joseph
- We will see that next week

God's sovereignty – fact or fiction?

- This morning, we have seen that the right answer is fact

¹⁴ Ross, 637.