

SUNDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY
Genesis 39-41 – Joseph Rises Again and Again

OUTLINE OF THE STORY OF JOSEPH

Genesis 37	Joseph is sold into Egypt		*Joseph has two dreams
Genesis 38	Judah and Tamar		
Genesis 39:1-19	Joseph and Potiphar	A	
Genesis 39:20-40	Joseph in Prison	B	*Fellow prisoners have two dreams
Genesis 41	Joseph in the Palace	C	*Pharaoh has two dreams
Genesis 42	First visit of Joseph's family to Egypt	A'	
Genesis 43-45	Second visit of Joseph's family to Egypt	B'	
Genesis 46-47	Third visit of Joseph's family to Egypt	C'	
Genesis 48-50	The last days and words of Jacob and Joseph		

CHAPTER 37 RECAP

So, Joseph, the dreamer, has two dreams that one day he will rule over his brothers. As a result of his arrogance, he is betrayed by his brothers and sold to a caravan of Ishmaelites on their way to Egypt. His brothers take his coat, dip it in goat's blood, and present it to their father suggesting that Joseph, his favorite son, has been eaten by a wild animal. Jacob tears his clothes and goes into mourning and no one can console him. "Meanwhile the Midianites sell him in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard" (E Source; Genesis 37:36).

GENESIS 39 – Joseph and Potiphar's Wife

When we pick up again in chapter 39, after a brief interlude, we once again learn about the sale to Potiphar who bought Joseph from the "Ishmaelites" (J Source; Genesis 39:1). God blesses Joseph and blesses Potiphar for Joseph's sake. In verses five and six, we learn that Joseph is trustworthy and that Potiphar trusted Joseph with everything that he had. At the end of verse six, we learn that Joseph is handsome and good-looking. And then in verse 7, here comes trouble.

Potiphar's wife notices Joseph and wants him. But he rebuffs her advances day after day until one day, she grabs his robe and he runs out of the house naked. "Seizing" the opportunity to get back at Joseph, she calls her servants and accuses him of doing exactly what she had been asking. Potiphar is not pleased. Joseph can't catch a break and is put in prison. But even in prison, God blesses him, and the chief jailer puts Joseph in charge of all the prisoners and it goes well for everyone. Joseph, again, is a man placed in charge of many things and he prospers.

GENESIS 39 (NRSV)

¹ Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. ² The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master. ³ His master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hands. ⁴ So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him; he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. ⁵ From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. ⁶ So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge; and, with him there, he had no concern for anything but the food that he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking. ⁷ And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." ⁸ But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, with me here, my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my hand. ⁹ He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" ¹⁰ And although she spoke to Joseph day after

day, he would not consent to lie beside her or to be with her. ¹¹ One day, however, when he went into the house to do his work, and while no one else was in the house, ¹² she caught hold of his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. ¹³ When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, ¹⁴ she called out to the members of her household and said to them, "See, my husband has brought among us a Hebrew to insult us! He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice; ¹⁵ and when he heard me raise my voice and cry out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside." ¹⁶ Then she kept his garment by her until his master came home, ¹⁷ and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to insult me; ¹⁸ but as soon as I raised my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside."

¹⁹ When his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, saying, "This is the way your servant treated me," he became enraged. ²⁰ And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; he remained there in prison. ²¹ But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. ²² The chief jailer committed to Joseph's care all the prisoners who were in the prison, and whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. ²³ The chief jailer paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph's care, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.

Source Theory: J Source – normal; E source = **Bold**; P Source = *italicized*; Redactor = ***Bold Italicized***

Things to note:

The presence of YHWH is with Joseph (See Genesis 39:2). It doesn't matter where Joseph finds himself, God is with him. And because of that, Joseph is a successful man, much like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob before him. Potiphar recognizes his success and promotes Joseph and makes him steward over everything he owns (Genesis 39:4-6). Joseph was extremely honored in Potiphar's house. There is no one greater than he in the household. And notice what YHWH does for Joseph's sake. God blesses Potiphar's house and God's blessing is on everything Potiphar owns, in house and field.

This is an echo of what happened in the life of Jacob while he was living and working with Laban. In Genesis 30:27 we read that God blessed Laban because of Jacob's presence in his house. So there is a deliberate parallel between Israel and Joseph.

