

NEW COLLAR JOB

GENESIS 41:1-45 DECEMBER 7, 2022

In 1896, a young man named Gregorio del Pilar enlisted in the Philippine Revolutionary Army. Two years later, at 23 years old, he was promoted to the rank of brigadier-general and made governor of a province north of Manila.¹

He made a name for himself for violent feats during the Revolution. He once single-handedly ambushed a priest and his escort of guards. He led troops in a surprise attack against a group of Spanish soldiers who were attending a late-night mass.² But a year after his promotion, Gregorio was killed by US forces during the Philippine-American War.

Gregorio's leap from poverty to power is dramatic but nothing can compare with what Joseph would experience in Genesis 41. In one day, he went from prisoner to Prime Minister of the most powerful nation on earth. The title prime minister puts Joseph's aggrandizement into perspective. When I think of a prime minister, I think of power and authority. But Joseph was not being made into a brigadier-general, whose job it is to slay. He was being empowered to *minister* - to serve.

Joseph was brought *out* of prison, but he wasn't set free. He was given a duty and an opportunity to save many lives. He would carry out that duty for 80 years. The job had perks and comforts, to be sure, but the rest of his days would be defined by serving and *saving* lives.

This text contains beautiful parallels of Jesus' glorification and future rule. At the same time, we can find application for our own lives as we study Joseph's example. And that makes sense because even though we are *not* Christ, we *are* His Body and we follow after Him, doing the work He started. So, Joseph can stand for us as both a type of our Lord and an example for us.

Genesis 41:1a - At the end of two years Pharaoh had a dream:

In my version, the chapter opens with those three words: "At the end." Joseph still has a deep and abiding faith in God but I'm *sure* he was wondering, "When will my suffering end?"

God has explained to us that suffering will be a part of *all* our lives, but *one day* it's going to come to an end. He will deliver us from every sorrow, every pain, every doubt, and every difficulty.

Joseph suffered as a prisoner and slave for thirteen long years. But the dawn of a new day was about to break. He was going to be rescued from pit to palace. Now, consider our coming rescue from earth to heaven, from mortality to immortality, from sinful imperfection to perfect glory.

Genesis 41:1b-7 - [Pharaoh] was standing beside the Nile, ²when seven healthy-looking, well-fed cows came up from the Nile and began to graze among the reeds. ³After them,

¹ <https://www.1898miniaturas.com/en/2017/gregorio-del-pilar-boy-general/>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregorio_del_Pilar#Philippine_Revolution

seven other cows, sickly and thin, came up from the Nile and stood beside those cows along the bank of the Nile. ⁴The sickly, thin cows ate the healthy, well-fed cows. Then Pharaoh woke up. ⁵He fell asleep and dreamed a second time: Seven heads of grain, plump and good, came up on one stalk. ⁶After them, seven heads of grain, thin and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up. ⁷The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven plump, full ones. Then Pharaoh woke up, and it was only a dream.

This was more than a bad dream. These images were *full* of significance to Pharaoh. The Nile was the source of Egypt's agriculture, power, and wealth.³ Cows were the symbol of the god Isis.⁴ The number seven was a sacred number, sometimes symbolizing fate.⁵ Wheat was "utilized at all levels and in all spheres of ancient Egyptian society."⁶ Bread and beer were served at nearly every meal and they were often used as wages and the basis of the bartering economy.⁷

The "east wind" would've been known to Pharaoh. In that era, desert winds would blow in during the spring or autumn and could dry up vegetation overnight.⁸ That sort of wind is referenced in Ezekiel, Jonah, and Isaiah. But, thanks to the Nile, Egypt was normally able to weather famines.⁹

Pharaoh jolted awake for a second time that night and, it says, "It was just a dream." If only that were true. You see, God was revealing that a coming disaster. The nightmare was going to become very real. In fact, the *reality* was going to be much worse than the dream had been.

God has revealed to *our* world that a judgment is coming. It will be poured out on the whole world. He tells us not to terrify us, but to *warn* us so that disaster might be averted for individuals who will believe God and call out to Him. This has always been the Lord's heart. Through this dream He is reaching down with mercy and grace to an unbelieving king of an unbelieving nation.

Genesis 41:8 - ⁸When morning came, he was troubled, so he summoned all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him.

Remember: dream interpretation was a *science* in this society. These magicians were celebrated professionals. They had piles of scrolls on how to make sense of dreams at their disposal.¹⁰ They trained in the "Houses of Life."¹¹ This was *their* moment! But they had no help for Pharaoh. What a shockingly embarrassment this would have been.

