

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

Pharaoh's dream of the seven well-favored and seven ill-favored kine, Genesis 41:1-4. His dream of the seven full and seven thin ears of corn, Genesis 41:5-7. The magicians and wise men applied to for the interpretation of them, but could give no solution, Genesis 41:8. The chief butler recollects and recommends Joseph, Genesis 41:9-13. Pharaoh commands him to be brought out of prison, Genesis 41:14. Joseph appears before Pharaoh, Genesis 41:15, Genesis 41:16. Pharaoh repeats his dreams, Genesis 41:17-24. Joseph interprets them, Genesis 41:25-32, and gives Pharaoh directions how to provide against the approaching scarcity, Genesis 41:33-36. Pharaoh, pleased with the counsel, appoints Joseph to be superintendent of all his affairs, Genesis 41:37-41. Joseph receives the badges of his new office, Genesis 41:42, Genesis 41:43, and has his powers defined, Genesis 41:44; receives a new name, and marries Asenath, daughter of Poti-Pherah, priest of On, Genesis 41:45. Joseph's age when brought before Pharaoh, Genesis 41:46. Great fertility of Egypt in the seven plenteous years, Genesis 41:47. Joseph hoards up the grain, Genesis 41:48, Genesis 41:49. Ephraim and Manasseh born, Genesis 41:50-52. The seven years of famine commence with great rigour, Genesis 41:53-55. Joseph opens the storehouses to the Egyptians, Genesis 41:56. People from the neighboring countries come to Egypt to buy corn, the famine being in all those lands, Genesis 41:57.

Verse 1

Two full years - שְׁנַת יָמִים שְׁנַת יָמִים (shenathayim yamim), two years of days, two complete solar revolutions, after the events mentioned in the preceding chapter.

The river - The Nile, the cause of the fertility of Egypt.

Verse 2

There came up out of the river seven well-favored kine - This must certainly refer to the hippopotamus or river horse, as the circumstances of coming up out of the river and feeding in the field characterize that animal alone. The hippopotamus is the well-known inhabitant of the Nile, and frequently by night comes out of the river to feed in the fields, or in the sedge by the river side.

Verse 6

Blasted with the east wind - It has been very properly observed that all the mischief done to corn or fruit, by blasting, smutting, mildews, locusts, etc., is attributed to the east wind. See Exodus 10:13; Exodus 14:21; Psalm 78:26; Ezekiel 17:10; Jonah 4:8. In Egypt it is peculiarly destructive, because it comes through the parched deserts of Arabia, often destroying vast numbers of men and women. The destructive nature of the simoom or smoom is mentioned by almost all travelers. Mr. Bruce speaks of it in his Travels in Egypt. On their way to Syene, Idris their guide, seeing one of these destroying blasts coming, cried out with a loud voice to the company, "Fall upon your faces, for here is the simoom! I saw," says Mr. B., "from the S. E. a haze come, in color like the purple part of the rainbow, but not so compressed or thick. It did not occupy twenty yards in breadth, and was about twelve feet high from the ground. It was a kind of blush upon the air, and it moved very rapidly, for I scarce could turn to fall upon the ground, with my head northward, when I felt the heat of its current plainly upon my face. We all lay flat upon the ground, as if dead, till Idris told us it was blown over. The meteor or purple haze which I saw was indeed passed, but the light air that still blew was of a heat to threaten suffocation. for my part, I found distinctly in my breast that I had imbibed a part of it; nor was I free from an asthmatic sensation till I had been some months in Italy, at the bath of Poretta, near two years afterwards." - Travels, vol. vi., p. 462. On another occasion the whole company were made ill by one of these pestilential blasts, so that they had scarcely strength to load their camels - ibid., p. 484. The action of this destructive wind is referred to by the Prophet Hosea 13:15: Though he be fruitful among his brethren, an East Wind shall come, the wind of the Lord shall come up From The Wilderness, and his spring shall Become Dry, and his fountain shall be Dried up: he shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels.

