Week 6: *Genesis 41:1-36*

**Hook**

*All for good*

_the story of Joseph in Genesis*

**Main Point:** God is working all things together for His plan. He uses His people to accomplish His purposes, and sometimes even uses supernatural means.

Rube Goldberg (1883–1970) was a Pulitzer Prize winning cartoon artist, known for outrageous cartoons that featured outrageous, complicated inventions to solve a task. These became so popular that people have taken to bringing these inventions to life in what are known as “Rube Goldberg Machines” (here’s an example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yw4IJJXPTJXk).

*Teacher, search for a video of a Rube Goldberg machine and play it for your group.*

Q: If you could commission one of these contraptions to solve a problem for you, what would you like it solve?

Q: What was the most interesting or unexpected element of the Rube Goldberg machine?

Q: Describe a time when God’s creativity was on display in your life, accomplishing His plans in a way that you didn’t expect.
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Book

Main Point: God is working all things together for His plan. He uses His people to accomplish His purposes, and sometimes even uses supernatural means.

Text Summary: Two years after the cupbearer was restored to his position in Pharaoh’s house, Pharaoh had some disturbing dreams that his magicians couldn’t interpret. This made the cupbearer remember Joseph and they sent for him. Joseph correctly interpreted the dream, giving credit to God alone for the power to do so. Then, he even suggested a solution to Pharaoh, to prepare for the famine foretold in the dream.

Genesis 41:1-8 [Read]

Talking Point 1: In the Scriptures, God spoke through dreams – but it was rare.

“After two whole years ...” refers to how long it has been since the cupbearer was restored to his position, but had forgotten Joseph (40:23). Even after Joseph successfully interpreted his dreams, and we thought things were looking up for him again, he spends two more years in prison! Joseph’s trajectory was not a diagonal line from the pit to Pharaoh’s palace. His whole life was a series of ups and downs.

Q: What made Pharaoh think these particular dreams were significant?

In Scripture, significant dreams are quite rare, just over 20 times—six of which happen in the story of Joseph! Each time a significant dream was recorded in Scripture, it had the following characteristics:

- It was dreamed by a significant person—a king, a patriarch, Pharaoh’s servants, the Magi, Jesus’ earthly father, Joseph. Only once is it not someone significant—an unknown man in the foreign army, but the dream was overheard by Gideon, who was a significant character in Israel’s story (Judg. 7:9–14).
- A prophet or an angel or the dreamer themselves were given an interpretation by God
- The thing dreamed about came true
- The thing dreamed about was a significant event that greatly affected the future of God’s people

Today’s passage presents a specific story of one time when God said He was giving someone a dream and He also gave the interpretation for this dream; the dream was for a very important reason, which impacted the entire trajectory of God’s people and the world. This is not an open invitation to all of us to start interpreting every dream we ever have, as if they are all direct
communication from God. God says in His Word that He does speak to His prophets through dreams and visions (Num. 12:6; Hos. 12:10), but that doesn’t mean that every dream we ever have is from God.

While it is possible for God to speak to us through dreams and visions today, it isn’t something that happens every day. But we can hear God speak to us every single day by reading His Word to learn what He is saying to us (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

Q: What would you recommend to a believer who says they “aren’t hearing from the Lord”?

Q: Read John 10:1–16. How can we recognize God’s voice?

Genesis 41:9–16 [Read]
Talking Point 2: God’s power is superior to any other supernatural power in the world.

Q: What does it say to you that Pharaoh’s magicians and wise men couldn’t interpret the dreams?

Q: Why does Joseph give God all the credit for interpreting Pharaoh’s dream?

In the ancient Near East, dreams were believed to be communication from the gods. Double dreams were considered especially significant. The culture believed that gods communicated through dreams, but did not reveal their meanings; they had to be interpreted. However, it was unusual in Egypt for the pharaoh to need an interpreter, because he was considered divine, he should have understood the dreams himself.