Potiphar is called שֵׁר הַטְּבָחִים which could be translated as "the chief of the cooks" or also "the chief of the bodyguards" – or literally even "executioners" (Genesis 37:36). But, if Potiphar's job is as "chief of the cooks" and he was in charge of everything related to Pharaoh's food, it's ironic that year's later Pharaoh will appoint Joseph as the administrator of all things related to food for the entire nation of Egypt (and the surrounding world).

Of course, Potiphar's wife takes notice and is attracted to him. But Joseph shows his loyalty to Potiphar by declining her advances. Like Adam in the Garden of Eden, there was only one thing that was strictly forbidden to Joseph in Potiphar's house. Where Adam failed by eating from the forbidden fruit, Joseph succeeds by avoiding sexual contact with the one woman who was forbidden to him. Joseph, as a true son of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, must not fail where their ancestor Adam did. And of course, this is in direct contrast to the story of Judah in the previous chapter.

Notice also that Joseph is aware of God's presence with him. He is convinced that no matter where he is, God is with him, not only in his success and prosperity, but also in moments of temptation and responsibility. This knowledge of God being with him helps serve as a moral compass that provides guidance. But, it doesn't matter. She grasps hold of some "evidence" and convinces her husband that Joseph made advances towards her instead of the other way around. And Joseph is thrown into Pharaoh's prison. In Genesis 39:21 we read that "the LORD was with Joseph," even in prison. And once again, he prospers and people recognize it and give him great authority and responsibility.

GENESIS 40 – Cupbearer and Baker’s Dreams

The king of Egypt’s cupbearer and baker offend the king, and both are put in prison. The captain places them under the care of Joseph. They both have a dream and are troubled. So, Joseph interprets their dreams for them. Good news for the cupbearer and Joseph asks him to put in a good word with Pharaoh about Joseph. Bad news for the baker who is hanged. When the cupbearer was restored, he forgot about Joseph. Does this remind us of the book of Daniel?

GENESIS 40 (NRSV)

¹ Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker offended their lord the king of Egypt. ² Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, ³ and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. ⁴ The captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he waited on them; and they continued for some time in custody. ⁵ One night they both dreamed—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—each his own dream, and each dream with its own meaning. ⁶ When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. ⁷ So he asked Pharaoh’s officers, who were with him in custody in his master’s house, “Why are your faces downcast today?” ⁸ They said to him, “We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them.” And Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me.”

⁹ So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, “In my dream there was a vine before me, ¹⁰ and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms came out and the clusters ripened into grapes. ¹¹ Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand.” ¹² Then Joseph said to him, “This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days; ¹³ within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you shall place Pharaoh’s cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. ¹⁴ But remember me when it is well with you; please do me the kindness to make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this place. ¹⁵ For in fact I was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon.”

¹⁶ When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, “I also had a dream: there were three cake baskets on my head, ¹⁷ and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head.” ¹⁸ And Joseph answered, “This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days; ¹⁹ within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a pole; and the birds will eat the flesh from you.”

²⁰ On the third day, which was Pharaoh’s birthday, he made a feast for all his servants, and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. ²¹ He restored the chief cupbearer to his cupbearing, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand; ²² but the chief baker he hanged, just as Joseph had interpreted to them. ²³ Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Source Theory: J Source – normal; E source = **Bold**; P Source = *italicized*; Redactor = ***Bold Italicized***

Pharaoh gets upset with his מִשְׁקֵה (mishkeh) “cup bearer” and אֹפֵה (ofeh) “baker” who serve in his royal court. He puts them in prison and Joseph is assigned to take care of them. When they each have disturbing dreams and no one is there to interpret them, Joseph insists that they tell him because “Surely God can interpret them” (Genesis 40:8).

In Egypt, the interpretation of dreams was regarded as a science, and formal instruction in techniques of dream interpretation was given in schools called “houses of life.” Joseph contradicts their Egyptian notion about dreams and insists that his God can interpret them. When the chief cupbearer tells Joseph his dream, Joseph says that in three days, the man will be restored to his place of honor. When the chief baker tells Joseph his dream, Joseph says in three days the man will be hung to death (Genesis 40:9-13).

It's interesting that when Joseph told his dreams to his family in Genesis 37, the family understood their meaning right away. No interpretation was needed. But the Egyptians in this story need help interpreting their dreams.