Verse 8

Called for all the magicians - שְׂרָפִים (sharaphim) (chartummim). The word here used may probably mean no more than interpreters of abstruse and difficult subjects; and especially of the Egyptian hieroglyphics, an art which is now entirely lost. It is most likely that the term is Egyptian, and consequently its etymology must remain unknown to us. If Hebrew, Mr. Parkhurst's definition may be as good as any: "cheret", a pen or instrument to write or draw with, and שָׂרָפָה (tam), to perfect or accomplish; those who were perfect in drawing their sacred, astrological, and hieroglyphical figures or characters, and who, by means of them, pretended to extraordinary feats, among which was the interpretation of dreams. They seem to have been such persons as Josephus (Ant., lib. ii., c. 9, s. 2) calls "sacred scribes, or professors of sacred

learning.â€•

Wise men - ם—םׁםׂם׃םׄ” (chacameyha), the persons who, according to Porphyry, â€œaddicted themselves to the worship of God and the study of wisdom, passing their whole life in the contemplation of Divine things. Contemplation of the stars, self-purification, arithmetic, and geometry, and singing hymns in honor of their gods, was their continual employment.â€• - See Dodd. It was probably among these that Pythagoras conversed, and from whom he borrowed that modest name by which he wished his countrymen to distinguish him, viz., חכמי, a philosopher, simply, a lover of wisdom.

Verse 9

I do remember my faults - It is not possible he could have forgotten the circumstance to which he here alludes; it was too intimately connected with all that was dear to him, to permit him ever to forget it. But it was not convenient for him to remember this before; and probably he would not have remembered it now, had he not seen, that giving this information in such a case was likely to serve his own interest. We are justified in thinking evil of this man because of his scandalous neglect of a person who foretold the rescue of his life from imminent destruction, and who, being unjustly confined, prayed to have his case fairly represented to the king that justice might be done him; but this courtier, though then in the same circumstances himself, found it convenient to forget the poor, friendless Hebrew slave!

Verse 14

They brought him hastily out of the dungeon - Pharaoh was in perplexity on account of his dreams; and when he heard of Joseph, he sent immediately to get him brought before him. He shaved himself - having let his beard grow all the time he was in prison, he now trimmed it, for it is not likely that either the Egyptians or Hebrews shaved themselves in our sense of the word: the change of raiment was, no doubt, furnished out of the kingâ€™s wardrobe; as Joseph, in his present circumstances, could not be supposed to have any changes of raiment.

Verse 16

It is not in me, etc. - םׁםׂם׃םׄ” (biladai), without or independently of me - I am not essential to thy comfort, God himself has thee under his care. And he will send thee, or answer thee, peace; thou shalt have prosperity (ם׃םׂם׃םׄ” (shelom)) howsoever ominous thy dreams may appear. By this answer he not only conciliated the mind of the king, but led him to expect his help from that God from whom alone all comfort, protection, and prosperity, must proceed.

Verse 18

Seven kine, fat-fleshed - See Clarke on Genesis 41:2 (note). And observe farther, that the seven fat and the seven lean kine coming out of the same river plainly show, at once, the cause both of the plenty and the dearth. It is well known that there is scarcely any rain in Egypt; and that the country depends for its fertility on the overflowing of the Nile; and that the fertility is in proportion to the duration and quantity of the overflow. We may therefore safely conclude that the seven years of plenty were owing to an extraordinary overflowing of the Nile; and that the seven years of dearth were occasioned by a very partial, or total want of this essentially necessary inundation. Thus then the two sorts of cattle, signifying years of plenty and want, might be said to come out of the same river, as the inundation was either complete, partial, or wholly restrained. See Clarke on Genesis 41:31 (note).

Verse 21

And when they had eaten them up, etc. - Nothing can more powerfully mark the excess and severity of the famine than creatures of the beeve or of the hippopotamus kind eating each other, and yet without any effect; remaining as lean and as wretched as they were before. A sense of want increases the appetite, and stimulates the digestive powers to unusual action; hence the concoction of the food becomes very rapid, and it is hurried through the intestines before its nutritive particles can be sufficiently absorbed; and thus, though much is eaten, very little nourishment is derived from it. And when they had eaten them up, it could not be known that they had eaten them; but they were still ill favored, as at the beginning. A most nervous and physically correct description.

Verse 25

God hath showed Pharaoh what he is about to do - Joseph thus shows the Egyptian king that though the ordinary cause of plenty or want is the river Nile, yet its inundations are under the direction of God: the dreams are sent by him, not only to signify beforehand the plenty and want, but to show also that all these circumstances, however fortuitous they may appear to man, are under the direction of an overruling Providence.

