

Series: The Providence of God #1470

Title: Genesis 41

Joseph Becomes Prime Minister

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world! It's *so good* to have you here as another week comes to a close. I hope that you are well, and that you will enjoy the weekend upcoming. This week on *God Is* we have observed the providence of God in the life of one of His people: Joseph. He is the son of Jacob (later renamed Israel) and Rachel. And Joseph is Jacob's much beloved son, his second youngest. There are eleven other boys. And Jacob has one daughter, Dinah, from one of his other wives, Rachel's sister Leah.

This is the Joseph that so many have heard about, but perhaps you have never connected the events of his life to the providence in God's life. By providence we mean that God directs the actions of everyone and everything He has created, working all things together for God's own honor and glory. And we have seen that evil and sin are included in the providence of God. Joseph's Old Testament life proves it and a significant New Testament life will prove it again (we will meet that person next week, I believe).

Before the weekend, let's catch up with Joseph in Genesis chapter 41. And you may remember from yesterday the providential and yet difficult, suffering filled journey that our man Joe has been on. Over the course of time Joseph has gone from visiting his brothers at Dothan in Canaan, out tending sheep, to in chains and dragged as a slave down to Egypt, purchased by Potiphar and put in charge of his household, he had his reputation ripped to shreds by a lie, then exiled to jail as a prisoner, and now clean shaven and wearing the proper attire here is Joseph standing before the mightiest ruler in the world: the Pharaoh of Egypt! And all of this because God permitted evil and sin against Joseph, but then God directed, restrained and limited, and overruled such evil and sin so that here Joseph is. Right where God wants him.

In Genesis 41 Joseph correctly interprets dreams the Pharaoh has had. And it is valuable to know that Joseph credits the proper interpretation of dreams to *God*. I am reading Genesis 41, verse 16, "**Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, 'It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.'**" Who gives Joseph the proper interpretation? God does. And what these dreams reveal is alarming: there will be seven years of abundance followed by seven years of famine. In fact, the Bible says, "**Famine will ravage the land** (Genesis 41.30)."

Let's pick-up the reading in bulk today at Genesis 41, verse 38. I will read verses 38-49 for context. Genesis 41.38-49. I will comment along the way. "**Then Pharaoh said to his servants, 'Can we find a man like this, in whom is a divine spirit?' ³⁹ So Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. ⁴⁰ You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you.'**"

Do not miss that! Joseph sure did go from the jail that was in the dungeon to the master over the house of Pharaoh quickly, and why? It was because the Lord was with Joseph. That's providence, friends!

Verse 41: "**Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.' ⁴² Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put the gold necklace around his neck. ⁴³ He had him ride in his second chariot; and they proclaimed before him, 'Bow the knee!' And he set him over all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁴ Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Though I am Pharaoh, yet without your permission no one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.' ⁴⁵ Then Pharaoh named Joseph Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of On, as his wife. And Joseph went forth over the land of Egypt.**

⁴⁶ Now Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went through all the land of Egypt."

Let me insert here: Joseph was thirty at this time, and he was seventeen when his brothers sold him into slavery, so just thirteen years have passed. A lot has happened to Joseph in a short amount of time, but this is all in God's time and according to God's providential plan.

Pharaoh makes Joseph his second-in-command or the prime minister of Egypt! And that transfer of the signet ring from Pharaoh's hand to Joseph's is significant. It means Joseph has the King's authority to carry out state business on behalf of Pharaoh himself. And then bestowed on Joseph are the garments and necklace of the royal household, he is given the chariot (the second chariot for being the second in command of the whole nation), an Egyptian name (which probably means "God speaks; he lives"), and an Egyptian wife. And as Joseph traveled throughout the land the people would come and be asked to bow before him.

Back to the text at verse 47 of Genesis 41: **"During the seven years of plenty the land brought forth abundantly. ⁴⁸ So [Joseph] gathered all the food of *these* seven years which occurred in the land of Egypt and placed the food in the cities; he placed in every city the food from its own surrounding fields. ⁴⁹ Thus Joseph stored up grain in great abundance like the sand of the sea, until he stopped measuring *it*, for it was beyond measure."**

Based on the wisdom God has given to Joseph, and the authority he has been granted from Pharaoh Joseph undertakes his work as a very competent manager. He stores up food beyond measure for the seven years of famine that are about to descend upon Egypt and surrounding lands. This is a widespread famine. Drop down to verse 57 of Genesis 41 for a moment. This is verse 57, **"The people of all the earth came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the earth."**

I just love how the Bible, in one sentence, drops in such a hint of why what has been said is important. Verse 57 talks about the people of all the earth who are very hungry and you know who this includes, don't you? Yes! Joseph's father and brothers, the whole family, back in Canaan. Genesis 42, verse 1 starts, **"Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt..."** Jacob (otherwise known as Israel) has a large family to feed, but there is no food to feed them with, and so despite his reservations about sending his sons to Egypt, send them he must if they're going to eat.

And so you can see the drama taking shape. If the people of the earth come to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph and if that includes Jacob's other sons, then guess who the sons are going to meet when they get to Egypt? Oh, your mind is sharp on this Friday! Yes. The brothers are going to be reunited with Joseph, the one they now presumed dead. They are in for quite a shock, aren't they?

I will save that part of this fascinating story for Monday. Do plan to be back with us after the weekend. Here, I want to pause and reflect on what God has done. Through His sovereign and providential care for Joseph He has seen to it that Joseph is now in command of the grain at Egypt. This will be grain used to feed the people of God back in the land of Canaan as the famine also struck hard there. When Joseph's brothers buy the food, God's people will be provided for. And that will sustain this chosen race for God's honor and glory. What happens in Genesis is integral to God's perfect plan for all people, in all time, and in all places. This is the transcendent work of God in all of human history.

And, as mystifying as it may be to us, as we have seen this week, the evil of sin has its place, its use, and its purpose. God never commands sin. God never causes sin. And God never approves of sin. We have not seen Him do this in our reading this week, have we? No. But what we have seen is that God will permit, direct, limit, restrain and overrule sin. He has total, dominant power over it. And this is not only true in Joseph's life, but in yours and in mine.

Joseph has had a lot of people – even those closest to him (his brothers) – sin against him. Have you had people sin against you? Even family? Especially family? It hurts. It is terribly painful. No person wounds us as severely as a family member. And it is normal and fair to ask, how can anything good come out of this? While we should *never* imagine that God approves of the sin done against us, yet we can see (over time) how God will direct this sin for a purpose that is well beyond our comprehension to understand when we are in the thick of it.

Surely Joseph wondered what God was doing in his life? Haven't you wondered this about your life? Full disclosure: I've wondered, "Lord, what are you up to?" I've faced those moments – a crisis point where someone has sinned against me and I just cannot see how God could direct that evil for my good. We all walk by faith, not by sight, don't we?

But as we will find out next week, Lord willing, God is intimately involved in directing the actions of ourselves and others such that all things work together for our good and His honor and glory. Join me on Monday for God Is!

---END---