

Mikketz

מִקֶּצֶן

“At the end”

Genesis 41:1 – 44:17

Torah Together



The circumstances in Joseph’s life take a dramatic turn for the better in this *Torah* portion. After being in the hopeless position of an Egyptian slave for many years, he suddenly finds himself blessed beyond his dreams. It must have been a great feeling for Joseph to have his faith validated and to see that God really was working in his life all along.

1. Pharaoh’s Dreams - 41:1-40

a) Describe Pharaoh’s dreams. Why do you think that the magicians and wise men could not interpret the dreams? Could you have interpreted these dreams?

Pharaoh’s two dreams were similar in nature, with seven fat cows (seven healthy heads of grain) being followed and consumed by seven ugly, emaciated cows (seven withered heads of grain). The magicians and wise men could not interpret them because “interpretations are from God.”

b) Who suggested that Joseph might be able to interpret the dreams? How long had it been since Pharaoh’s cupbearer was in prison?

The cupbearer, who had forgotten about Joseph when he was in prison two years earlier, suddenly remembered him and that he could interpret dreams.

c) What was Joseph’s response when Pharaoh asked if he could interpret his dreams?

Joseph said, “I cannot interpret dreams, but God will give me the interpretation,” giving the credit to Whom it was due.

Dreams from God

We all dream, usually nightly, and most of our dreams are not messages from God. However, the Bible has a great many examples of God using dreams to communicate with people, both believers and non-believers. Notice that if God gives the dream, He will also provide for the interpretation for that dream, as Joseph correctly states in **Genesis 41:16.**

“Pharaoh said . . . ‘The Spirit of God lives in him!’”

Genesis 41:38

Joseph's Interpretation

The interpretation that Joseph gave Pharaoh fits the dreams very well, including the fact that the dreams also included God's instructions for dealing with the upcoming famine. However, it is unlikely that anyone could have come up with such an interpretation without inspiration from some external source. Therefore, it is reasonable that Pharaoh would assume that "the spirit of God" was in Joseph.

Historical Evidence for Joseph

Other than the Bible, there is very little written history available from this period, some 3800 years ago. Therefore, there is a fair amount of disagreement among scholars concerning the authenticity of the story of Joseph. However, the details of the story fit well with the 12th Dynasty in Egypt sometime during the 19th century bce. There is an increasing amount of archeological evidence that supports the Biblical account and strongly suggests that Joseph did indeed serve the Pharaoh in this position.

d) Analyze Joseph's interpretation of the dreams. What was the significance of the fact that both dreams had the same message? How do the dreams suggest the action that Pharaoh should take?

Verse 32 says that the reason both dreams were the same is indication that God will certainly bring it to pass and very soon. The fact that the gaunt cows ate the fat ones and that the withered heads of grain ate the full ones showed that God intended that the food from the seven rich years be used to live on during the seven years of famine.

e) Was Pharaoh impressed with Joseph's interpretation? What qualifications did Joseph have that made him suitable for the job of managing Egypt at this time?

Pharaoh clearly recognized that the interpretation was correct and was in awe of Joseph who could provide such an interpretation. He was convinced that the "Spirit of God" (or the 'spirit of the gods') was on him and thus he was the most qualified man for the job of managing Egypt through the famine.

2. Joseph in Charge of Egypt - 41:41-57

a) What was Joseph's position in Pharaoh's government? What was the significance of the signet ring? What was the reason for the chariot ride?

Joseph was 'second in command' after Pharaoh, sometimes called 'vizier' or 'viceroy'. The signet ring allowed Joseph to write government decrees that would have the authority of Pharaoh. The chariot ride was to present Joseph to the population and verify that Pharaoh had indeed raised a former slave to this position so that no one would challenge Joseph's authority.

b) What was the significance of Joseph's new Egyptian name? Who was his new wife?

Joseph was given an Egyptian name to give him added respect in the government. Zaphenath-Paneah means "he who explains what is hidden." His wife, Asenath, was the daughter of a priest of Ra, the Egyptian sun god whose city of worship was On, or Heliopolis.

c) How old was Joseph at this time? About how many years had he been in Egypt? What did he name his two sons? What was the significance of their names?

Joseph was 30 at this time (verse 46) which implies that he had been in Egypt about 13 years. Manasseh means "God has made me forget" my troubles, and Ephraim means "God has made me fruitful" in the land of my suffering.

d) How well did Joseph do with his "famine relief" plan? What were the results?