Verse 31

The plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following - As Egypt depends for its fertility on the flowing of the Nile, and this flowing is not always equal, there must be a point to which it must rise to saturate the land sufficiently, in order to produce grain sufficient for the support of its inhabitants. Pliny, Hist. Nat., lib. v., cap. 9, has given us a scale by which the plenty and dearth may be ascertained; and, from what I have been able to collect from modern travelers, this scale may be yet considered as perfectly correct.

Justum incrementum est cubitorum 16. Minores aquae non omnia rigant, ampliores detinent, tardius recedendo. Hae serendi tempora absumunt, solo madente, Illae non dant, sitiente. Utrumque reputat provincia. In 12. cubitis famen sentit. In 13. etiamnum esurit; 14. cubita hilaritatem afferunt; 15. securitatem; 16. delicias.

“The ordinary height of the inundations is sixteen cubits. When the waters are lower than this standard they do not overflow the whole ground; when above this standard, they are too long in running off. In the first case the ground is not saturated: by the second, the waters are detained so long on the ground that seed-time is lost. The province marks both. If it rise only twelve cubits, a famine is the consequence. Even at thirteen cubits hunger prevails; fourteen cubits produces general rejoicing; fifteen, perfect security; and sixteen, all the luxuries of life.”

When the Nile rises to eighteen cubits it prevents the sowing of the land in due season, and as necessarily produces a famine as when it does not overflow its banks.

Verse 33

A man discreet and wise - As it is impossible that Joseph could have foreseen his own elevation, consequently he gave this advice without any reference to himself. The counsel therefore was either immediately inspired by God, or was dictated by policy, prudence, and sound sense.

Verse 34

Let him appoint officers - פקידים (pekidim), visitors, overseers: translated by Ainsworth, bishops; see Genesis 39:1.

Take up the fifth part of the land - What is still called the meery, or that part of the produce which is claimed by the king by way of tax. It is probable that in Joseph’s time it was not so much as a fifth part, most likely a tenth: but as this was an extraordinary occasion, and the earth brought forth by handfuls, Genesis 41:47, the king would be justified in requiring a fifth; and from the great abundance, the people could pay this increased tax without feeling it to be oppressive.

Verse 35

Under the hand of Pharaoh - To be completely at the disposal of the king.

Verse 37

The thing was good - Pharaoh and his courtiers saw that the counsel was prudent, and should be carefully followed.

Verse 38

In whom the Spirit of God is? - רוח אלהים (ruach Elohim), the identical words used Genesis 1:2; and certainly to be understood here as in the preceding place. If the Egyptians were idolaters, they acknowledged Joseph’s God; and it is not to be supposed that they only became acquainted with him on this occasion. The knowledge of the true God was in Egypt long before; but it is very likely that though they acknowledged his influence with respect to Joseph, as they saw most clearly that he acted under an influence far beyond that of their magicians, for he interpreted dreams which they could not; yet they might, notwithstanding, have their gods many and their lords many at this time, for we know that in religious matters they were exceedingly corrupt afterwards.

Verse 40

According unto thy word shall all my people be ruled - Literally, At thy mouth shall all my people kiss. In the eastern countries it is customary to kiss any thing that comes from a superior, and this is done by way of testifying respect and submission. In this sense the words in the text are to be understood: All the people shall pay the profoundest respect and obedience to all thy orders and commands.

Only in the throne will I be greater than thou - This, in one word, is a perfect description of a prime minister. Thou shalt have the sole management, under me, of all state affairs.

Verse 42

And Pharaoh took off his ring - and put it upon Joseph's hand - In this ring was probably set the king's signet, by which the royal instruments were sealed; and thus Joseph was constituted what we would call Lord Chancellor, or Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal.