But Pharaoh didn’t understand these dreams and they bothered him so much (v. 8) that he sent for the professional magicians and wise men. Note that the text says “all” the magicians and wise men and then “there was none” (v. 8). Genesis is emphasizing the fact that Pharaoh tried everything, and there was no one in Egypt who could interpret these dreams. God would prove Himself to be superior to all of the greatest magicians of Egypt.

The chief cupbearer had forgotten about Joseph (Gen. 40:23), but the dream triggered his memory (vv. 9–13). There was someone in prison who might be able to help. The cupbearer was explicit in saying it was a young Hebrew, and a slave (v. 12). Neither his ethnicity/religion nor his social status seemed to matter to Pharaoh. He just wanted someone who could interpret the dream! Joseph is also explicit in saying that it isn’t he who has the power, but God Himself (v. 16). The text is being deliberate in pointing out how God’s power is superior to the power and wisdom of the Egyptians – even their magicians and even their pharaoh, who was worshipped as a god.
God’s law was very clear in outlawing practicing magic, calling it an abomination (Deut. 18:9–14; Lev. 19:31). In Isaiah, God says that compared to God’s power, these sorceries are “like stubble, the fire consumes them” (Isa. 47:12–15). God tells the people not to inquire of the mediums and necromancers, but instead inquire of God (Isa. 8:19). Magic is yet another way to try to be our own gods. Instead of trying to do magic spells, we should ask God for His power and wisdom. Instead of trying to predict the future, we should trust in God to control it.

Q: Read Ephesians 6:10–18. What are the spiritual weapons we can use to fight evil in spiritual warfare?

Q: Where else in Scripture do we see God challenge and defeat magicians?

Q: Why doesn’t God want us to get involved with magic?

Genesis 41:25-36 [Read]

Talking Point 3: When God does speak through dreams, it is to get the attention of someone for an important reason.

This brings us back to the first point of the lesson—God does speak through dreams, but it’s rare. And when He does, it’s for a big reason. We can see now why God gave Joseph those significant dreams at the beginning of the story (Gen. 37) and why God gave Joseph the ability to interpret the cupbearer and baker’s dreams in prison (Genesis 40). That was setting Joseph up for this moment, to interpret this really important dream that would save God’s chosen people (Gen. 41:57).

The interpretation of the dream is that Egypt will go through seven years of plenty and then seven years of famine (vv. 25–31). The first dream features cows, which were a symbol of fertility and prosperity. The second dream featured ears of “corn,” not the modern American version of corn, but grains of wheat. Egypt was known to all as the granary of the ancient world. The doubling of the dream means this is fixed by God; it cannot be changed, and it will come about shortly (v. 32). Joseph then suggests that Pharaoh plan ahead for the famine by keeping reserves during the years of plenty (vv. 34–36).

Q: If God hadn’t given Pharaoh this dream, what would have happened?

Q: Why would God target Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to share this information? Why not just tell Jacob and his family—God’s chosen people?

Q: Why did Pharaoh believe Joseph at this point in the story?
This dream was an intentional dramatic way to get Pharaoh’s attention, to make him put a plan in place to save God’s people from famine, and even save Egypt and other nations (v. 57). Egypt was the superpower of the time and would have been most effective at saving enough food for themselves and other nations who would also be experiencing famine.

Scholars disagree about whether “all the earth” in vv. 56–57 literally refers to every nation on earth or whether it is more figurative, meaning all of the eastern Mediterranean region, the countries surrounding Egypt. Those who see this as a worldwide famine see Joseph as an antitype of Noah, building storehouses just as Noah built his ark. Either way, whether it was the entire world, or figuratively “all the earth” because it was all of the eastern Mediterranean region, it shows that God’s plan saved more than just God’s chosen people. He saved the Egyptians and other nations as well. This points back to God’s original covenant with Abraham, that through blessing him, God would bless all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:1–3).

Egypt’s management of the Nile River and its predictability made it a “breadbasket” for the rest of the ancient Near East. The climate and the regular flooding of the Nile made it an ideal place for larger agricultural communities with fresh soil and moisture. The Egyptians grew an exorbitant amount of food compared to other nations. Egypt had many storehouses in strategic cities in each region (Ex. 1:11).