Joseph asks the cupbearer for a favor, that the cupbearer would remember him when he returns to Pharaoh's service (Genesis 40:14-15). But the cupbearer forgets and forgot about him (Genesis 40:23). The phrases used here are לא־זָכַר (lo zakhar), which means "did not remember" and יָשַׁכְחֵהוּ (yishkachehu), which means "forgot about him." This concept of forgetfulness is set in opposition to the familiar idea of God's remembrance of Noah, Lot, and Rachel. When Noah, his family and his animals were in the ark, the Hebrew text states that יָזַכַּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נֹחַ (yizkor Elohim et Noach) "God remembered Noah." God spared Lot from being judged together with the evil inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah because He remembered Abraham (Gen. 19:29). The Hebrew phraseology in that case is remarkably similar to the case of God remembering Noah: יָזַכַּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־אַבְרָהָם (yizkor Elohim et Avraham). When Leah bore Jacob six sons and one daughter while Rachel remained barren in utter distress, we are told in Hebrew יָזַכַּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־רָחֵל (yizkor Elohim et Rachel) - "God remembered Rachel."

The phrase about remembering looks backwards to when God remembered Joseph's ancestors and it looks forward to when God will remember the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Egyptian captivity and act on their behalf (Exodus 2:24; 6:5). The "God remembered" concept functions as a synonym for "God acted on their behalf." When God remembered Noah, the waters of the flood receded. When God remembered Abraham, his nephew Lot was taken to safety. When God remembered Rachel, he opened her womb. By the same token, when the chief cupbearer "forgot" and "did not remember," it's more about the cupbearer didn't act upon Joseph's request rather than he didn't remember it. The cupbearer never told Pharaoh about Joseph. And it cost Joseph, who spent two more years of his life in jail.

GENESIS 41 – Pharaoh's Dreams and Joseph's Rise

Two years pass and then Pharaoh has two dreams: cows in the first and grain in the second. Pharaoh is troubled, and no one can interpret his dreams for him. But then the cupbearer remembers Joseph and tells Pharaoh and Joseph is summoned to the dungeon. Joseph insists that God is the interpreter of dreams, not him. So, Pharaoh retells the story of his dreams. The dreams are about feast and famine; seven good years followed by seven bad years. He tells Pharaoh that God is going to do this and so he had better plan and store up food for the famine.

Pharaoh is pleased and places Joseph in charge of his household and gives him his signet ring. He gave him the name "Zaphenath-paneah" (which might mean "The god speaks and he lives") and gave him the daughter of a priest as a wife. Joseph went around in those seven years and stored up more grain than could be counted. He had two sons, Manasseh (which means "making to forget") and Ephraim (which means "to be fruitful"). Famine then strikes all over, but Egypt is prepared and Pharaoh sends his people to Joseph. Joseph opens up the storehouses and people from all the world come to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain.

GENESIS 41 (NRSV)

¹ After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, ² and there came up out of the Nile seven sleek and fat cows, and they grazed in the reed grass. ³ Then seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. ⁴ The ugly and thin cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. And Pharaoh awoke. ⁵ Then he fell asleep and dreamed a second time; seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. ⁶ Then seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind, sprouted after them. ⁷ The thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Pharaoh awoke, and it was a dream. ⁸ In the morning his spirit was troubled; so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

⁹ Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "I remember my faults today. ¹⁰ Once Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard. ¹¹ We dreamed on the same night, he and I, each having a dream with its own meaning. ¹² A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each according to his dream. ¹³ As he interpreted to us, so it turned out; I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged."

¹⁴ Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was hurriedly brought out of the dungeon. When he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. ¹⁵ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." ¹⁶ Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." ¹⁷ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "In my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile; ¹⁸ and seven cows, fat and sleek, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass. ¹⁹ Then seven other cows came up after them, poor, very ugly, and thin. Never had I seen such ugly ones in all the land of Egypt. ²⁰ The thin and ugly cows ate up the first seven fat cows, ²¹ but when they had eaten them no one would have known that they had done so, for they were still as ugly as before. Then I awoke. ²² I fell asleep a second time and I saw in my dream seven ears of grain, full and good, growing on one stalk, ²³ and seven ears, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprouting after them; ²⁴ and the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. But when I told it to the magicians, there was no one who could explain it to me."

²⁵ Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dreams are one and the same; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁶ The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. ²⁷ The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, as are the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind. They are seven years of famine. ²⁸ It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁹ There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. ³⁰ After them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; the famine will consume the land. ³¹ The plenty will no longer be known in the land because of the famine that will follow, for it will be very grievous. ³² And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about. ³³ Now therefore let Pharaoh select a man who is discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. ³⁴ Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land, and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plenteous years. ³⁵ Let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and lay up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. ³⁶ That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to befall the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine."

