



# Finer Grounds Bible Study

## Genesis (Part 2)

### Lesson 9: Genesis 41:1-42:38

Life has a way of getting too busy. I am sure you ladies have experienced some of that this past week. This week we are going to see Joseph go from prison to becoming second in command of Egypt in charge of saving the whole nation from starvation. I imagine busy was an understatement for him at that time. So, take a deep breath, pray, and let's dive in!

#### Read Genesis Chapter 41:1-45

At the end of chapter 40, Joseph is sending the cupbearer off asking him to remember him and asking him to plead his case before Pharaoh. Once again Joseph waits faithfully and patiently. It will be two long years before the cupbearer will give any thought again to Joseph. I wonder how Joseph felt day after day the first few weeks or months waiting in anticipation to have a hope of release.

As you know, God sends two dreams to the leader of Egypt that trouble his spirit. The first one of seven beautiful and fat cows coming up out of the Nile followed by seven ugly and thin cows who eat up the first cows. The second one of seven fat and good ears of grain followed by seven thin and scorched ears which eat up the first ears. As an interesting side note, the "east wind" that scorches these ears could be referring to what is commonly called the Khamsin, which is an intensely hot and dry wind in North Africa that is quite oppressive and dusty. It occurs intermittently between February and June, but usually between April and June. Its name comes

from the Arabic word *khamsin* or *hamsin*, which means "fifty" probably from the approximate number of days that the wind blows. This wind can be cruel and may be what contributes to the future famine.

Pharaoh seeks the interpretation of the dreams from all of Egypt's magicians and wise men, but none of them have the answer. Finally, the cupbearer remembers the young Hebrew who interpreted his dream in prison. No one likes to bring up times in their past when they have been in trouble, but the cupbearer does so in the hopes of assisting Pharaoh in his search for an answer. When he tells Pharaoh how Joseph accurately interpreted both his and the baker's dreams, Pharaoh sends for Joseph.

Pharaoh's men "hurriedly" retrieve Joseph from prison. The NAS version says they bring Joseph out of the "dungeon". This is the same word that is also translated "pit, well, or cistern" and is indeed the same word used for the "pit" that his brothers had thrown him in about thirteen years previously. Joseph's life seems a bit like a roller coaster. One minute he is the favored son receiving special blessings from his father, the next he is in a pit in danger of being murdered by his own brothers. He becomes a slave, but then becomes head over all his master's possessions. He is falsely accused and now once again in a "pit". His circumstances change dramatically several times, but there is always one constant - God has not left him. God is the only being who



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will be with you and want you every moment of every day. He is faithful! I know I say that a lot, but that's because it is one of the biggest themes of Genesis. In fact, it is one of the biggest themes of the entire Bible – God is faithful, and we need to see it, hear it, and believe it!

They shave Joseph, most likely both his head and beard. Ancient Egyptian documents verify this was the custom of the times. After his shaving and change of clothes, he is brought to Pharaoh. Joseph's response is so wonderful to me. This is a man who has been imprisoned for over two years for a crime he did not commit. He has been brought before the king and instead of promoting himself and taking credit for the interpretation of the dreams, he chooses to lift God up. We will find out later in this chapter that Joseph was thirty years old. He really is wise beyond his years and his faithfulness and devotion are extremely commendable. He immediately lets Pharaoh know in no uncertain terms that it is God, not him, who possesses that power.

Pharaoh proceeds to describe his dreams to Joseph. Upon the revealing of their interpretation, Joseph once again emphasizes the fact that it is all about God. In verse 25, he says, “**God** has told to Pharaoh what He is about to do”. In verse 28, he says, “**God** has shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do”. In verse 32, he says, “the matter is determined by **God**, and **God** will quickly bring it about”. Joseph is not about to let Pharaoh forget that this is from God in every way. God not only allows Joseph to interpret the dreams, but he also gives him the wisdom on how to survive the impending famine.

Pharaoh has enough sense to discern that Joseph is quite obviously the best choice for

leading these endeavors to save Egypt from devastation. The Egyptians worshipped many gods and Pharaoh himself was considered a god, but he recognized that Joseph had a “divine spirit” and even acknowledges that “**God** has informed [Joseph] of all this”. He not only puts him in charge of saving grain, but Joseph becomes the second in command over all of Egypt. He gives him his signet ring which is his seal of authority. He also receives fine garments, a gold necklace and the honor of riding in Pharaoh's second chariot. Pharaoh goes so far as to say nothing will be done in Egypt without Joseph's approval. Isn't God mighty? How greatly He blesses the faithful, beyond what we could ask or imagine!

Pharaoh also gives Joseph a new name which is not only hard to pronounce, but also hard to define. Although there are some possible definitions, which you may have as a footnote in your Bible, the truth is we really do not know what that Egyptian name means. Along with an Egyptian name, he receives an Egyptian wife named Asenath, whose father is a priest of an Egyptian god. Asenath's name means “belonging to the goddess Neith”, who is yet another Egyptian god. Obviously, Joseph is becoming steeped in Egyptian culture. How hard it must have been for him to be so faithful to God when he was alone in his faith for so long in this foreign country. I do not know about you, but I am gaining an immense appreciation for this great man of faith.