Joseph's famine relief plan worked well. The end result was that the Pharaoh became the owner of all the land.

3. Joseph's Brothers go to Egypt - 42:1-38

a) Why did Joseph's brothers go to Egypt? Which ones went and why just these?

All of Joseph's brothers except Benjamin went to Egypt to buy grain. Jacob feared for Benjamin's well-being.

b) When they arrived in Egypt, what prophecy was fulfilled? Of what were they accused?

Joseph's brothers bowed down to him as his dream had foretold. Joseph accused them of being spies.

c) How did Joseph plan to 'test' whether or not they were being truthful? What other reasons might he have had for doing this? Why do you think he chose Simeon to remain in prison?

If they would return with their other brother (Benjamin), then Joseph would believe them. Had he revealed himself to them, they may not have told Jacob that he was still alive.

d) What does the exchange related in verses 21 & 22 reveal about Joseph's brothers?

Their consciences still bothered them about what they had done.

Joseph's Assimilation

Once Joseph had been elevated to second in command of Egypt, it was no longer an option for him to return to his family and his former way of life. For the rest of his life, he was a part Egyptian society. So he received an Egyptian name, an Egyptian wife and no doubt underwent other changes that typified the Egyptian ruling class.

Why Didn't His Brothers Recognize Joseph?

When Joseph's brothers last saw him, he was still a young teenager. The years that passed had undoubtedly changed Joseph's appearance substantially. Furthermore, Egyptian culture at the time involved facial make-up, tattoos, and articles of clothing that would have made Joseph look much different. Finally, since they had sold Joseph as a slave, his brothers certainly would not expect to see Joseph in a position of authority in Egypt.

Jacob's Fearfulness

Jacob was clearly afraid of sending Benjamin with his brothers on the trip to Egypt in search for food. He probably had several good reasons for this fear. He couldn't bear to lose the only remaining son of his beloved wife, Rachel. He may also have doubted that his sons would watch out for Benjamin as carefully as he wanted. However, Jacob's fearfulness would have a significant effect on the brothers. They would realize that their father had still not recovered from the loss of Joseph. They might also believe that he blamed them in some way for Joseph's death and that they couldn't be trusted. All of this would increase the tension between Jacob and his sons. It must have been a very difficult decision for Jacob to allow his sons to take Benjamin with them on the second trip to Egypt.

e) Why do you think Joseph had their money put into the sacks of grain? What was the reaction of his brothers and of Jacob? Why?

Joseph may simply have wanted to bless them. They were afraid because they knew that they could be accused of treachery by Joseph.

f) What was Jacob's assessment of their situation? Was he justified in fearing for Benjamin's life? What was Reuben's offer? Was it a serious offer?

Every time he sent his sons on a journey, one of them didn't come back. Reuben offered to have his two sons put to death if he didn't return with Benjamin. It was a "rhetorical" offer.

4. The second journey to Egypt - 43:1-34

a) What finally made Jacob decide to send his sons back to Egypt? Who argued that Benjamin should accompany them and what were his reasons? Why do you think Jacob agreed this time but not when Reuben first suggested it?

When they ran out of food Jacob had no choice but to send the brothers back to Egypt. Judah told Jacob that it was of no use to return without Benjamin because the governor (Joseph) said that he wouldn't see them otherwise. Judah offered to personally guarantee Benjamin's safety. Judah had lost two sons and could understand Jacob's concerns.

b) What do you think about the gift that Jacob sent with his sons? Why did he send them with twice the money? What was the idea behind all of this?

Jacob's choice of gifts was tasteful, suitable to be given to a man of wealth. The double money was to pay for the first food given them. The whole idea was to be courteous and assure no fault could be found in them.

c) When the sons arrived in Egypt, what happened first? Why were they frightened? What happened to put them at ease?

Upon arrival, they were ushered into Joseph's home for a meal. They thought perhaps they were to be taken captive. Joseph's servant told them that he had been paid for their first food and not to worry about the situation.

d) Before the meal, why was Joseph overcome with emotion? Why didn't he eat with his brothers? What was the "coincidence" that occurred at the meal?

Joseph was overcome at the sight of Benjamin, whom he hadn't seen for ~ 15 years. The custom was that Egyptians didn't eat with foreigners. Joseph had the 11 brothers seated according to the order of their birth.

e) Why do you think that Benjamin received five times as much food as the others?