³⁷ The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. ³⁸ Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find anyone else like this—one in whom is the spirit of God?" ³⁹ So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. 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." ⁴¹ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." 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. 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. 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." 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.

⁴⁶ *Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went through all the land of Egypt.* ⁴⁷ During the seven plenteous years the earth produced abundantly. ⁴⁸ He gathered up all the food of the seven years when there was plenty in the

land of Egypt, and stored up food in the cities; he stored up in every city the food from the fields around it.

⁴⁹ So Joseph stored up grain in such abundance—like the sand of the sea—that he stopped measuring it; it was beyond measure.

⁵⁰ Before the years of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphara, priest of On, bore to him. ⁵¹ Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house.” ⁵² The second he named Ephraim, “For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes.”

⁵³ The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; ⁵⁴ and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every country, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. ⁵⁵ When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do.” ⁵⁶ And since the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. ⁵⁷ Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world.

Source Theory: J Source – normal; E source = **Bold**; P Source = *italicized*; Redactor = ***Bold Italicized***

Let’s see, Joseph had two dreams. The cupbearer and chief baker had two dreams. And now Pharaoh has two dreams. And we learn once again about the incompetence of anyone in Egypt to interpret them. Everyone else has failed. And that’s when the chief cupbearer gets the courage to speak up for Joseph, the Hebrew slave locked up in prison (Genesis 41:9-13). It’s interesting that the dungeon in Genesis 41:14 is called בּוֹר (bor) “pit.” This is the exact same word as used in Genesis 37: 24 to describe the dried-up well that Joseph’s brothers used to confine him.

Once Joseph was cleaned up and prepared to enter the King’s presence he was ushered in without much delay. His head was shaved and new clothes were given to him (Gen.41:14). “In the ancient Near East, only the Egyptians were clean-shaven, and the verb used here can equally refer to shaving the head, or close-cropping it, another distinctive Egyptian practice.” The new garments on Joseph were probably necessary, but the listeners of the story are probably meant to remember also all the stories of Joseph’s garments. His special garment got him into trouble with his brothers. It was taken from him and dipped in blood to deceive his father. Joseph’s garment was used by Potiphar’s wife to accuse him. Each time Joseph was thrown into a dark place his garment was taken from him. Now a garment is restored to him. When Pharaoh elevates him later in the story, Joseph will receive another special garment worthy of an Egyptian aristocrat and ruler.

Pharaoh has received a report that Joseph possesses the ability to interpret dreams, but Joseph responds that “only God himself” אֱלֹהִים (biladay Elohim) will answer regarding the שְׁלוֹם (shalom) “well-being” of Pharaoh. It is possible that Joseph’s refusal to claim that he interprets dreams himself has to do with the divinity claims of the Pharaoh himself. For Joseph, the Pharaoh was not divine. It would be God who will answer Pharaoh. When Pharaoh told Joseph the content of both dreams, Joseph told him that the two dreams are really the same one repeated. The meaning of the dreams is that God has decided to show Pharaoh his plans for the next 14 years. The double dreaming confirms the irreversibility of this message and that it is imminent. It will surely come to pass (Genesis 41:25-32). The dream, in fact, was a sign of God’s favor upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt. Now that the Pharaoh has been informed of God’s plans, preparations could be made to avoid an economic catastrophe. While providing the interpretation, Joseph also suggested a plan to Pharaoh – the purposeful and consistent saving of extra grain that will be received in the next seven coming harvest seasons to insure future prosperity (Genesis 41:33-36). And so, with his royal advisors council, Pharaoh places Joseph in charge of this project immediately (Genesis 41:37-38) and makes him second-in-command in Egypt, stating that only Pharaoh’s throne will separate the authority of Joseph from that of Pharaoh.

We read in Genesis 41:40:

אֶתְּהַיְהִי עַל־בֵּיתִי וְעַל־פִּיךָ יִשְׁקָ כָּל־עַמִּי רַק הַכֶּסֶף אֲגַדֵּל מִמֶּךָ

You shall be in charge of my court, and by your command shall all my people be directed; only with respect to the throne shall I be superior to you.” (Gen. 41:40)

The Hebrew *אתה תהיה על-ביתי* (atah tiyeh al beti) literally means “you will be over my house.” And *על-פיך ישק כל-עמי* (al pikha yishek kol ami), which is very difficult to translate literally, perhaps means something like “over your mouth/according to you will all people kiss [i.e., be ruled].” Pharaoh’s words were not empty. He proceeded to grant Joseph formal authority in Egypt. Joseph will govern Egypt in every way but just coming short of being Pharaoh. These words reflect the state of things that had been at Potiphar’s house. Joseph had had responsibility over almost all of Potiphar’s affairs (Gen. 49:4).