Vestures of fine linen - *shesh* (shesh). Whether this means linen or cotton is not known. It seems to have been a term by which both were denominated; or it may be some other substance or cloth with which we are unacquainted. If the fine linen of Egypt was such as that which invests the bodies of the mummies, and these in general were persons of the first distinction, and consequently were enveloped in cloth of the finest quality, it was only fine comparatively speaking, Egypt being the only place at that time where such cloth was manufactured. I have often examined the cloth about the bodies of the most splendidly ornamented mummies, and found it sackcloth when compared with the fine Irish linens. As this (*shesh*) appears to have been a part of the royal clothing, it was probably both scarce and costly. By comparing, says Parkhurst, Exodus 25:4, Exodus 26:1, with 2 Chronicles 2:14, and Exodus 26:31, with 2 Chronicles 3:14, it appears that *shesh* (but), cotton, is called *shesh*; and by comparing Exodus 28:42, with Exodus 39:28, that *bad* (bad), linen, is also called *shesh*; so that (*shesh*) seems a name expressive of either of these, from their cheerful vivid whiteness.

Put a gold chain about his neck - This was not merely a badge of office. The chain might be intended to point out the union which should subsist between all parts of the government - the king, his ministers, and the people; as also that necessary dependence which they had reciprocally on each other, as well as the connection which must be preserved between the different members of the body politic, and the laws and institutions by which they were to be governed. Its being of gold might be intended to show the excellence, utility, and permanence of a government constituted on wise, just, and equal laws. We are justified in drawing such inferences as these, because in ancient times, in all nations, every thing was made an emblem or representation of some spiritual or moral subject it is strange that, probably without adverting to the reasons, the chain of gold worn about the neck is in different nations an emblem of civil authority.

Verse 43

He made him to ride in the second chariot - That which usually followed the king's chariot in public ceremonies.

Bow the knee - *abrech* (abrech), which we translate bow the knee, and which we might as well translate any thing else, is probably an Egyptian word, the signification of which is utterly unknown. If we could suppose it to be a Hebrew word, it might be considered as compounded of *ab* (ab), father, and *rach* (rach), tender; for Joseph might be denominated a father, because of his care over the people, and the provision he was making for their preservation; and tender because of his youth. Or it may be compounded of *ab* (ab), father, and *abrech* (barech), blessing, the latter *beth* (beth) being easily lost in the preceding one; and Joseph might have this epithet as well as the other, on account of the care he was taking to turn aside the heavy curse of the seven years of famine, by accumulating the blessings of the seven years of plenty. Besides, father seems to have been a name of office, and probably father of the king or father of Pharaoh might signify the same as the king's minister among us; see on Genesis 45:8 (note). But if it be an Egyptian word, it is vain to look for its signification in Hebrew.

Verse 44

I am Pharaoh - The same as if he had said, I am the king; for Pharaoh was the common title of the sovereigns of Egypt.

Verse 45

Zaphnath-paaneah - The meaning of this title is as little known as that of *abrech* in the preceding verse. Some translate it, The revealer of secrets; others, The treasury of glorious comfort. St. Jerome translates the whole verse in the most arbitrary manner. *Vertitque nomen ejus, et vocavit eum, lingua Aegyptiaca, Salvatorem mundi.* And he changed his name, and called him in the Egyptian language, The savior of the world. None of the Asiatic versions acknowledge this extraordinary gloss, and it is certainly worthy of no regard. The Anglo-Saxon nearly copies the Vulgate: And named him in Egyptian, The healer of the world. All the etymologies hitherto given of this word are, to say the least of them, doubtful. I believe it also to be an Egyptian epithet, designating the office to which he was now raised; and similar to our compound terms, Prime-Minister, Lord Chancellor, High-Treasurer, Chief Justice, etc.

Asenath the daughter of Poti-pherah - There is no likelihood that the Poti-pherah mentioned here is the same as the Potiphar who had purchased Joseph, and, on the false accusations of his wife, cast him into prison. 1. The

Scripture gives no intimation that they were one and the same person. 2. Poti-pherah had children, and Potiphar was an eunuch; See Clarke on Genesis 37:36 (note); for though eunuchs often kept women, there is no proof that they had any issue by them.

Priest of On - For the signification of the word כֹּהֵן (cohen) or priest, See Clarke on Genesis 14:18 (note). On is rendered Heliopolis (the city of the sun) by the Septuagint and Anglo-Saxon; and it is very likely that this Poti-pherah was intendant of that nome or province, under Pharaoh.

Joseph went out over all the land - No doubt for the building of granaries, and appointing proper officers to receive the corn in every place, as Dr. Dodd has very properly conjectured.