Joseph may have favored Benjamin to see if his brothers would be jealous.

5. A Silver Cup in a Sack - 44:1-17

a) Why do you think Joseph chose to put his silver cup in Benjamin's sack?

He wanted to create a situation in which his brothers would be forced to defend Benjamin to test their commitment to him.

b) What rash statement did the brothers make when accused of stealing the cup?

They said, "If one of us has stolen the cup, he will die and the rest of us will become your slaves."

c) What was their attitude when they faced Joseph? What punishment did they suggest?

They were contrite and pled for mercy. Judah suggested that they would all become Pharaoh's slaves.

d) What was Joseph's plan for punishment? How would this affect the brothers? Jacob?

Joseph suggested that he keep the guilty party, Benjamin, and that the others go back home. This would devastate Jacob.

The Big Test

Although it may have been a little confusing up to this point, it is now clear that Joseph had been creating the different situations for his brothers to bring them to this critical test: Would they abandon one of their own brothers to Egyptian slavery as they had done to him so many years earlier? Joseph desperately wanted to know if his brothers had had a change of heart or if they had the same selfish and insensitive hearts they did some fifteen years ago.

In His Brothers' Shoes

Imagine how his brothers must have felt when Joseph's said, "Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found with the cup [Benjamin] will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to you father in peace." **Genesis 44:17** Suddenly, they were facing a repeat of the scene in which they had told Jacob of Joseph's death. (**Genesis 37:31-35**) Could they cause their father such pain a second time in his life?

Digging deeper

1. Joseph was overcome with emotion several times during his meetings with his brothers. Why do you think he didn't identify himself right away? What was he trying to determine with the situations he created and the trials he put his brothers through?

Joseph wanted to determine if his brothers' hearts had changed. He wanted to determine whether or not they were sorry for what they had done to him. If their attitude had not changed and he had revealed himself to them, they might have tried to continue to deceive Jacob concerning Joseph's death. He also wanted to see if they were as jealous of Benjamin as they were of him.

2. There are many similarities between the story of Joseph's life and the life of Yeshua. Compare and contrast these two stories and list as many similarities & differences as you can.

	Joseph	Yeshua
<i>Beloved by their fathers</i>	Gen 37:3	Matthew 3:17
<i>Regarded themselves as shepherds</i>	Gen 37:2	John 10:11-14
<i>Sent by their father to their brothers</i>	Gen 37:13-14	Luke 20:13; Hebrews 2:12
<i>Hated by their brothers without cause</i>	Gen 37:4,5,8	John 1:11, 7:5, 15:25
<i>Plotted against by their brothers</i>	Gen 37:20	John 11:53
<i>Severely tempted</i>	Gen 39:7	Matthew 4:1
<i>Taken to Egypt</i>	Gen 37:26	Matt 2:14-15
<i>Stripped of their robes</i>	Gen 37:23	John 19:23-24
<i>Sold for the price of a slave</i>	Gen 37:28	Matthew 26:15
<i>Bound</i>	Gen 39:20	Matthew 27:2
<i>Remained silent, offered no defense</i>	Gen 39:20	Isaiah 53:7
<i>Falsely accused</i>	Gen 39:16-18	Matt 26:59-60
<i>Experienced God's presence throughout</i>	Gen 39:2; 21, 23	John 16:32
<i>Respected by their jailers</i>	Gen 39:21	Luke 23:47
<i>Placed with two prisoners, one later lost, the other saved</i>	Gen 40:2,3	Luke 23:32
<i>Both ~30 at beginning of their ministry</i>	Gen 41:46	Luke 3:23
<i>Both highly exalted after their sufferings</i>	Gen 41:41	Phil 2:9-11
<i>Both took non-Hebrew brides</i>	Gen 41:45	Eph 3:1-12
<i>Both lost their brothers for a time</i>	Gen 42:7-8	Rom 10:1-3; 11:7-8
<i>Both forgave & restored repentant brothers</i>	Gen 45:1-15	Zech 12:10-12
<i>Both visited and honored by earthly nations</i>	Gen 41:57	Isaiah 2:2-3; 49:6

Also see Acts 7:9-16 and Psalm 105:16-22

For further study, see
Haftarah : 1 Kings 3:15-4:1
Brit Hadashah : Acts 7:9-16