ויאמר פרעה אל-יוסף ראה נתתי אתך על כל-ארץ מצרים
Pharaoh further said to Joseph, “See, I put you in charge of all the land of Egypt.” (Gen. 41:41)

ויסר פרעה את-טבעתו מעל ידו ויתן אתה עלי-יד יוסף וילבש אתו בגדי-ישש וישם רבד הזהב על-צווארו
And removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph’s hand; and he had him dressed in robes of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck. (Gen. 41:42).

Joseph once again gets new clothes and is now clearly in charge. Pharaoh summarizes the level of authority he granted Joseph by stating in Genesis 41:44:

אני פרעה ובלעדיך לא-יגרים איש את-ידו ואת-רגלו בכל-ארץ מצרים
“I am Pharaoh; (yet) without you, no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.” (Gen. 41:44)
Royal decrees in the ancient Near East regularly began with the formula: I am King X. Therefore, the sense here would be: By the authority of the Pharaoh, I declare that without you...” It is interesting that the same phraseology *בלעדיך* (biladekha) “without you” that is used in reference to Joseph by Pharaoh, was used by Joseph to say that “only God” could interpret Pharaoh’s dreams *בלעדי אלהים* (biladi Elohim). It is possible that the use of this phrase is intentional. The Torah writer may be drawing a connection here between Joseph’s complete reliance and honor of God and Pharaoh honoring of Joseph with great authority in Egypt.

“Joseph will indeed rule, just as his brothers feared (Gen. 37.8, 10 - 11), but with this crucial qualification: His rule will be rooted not in sheer power, but in the benefit he provides to the less fortunate. This corresponds to an ideal of kingship widespread in the ancient Near East, in which the king is the rescuer and servant of the people.” As a sign of Joseph’s new identity Pharaoh gave Joseph a new name. He called him Zaphenath-Paneah (*צפנת פעה*). Although there is no agreement among Egyptologists as to what this name may actually mean, one fitting, but only possible suggestion is that *צפנת פעה* is a Hebrew transliteration of Egyptian for “God speaks, he lives.” In Gen. 42:6 Joseph’s brothers bowed to him, and Hebrew uses the same verb for this act as in Gen. 37:9-10 where Joseph’s dreams are described.

Joseph was roughly thirty years old when all of these things took place (Gen. 41:26). His new job involved a lot of traveling. He was supervising the entirety of Egypt to reach a very important point – enough provisions saved to survive a regional famine. Just as everything prior that Joseph put his hand to, this nationwide project was also destined for great success. In Genesis 41:38 Pharaoh asks a rhetorical question: *הנמצא כנה איש אשר רוח אלהים בו* “Could we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God?” (Gen. 41:38) Almost identical words were said about a craftsman named Bezalel in Exodus 31:2. It is ironic that Joseph’s family did not recognize (or admit) these traits in him, but Pharaoh did.

During the first seven years, Joseph’s Egyptian wife Asenath bore him two sons. He called the firstborn son “Manasseh” *מנשה* (Menasheh), which translated means “(God) has caused me to forget” – *כי-נשני אלהים* (ki nashani Elohim) – the hardship of the past and my parental home. The second son’s name has a more positive meaning, described in the text as “God made me fruitful.” The meaning of Joseph’s sons’ names has to do with his awareness that it was God who set him free and made him fruitful in Egypt (Gen. 41:51-52). The fertility of all Israelites in the land of Egypt will eventually prove to be a mixed blessing, because it is precisely when the Israelites were very fertile that a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph, and he enslaved the Israelites (Ex. 1:7- 8).

As seven fruitful harvest years came to an end, it became obvious that Joseph was not crazy and that Pharaoh was right to appoint him to the task of setting aside food. When the famine hit Egypt also and the people began to experience hunger, Pharaoh directed people to ask Joseph, by telling them to “do whatever he tells you” אֲשֶׁר-יֹאמַר לְכֶם תַּעֲשׂוּ (asher yomar la-khem taasu). Joseph rationed out the grain and not only did the Egyptians come to Joseph, but the rest of the Mediterranean world did, too. The hunger becomes unbearable for Joseph’s family in Canaan. Everything is set in motion for the eventual meeting of Joseph with his brothers as well as Joseph and his beloved father.