³ Bruce Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary*

⁴ Gordon Wenham *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 2: Genesis 16-50*

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Serena Kleeman *Barley And Wheat In Ancient Egypt*

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Wenham

⁹ *The NET Bible First Edition Notes*

¹⁰ *CSB Study Bible Notes*

¹¹ Robert Alter *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation With Commentary*

The humiliation is compounded when we realize that Pharaoh *himself* was supposed to be the incarnation of the god Horus.¹² The name Horus means, “he who is above.”¹³ But there, in the court of the most powerful ruler on earth, full of wizards and divine incarnations everyone comes up empty. Instead of answers, there was only fear. Instead of confidence, there was only the admission that none of them knew *what* the truth was or *what* they should do about it.

You see, without *truth*, power could not save them from what was coming. And so, Pharaoh trembled. Literally the phrase means, “his spirit *pounded*.”¹⁴ In *this* moment, the butler speaks up.

Genesis 41:9-13 - ⁹Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, “Today I remember my faults. ¹⁰Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and he put me and the chief baker in the custody of the captain of the guards. ¹¹He and I had dreams on the same night; each dream had its own meaning. ¹²Now a young Hebrew, a slave of the captain of the guards, was with us there. We told him our dreams, he interpreted our dreams for us, and each had its own interpretation. ¹³It turned out just the way he interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was hanged.”

On the one hand, his forgetfulness almost led to the destruction of an entire nation. On the other hand, even though he wasn’t a certified wise man, he had the only piece of hopeful and helpful information. *He* could point the way to the one who might make sense of the mess.

Everyone chides the butler for not remembering Joseph. But, think about it - you were sent to prison and *almost* got your head cut off. Then you are brought back to your job. Are you *really* going to say, “Hey there’s this *other* guy you should let out of prison, too!”

The butler encourages me because he shows that you and I can be used in spite of our shortcomings. We may be boneheads from time to time, we may lack certification or worldly qualifications, but we know the One Who has the answers, don’t we? Point people to Him and *He* will know what to do in their hour of need. He solves problems. He brings clarity. He intervenes.

The question was: Would Pharaoh humble himself to get help? This was the problem Naaman had in 2 Kings. He needed help. But he almost died a leper because of pride. Pharaoh would have to say, “Yes, bring the filthy, foreign slave and let’s hear what *he* thinks about my dream.”

The butler called out Potiphar in verse 12. Maybe Pharaoh pulled him aside and said, “What’s with this Hebrew kid?” It would’ve been an interesting scene. But, as Bruce Waltke points out, eyewitness testimony paved the way to accept what God was trying to tell them.

God wants to make *you* an eyewitness of His power, His grace, His goodness, and His truth. That testimony has power as we confidently proclaim, “I *know* the Person with the answers.”

¹² Faithlife Study Bible Notes

¹³ <https://www.historymuseum.ca/cmhc/exhibitions/civil/egypt/egcrgh3e.html>

¹⁴ Alter

Genesis 41:14 - ¹⁴Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and they quickly brought him from the dungeon. He shaved, changed his clothes, and went to Pharaoh.

They probably shaved his face *and* his head.¹⁵ Everything about this little montage highlights the speed and urgency of the situation. Joseph received no heads up this was coming. It just *happened* all of a sudden. It's a lovely reminder that, in some near moment, we will be caught up from the pit of earth and ushered into the glory of heaven. We'll be given a new body, a robe of righteousness, and we'll be presented before the King, to be in His presence forever and ever.

Genesis 41:15-16 - ¹⁵Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said about you that you can hear a dream and interpret it." ¹⁶"I am not able to," Joseph answered Pharaoh. "It is God who will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."

Joseph is under a *lot* of pressure. The palace is full of magi and scholars and officials and nobility. And the king says, "I just have to tell you my dream and you'll know exactly what it means, right?"

Amazingly, Joseph is not tongue-tied, he's not nervous, he doesn't crumple under the pressure. He responds, "No, you're wrong about that." Scholars tell us that his reply, "I am not able to," is *one* Hebrew word.¹⁶ So, not only is he not nervous, he has the courage to *correct* Pharaoh to his face.

Joseph says a lot with few words. He is absolutely confident in the Lord. He believes that God is present and reliable. He says, "God gave you this dream, so I assume He will give an interpretation for you." Joseph believed God wanted to communicate *peace* to Pharaoh. We learned a lot about this on Sunday in our study through John 20. Where it says, "God will give a favorable answer" (or your version may say "an answer of peace"), it's that Hebrew word, *Shalom*. God's desire was to speak to them about their welfare, their wholeness, how they could be at peace with Him.