This wasn’t the first time the patriarchs had gone to Egypt during a famine. Abraham did it (Gen. 12:10). Isaac would have done it also except that God told him not to go there as his father had done, so he went to the Philistines instead (Gen. 26:2). Famine was a regular thing in much of the ancient Near East (it happens 17 times in the Bible) and Egypt was usually well stocked even when other places were in famine. Yet, this time, God was warning Pharaoh that the famine would be so severe that even Egypt would run out of food!

Q: What does it say about God that He chooses to use Pharaoh, the king of the enemy, to save His chosen people?

Q: What does it say about God’s love for the whole world? About His plan to bless the whole world through the family of Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3)?

God was quite strategic in choosing to reveal this information to Pharaoh. And He used a method that would have really gotten Pharaoh’s attention. And He orchestrated events to put Joseph in front of Pharaoh at this moment and make it so that Pharaoh believed Joseph. All that Joseph had gone through up to this point was made worth it in this one moment.

All of this points again to God’s sovereignty—the main theme of this story—that God works all things in our lives for good (Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28). God is sovereign over all things. God is the One who orchestrated every aspect of Joseph’s life to get him into the right place at the right
time. God is the One who used the past heartbreak of the cupbearer and of Joseph to accomplish His purposes. How is God working in your life to use your past heartbreak for good? How is He orchestrating events in your life to accomplish His purposes?


Q: What does this say about how believers should balance wise planning with storing up treasures in heaven?

Q: What does it mean to store up treasures in heaven? How can we do that?

Q: If you really trusted that God was using everything in your life for good, that He was orchestrating everything in your life to accomplish His good purposes, how would you change the way you lived?
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**Took**

**Main Point:** God is working all things together for His plan. He uses His people to accomplish His purposes, and sometimes even uses supernatural means.

William Cowper was an English poet in the 18th century who was determined to take his own life. In despair, he tried to drown himself in the Thames only to find a man standing watch and the Thames too low to drown in. He returned home and attempted to poison himself but couldn’t move his hand to his mouth, as if someone was holding his arm down. He finally attempted to hang himself and the rope snapped. Cowper gave up. He eventually struck up a friendship with a celebrated Anglican preacher, John Newton (author of the hymn “Amazing Grace”). With a newfound faith and friendship, Cowper teamed with Newton to write nearly 350 hymns. One of these works, written by Cowper, is titled “Light Shining Out of Darkness”; the hymn details the incredible journey on which God prevented Cowper’s suicide attempts and led the man to where he needed to be. The hymn opens with a line so well known, it’s often mistaken for Scripture: “God moves in a mysterious way…” ix

**Q:** Do you find that God has moved in mysterious ways in your life?

**Q:** What people has God used to accomplish His purposes in your life?

**CHALLENGES:**

**THINK:** *What is God saying to me?* Maybe God won’t give you a significant dream or vision, but God is trying to speak to you. How can you listen for His voice and how can you recognize His voice when you “hear” it? How does studying Scripture help us to know what God is saying to us? What other spiritual disciplines can you practice to better hear God’s voice?

**PRAY:** *For God to use me to accomplish His plan* — That God will put you in the right place at the right time, like Joseph and Pharaoh, to be used by Him to accomplish His plan. That God will give you the eyes to see and the ears to hear what He would have to you to do. That God would give you the humility to give Him all the glory as Joseph did.

**ACT:** *Practice listening:* Take time this week to practice Christian meditation. Christian meditation is not like Eastern meditation—you are not trying to empty your mind, you are trying to *fill* your mind with Scripture. You are not “seeking the god within”; you are listening for God’s voice. Be still and listen. Read Scripture and meditate on it; think about it; repeat it over and over; listen to it; pray it; and memorize it.
9 https://www.guideposts.org/faith-and-prayer/bible-resources/is-that-in-the-bible