Verse 46

Joseph was thirty years old - As he was seventeen years old when he was sold into Egypt, Genesis 37:2, and was now thirty, he must have been thirteen years in slavery.

Stood before Pharaoh - This phrase always means admission to the immediate presence of the sovereign, and having the honor of his most unlimited confidence. Among the Asiatic princes, the privilege of coming even to their seat, of standing before them, etc., was granted only to the highest favorites.

Verse 47

The earth brought forth by handfuls - This probably refers principally to rice, as it grows in tufts, a great number of stalks proceeding from the same seed. In those years the Nile probably rose sixteen cubits; See Clarke on Genesis 41:31 (note).

Verse 50

Two sons - Whom he called by names expressive of God's particular and bountiful providence towards him. Manasseh, מְנַשֶּׁה (menashsheh), signifies forgetfulness, from נָשָׁח (nashah), to forget; and Ephraim, עֲפְרַיִם (ephrayim), fruitfulness, from פָּרָה (parah), to be fruitful; and he called his sons by these names, because God had enabled him to forget all his toil, disgrace, and affliction, and had made him fruitful in the very land in which he had suffered the greatest misfortune and indignities.

Verse 54

The seven years of dearth began to come - Owing in Egypt to the Nile not rising more than twelve or thirteen cubits; (See Clarke on Genesis 41:31 (note)); but there must have been other causes which affected other countries, not immediately dependent on the Nile, though remotely connected with Egypt and Canaan.

The dearth was in all lands - All the countries dependent on the Nile. And it appears that a general drought had taken place, at least through all Egypt and Canaan; for it is said, Genesis 41:57, that the famine was sore in all lands - Egypt and Canaan, and their respective dependencies.

Verse 55

When all the land of Egypt was famished - As Pharaoh, by the advice of Joseph, had exacted a fifth part of all the grain during the seven years of plenty, it is very likely that no more was left than what was merely necessary to supply the ordinary demand both in the way of home consumption, and for the purpose of barter or sale to neighboring countries.

Verse 56

Over all the face of the earth - The original, כָּל־פְּנֵי־הָאָרֶץ (col peney haarets), should be translated, all the face of that land, viz., Egypt, as it is explained at the end of the verse.

Verse 57

All countries came into Egypt - to buy - As there had not been a sufficiency of rains, vapours, etc., to swell the Nile, to effect a proper inundation in Egypt, the same cause would produce drought, and consequently scarcity, in all the neighboring countries; and this may be all that is intended in the text.

1. As the providence of God evidently led the butler and baker of Pharaoh, as well as the king himself, to dream the prophetic dreams mentioned in this and the preceding chapter, so his Spirit in Joseph led to the true interpretation of them. What a proof do all these things give us of a providence that is so general as to extend its influence to every part, and so particular as to notice, influence, and direct the most minute circumstances! Surely God has way every where, and all things serve his will.

2. Dreams have been on one hand superstitiously regarded, and on the other skeptically disregarded. That some are prophetic there can be no doubt; that others are idle none can hesitate to believe. Dreams may be divided into the six following kinds:

1. Those which are the mere nightly result of the mind's reflections and perplexities during the business of the day.
2. Those which spring from a diseased state of the body, occasioning startings, terrors, etc.
3. Those which spring from an impure state of the heart, mental repetitions of those acts or images of illicit pleasure, riot, and excess, which form the business of a profligate life.
4. Those which proceed from a diseased mind, occupied with schemes of pride, ambition, grandeur, etc. These, as forming the characteristic conduct of the life, are repeatedly reacted in the deep watches of the night, and strongly agitate the soul with illusive enjoyments and disappointments.
5. Those which come immediately from Satan, which instill thoughts and principles opposed to truth and righteousness, leaving strong impressions on the mind suited to its natural bent and turn, which, in the course of the day, by favoring circumstances, may be called into action.
6. Those which come from God, and which necessarily lead to him, whether prophetic of future good or evil, or impressing holy purposes and heavenly resolutions. Whatever leads away from God, truth, and righteousness, must be from the source of evil; whatever leads to obedience to God, and to acts of benevolence to man, must be from the source of goodness and truth. Reader, there is often as much superstition in disregarding as in attending to dreams; and he who fears God will escape it in both.