Genesis 41:17-24 - ¹⁷So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile, ¹⁸when seven well-fed, healthy-looking cows came up from the Nile and grazed among the reeds. ¹⁹After them, seven other cows—weak, very sickly, and thin—came up. I've never seen such sickly ones as these in all the land of Egypt. ²⁰Then the thin, sickly cows ate the first seven well-fed cows. ²¹When they had devoured them, you could not tell that they had devoured them; their appearance was as bad as it had been before. Then I woke up. ²²In my dream I also saw seven heads of grain, full and good, coming up on one stalk. ²³After them, seven heads of grain—withered, thin, and scorched by the east wind—sprouted up. ²⁴The thin heads of grain swallowed the seven good ones. I told this to the magicians, but no one can tell me what it means."

The world offers you its wise men, its magicians, and sages. The Bible always presents them as insufficient. Jannes and Jambrees, the wise men of Babylon, Balaam the diviner, Simon the

¹⁵ See *Wenham, Waltke*

¹⁶ Kenneth A. Mathews *The New American Commentary Volume 1B: Genesis 11:27-50:26*

sorcerer. They had power, position, prestige, but when push comes to shove, they cannot deliver the truth. Joseph didn't mock them, but he didn't cower before them, either. *He knew God, they didn't.* And so, he wasn't afraid to speak the truth with heavenly authority.

Genesis 41:25 - ²⁵Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dreams mean the same thing. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do.

Since God was so concerned that the Egyptians know about this famine, why not just *stop* it from happening? The Lord obviously wanted to bring *deliverance*, so why not just cancel the wind? After all, *this* event is what would bring the family of faith to Egypt leading to their captivity for 400 years.

Bruce Waltke has an interesting speculation that makes sense. You see, Abraham understood the importance of staying separate from the Canaanites. So did Isaac and Jacob. But now, Jacob's *sons* had given up on separation. Several of his sons married Canaanite wives. Perhaps the Lord brought His people to Egypt to keep them from assimilating into the pagan cultures around them. The Egyptians kept the Hebrews sequestered - they wouldn't even eat with them.

This famine also drives home the fact that *some* judgments will not be called off. When Jonah went to Nineveh he said, "Forty days and then blammo." But they repented, so God called off the demolition of the city. But when God says, "Christ is coming back to judge the world," there is no calling it off. The *only* hope is deliverance and salvation. We need to take God's warnings seriously.

Genesis 41:26-32 - ²⁶The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads are seven years. The dreams mean the same thing. ²⁷The seven thin, sickly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven worthless heads of grain scorched by the east wind are seven years of famine. ²⁸"It is just as I told Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁹Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt. ³⁰After them, seven years of famine will take place, and all the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. The famine will devastate the land. ³¹The abundance in the land will not be remembered because of the famine that follows it, for the famine will be very severe. ³²Since the dream was given twice to Pharaoh, it means that the matter has been determined by God, and he will carry it out soon.

There was not a moment to lose. Yes, the problem was still *years* down the road, but the time for response was *now*. The same is true as we present the Gospel. The Gospel is the message of warning and mercy from God that we deliver to unbelievers, right? We tell them that judgment is coming for this world and for them, individually - that they will stand before God and face His wrath for sin unless they are born again. That may be 5 years, 15 years, 50 years from now. But *now* is the time. *Today* is the day for salvation. God is long-suffering, but there isn't a moment to lose.

Genesis 41:33-36 - ³³"So now, let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and set him over the land of Egypt. ³⁴Let Pharaoh do this: Let him appoint overseers over the land and take a fifth of the harvest of the land of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. ³⁵Let

them gather all the excess food during these good years that are coming. Under Pharaoh's authority, store the grain in the cities, so they may preserve it as food. ³⁶The food will be a reserve for the land during the seven years of famine that will take place in the land of Egypt. Then the country will not be wiped out by the famine."

Joseph tells Pharaoh, "This famine is coming, it's from God, it can't be stopped." And then he says, "So now you have the choice whether you're going to *do* something about it or not." Pharaoh was a man with a free will to choose. Would he believe and respond or would he harden his heart, mock God, and be destroyed? A very similar situation plays out between Daniel and King Belshazzar. Daniel says, "Judgment is coming." Belshazzar laughed. He didn't believe and was consumed.