God is amazing! In his roller coaster life, Joseph has now gone from prisoner to number two in the entire country within this one day. What a magnificent truth that no matter what



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your circumstances, God can change it drastically and immediately if He so chooses. That should comfort us greatly and help us to realize that nothing and no one is too desperate or “too far gone” for God to help.

**Do you think Joseph gave up on the cupbearer ever remembering him?**

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**How can we use our past sins to help others?**

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**What is your reaction when your circumstances change in a negative way?  
How about in a positive way?**

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**What do you think Joseph was thinking when Pharaoh sent for him?**

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**How do you think your conversations would change if you always gave God his due credit for your successes?**

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**If you could define Joseph with his new name, Zaphenath-paneah, what meaning would you give it to describe him?**

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**Read Genesis Chapter 41:46-42:38**

True to his character, Joseph faithfully gets to work on what he has been charged to do in order to store up during the seven plentiful years. During those seven years of plenty, Joseph fathers two sons from his wife. The first son is Manasseh, meaning “causing to forget”. Joseph was very blessed to “forget” the bad of his past, and very wise to hang on to the good – his faith in God. His second son was Ephraim, which means “fruitfulness”. God had blessed Joseph greatly. I love how Joseph gives thanks to God with both his sons’ names. He gives God the credit for forgetting his troubled past and for making him fruitful in what he calls the “land of [his] affliction”.

Strategically, Joseph saved the grain until the famine “was spread over all the face of the earth” before he started selling it to the Egyptians and others. Among those in need was his family back in Canaan. Jacob learns that there is grain in Egypt, so he sends all his remaining sons except for Benjamin to go buy some. When they arrive, they bow down to Joseph and unknowingly fulfill his prophetic dream from so many years ago.

They did not recognize Joseph. This could be for several reasons. It has been over twenty years since they have seen him. He more than likely was clean shaven like the Egyptians, which would have been very different from his Hebrew



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upbringing. To add to all of that, they also would never have expected to see him in this setting. In fact, they probably have assumed his death by now. On the other hand, Joseph has a clear advantage. They probably look a great deal like they did the last time he saw them, just a little older. He also had ten people to examine, not just one. Joseph may have believed his brothers would someday stand before him because of the famine. He had been given those dreams of ruling over his family and knew they would eventually bow down to him. Perhaps in faith, he was anticipating this very moment.

He speaks harshly to them at first, accusing them of being spies. When they describe their family, they acknowledge his existence. What emotions Joseph must have felt at them mentioning him as “no more”. After they proclaim that they have another brother at home, Joseph claims he is going to put their honesty to the test by locking all of them but one up until he returns with Benjamin. No doubt Joseph wants to see his little brother.

After three days of having all ten brothers in prison, Joseph relents and allows all but one brother to return home. He gives the reason for this change of heart because he fears God. That statement makes you wonder if he spent those three days in prayer and, as a result, found a more righteous response. I imagine if we fear God as we should we will be much more merciful to one another as well.

The brothers, being unaware that Joseph understands their language, begin to verbalize their guilt in what they did to Joseph. It is apparent that his desperate pleas on that fateful day still haunt them. It had to be a blessing from

God that He allowed Joseph to overhear their remorse and a comfort to know that Reuben had tried to save him. It is understandable that Joseph would have to turn away and weep from the emotion of it all. Here his brothers are after two decades and they too are still suffering some of the consequences of their former sins. What a lesson in how far reaching and how damaging our sins can be!

I find it compelling that throughout this story, the brothers constantly attribute their troubles to God repaying them for their sin against Joseph. It reminds me of David when he wrote in Psalm 51:3, “my sin is ever before me”. They knew they could not escape punishment and it was ever present in their hearts and minds. They once again fear what “God has done to [them]” when they find their money has been put back in their sacks. They will surely be considered thieves if they return. Things just seem to be spiraling down for them and, as a result, they become very disheartened.

Upon their return, they tell Jacob all that has taken place. He seems to give up on ever seeing Simeon again and staunchly refuses to release Benjamin. Jacob is unrelenting even when Reuben vows by the lives of his sons to return Benjamin safely. He just cannot bear the thought of losing another one of Rachel’s sons. His favoritism is still quite evident, but the other sons seem to have come to terms with it.

We end this chapter with Simeon in prison, the brothers in fear and turmoil from their past, Jacob in mourning and distress over the potential lose of another son, and Joseph reeling with emotions. What an incredible story God has weaved for these patriarchs.



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Why do you think Joseph put his brothers in prison for three days?

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Why do you think Joseph decided to only keep one brother locked up?

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Do you think there is any reason why Simeon was chosen to stay?

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List some consequences that you have endured from your former sins.

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How do you think Joseph felt to hear his brothers' confession of their treatment of him?

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What do you think life was like for Simeon during his stay in prison?

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Do you think Joseph visited Simeon in prison?

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Read James 5:16. What does confession bring and how do you think it could have helped the brothers in the beginning?

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We are closing this lesson on a cliff hanger, but don't fret, we will continue next week. I hope you will be ready to join me again as we watch God take one huge mess and, with His power and mercy, bring resolution and salvation.