R. Kent Hughes writes, "*The knowledge of what God is going to do does not produce passive resignation but aggressive action. The fact that God has set the future is a mighty summons to action.*"¹⁷

It was Pharaoh's job to ensure people didn't starve during a famine.¹⁸ And there is God, reaching down in Pharaoh's moment of helplessness, providing a way for people to live and not die. But Pharaoh would have to believe and respond. He would have to humble himself before God.

Joseph, for his part, wasn't one of these guys who holds a sign that says, "The end is near!" He steps past judgment and says, "...and *here's* what you should do since God is trying to save you!" Joseph had a plan for life, not just a warning about death. He offered compassion and hope.

Genesis 41:37-44 - ³⁷The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants, ³⁸and he said to them, "Can we find anyone like this, a man who has God's spirit in him?" ³⁹So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one as discerning and wise as you are. ⁴⁰You will be over my house, and all my people will obey your commands. Only I, as king, will be greater than you." ⁴¹Pharaoh also said to Joseph, "See, I am placing you over all the land of Egypt." ⁴²Pharaoh removed his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, clothed him with fine linen garments, and placed a gold chain around his neck. ⁴³He had Joseph ride in his second chariot, and servants called out before him, "Make way!" So he placed him over all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁴Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh and no one will be able to raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt without your permission."

Christ came to us as an innocent Outsider. He was mistreated, falsely accused, went into the grave, and came out and Lord and King forever. Now we're called to bow our knees, make the paths straight before Him, and acknowledge His goodness, His power, and His authority.

There are some thoughts for our own lives here as well. When we're elevated into glory, we will be given treasures and invited to rule alongside the King in His Kingdom.

¹⁷ R. Kent Hughes *Genesis: Beginning And Blessing*

¹⁸ John Goldingay *Genesis*

Joseph was given a gold chain. This is not the typical word for chain. Archaeological discoveries show it was a wide collar that covered part of the shoulders and upper neck.¹⁹ In fact, in the Septuagint, the term is usually rendered as “yoke.”²⁰ It’s not jewelry, it’s a job collar. But, wouldn’t Joseph be *happy* to take this yoke after what he had been through?

A fellow soldier who watched Gregorio del Pilar die recounted, “*He wore a new khaki uniform with his campaign insignia, his silver spurs, his polished shoulder straps, his silk handkerchiefs, his rings on his fingers. Always handsome and elegant!*” But his body would lay unburied for days on the battlefield. He lived by the sword and died by the sword.

God has saved us, set us free, lifted us, so that we might serve Him. Jesus said, “I’m going to put a yoke on you, but it’s a *glorious*, yoke. Take it and put it on and learn from Me and find rest for your soul.” We are not set free so that we can do whatever we want and live to enrich ourselves while the world burns away. God has set apart our lives so that we can be the witnesses, we can be the helpers, we can give the answers to those who are so desperately in need. It’s a big job, but God will always equip us for it. He equips us with a robe of righteousness and His authority and a yoke.

Genesis 41:45 - ⁴⁵Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah and gave him a wife, Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest at On. And Joseph went throughout the land of Egypt.

This is an interesting development. Pharaoh wanted to make Joseph like one of his own. One commentator writes, “*His clothing was Egyptian, his name was Egyptian, his language was Egyptian, his wife was Egyptian, [his job was Egyptian], and his father-in-law was the leading Egyptian sun-worshiper. Joseph’s soul was in greater peril than at any other time in his short life.*”²¹

Would he remain true to the Lord now that he had wealth and honor and fame and freedom? We’ll see that he names his sons Hebrew names and he makes his family swear they will bury him in the promised land. He traded rags for riches, but he didn’t trade Jehovah for Ra. His faith survived the promotion.

We’re not sure what this new name of his means. There’s a lot of debate. One scholar writes, “*Joseph’s [new] name in any language seems associated with life.*”²²

Hopefully *our* names are associated with life, too. Be about *life*. Be about saving life. Be about eternal, everlasting life, not the death of this world. Joseph left the dungeon and went *right* on the job, We’re told he went throughout the land. It wasn’t for sightseeing. He had to get going on his plan to save the world. We want to be ministers of life. If God wants to promote us in an earthly sense, great. If not, we know the ultimate promotion is coming and it’s worth the work, it’s worth the wait, it’s worth whatever we can give as we trust Him and allow Him to use us for His glory.

¹⁹ Alter

²⁰ Susan Brayford *Genesis*

²¹ Hughes

²² Brayford