

## Joseph (Part 2)

During our last lesson, we followed the first part of the story of Joseph, also called Yusuf, one of the most noble people in the Bible or the Qur'an. We saw Joseph, at the age of 17, sold into slavery by his jealous brothers and taken to Egypt. Far from the father who loved him and who now believed him to be dead (torn to pieces by wild animals), Joseph was re-sold and became the servant of Potiphar, who was head of Pharaoh's guards.

Due to his intelligence, his integrity and God's favor, Joseph prospered in the house of his master, who had complete confidence in him and made him manager of all his affairs. But when Joseph refused the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife, she falsely accused him of trying to rape her. Her furious husband had Joseph locked in the prison where prisoners of the king were detained. So the young man endured a grave injustice for having wanted to keep his behavior honorable toward his master and toward his God. But despite the misfortunes of the moment, he was not abandoned. On the contrary, God watches over him and little by little carries out a great plan. Joseph had no way of knowing how important that plan was.

So let's resume the reading of the narrative in Genesis 39:21–40:15.

### JOSEPH IN PRISON

"Now Joseph was there in prison. But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible for it. The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph's authority, because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper...

Then the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison, had a dream, both of them, each man's dream in one night and each man's dream with its own interpretation. And Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and saw that they were sad. So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in the custody of his lord's house, saying, 'Why do you look so sad today?' And

they said to him, 'We each have had a dream, and there is no interpreter of it.' So Joseph said to them, 'Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell them to me, please.'

Then the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, 'Behold, in my dream a vine was before me, and in the vine were three branches; it was as though it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and its clusters brought forth ripe grapes. Then 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.' And Joseph said to him, 'This is the interpretation of it: The three branches are three days. Now within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your place, and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand according to the former manner, when you were his butler. But remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house. For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I have done nothing here that they should put me into the dungeon.'" (Genesis 39:21b–40:15)

When the king's baker saw that the other had received a favorable interpretation of his dream, he explained his own dream to Joseph. Joseph gave him the explanation but the news was not good. The baker would be hung from a tree, and birds would eat his flesh. Three days later, as Joseph had said, Pharaoh restored the cupbearer to his duties, and he hung the baker. However the cupbearer forgot Joseph and did not talk about his case to Pharaoh.

### JOSEPH FREED AND RAISED TO A POSITION OF DIGNITY

Two years later, Pharaoh himself had a dream in which he saw seven beautiful, fat cows coming out of the river. They were followed by seven lean cows, who ate the first cows. However, one would not have believed that the skinny cows had eaten the fat ones, for they remained as skinny as before. Then he had another dream which was similar to the first. This time Pharaoh saw seven beautiful ears of wheat, which grew on the same stalk. Then seven more ears sprouted, stunted and dried out by the desert wind. The stunted ears gobbled up the beautiful, full ones.

As soon as it was daylight, the worried Pharaoh called all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. He told them his dreams, but no one could tell them their meaning. This is when the cupbearer remembered Joseph, who had interpreted his dream when he was in prison, and he told the king about this.

“Then Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and they brought him quickly out of the dungeon; and he shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that you can understand a dream, to interpret it.’ So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, ‘It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace.’”

After listening to Pharaoh tell what he had seen in his dreams, Joseph told him:

“The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do: The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads are seven years; the dreams are one. And the seven thin and ugly cows which came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty heads blighted by the east wind are seven years of famine. God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do. Indeed seven years of great plenty will come throughout all the land of Egypt; but after them seven years of famine will arise, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine will deplete the land...

‘Now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, to collect one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. Then that food shall be as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish during the famine.’

So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, ‘Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?’ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Inasmuch as God has shown you all

this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you.’ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.’ Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, ‘Bow the knee!’ ...

Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt. Now in the seven plentiful years the ground brought forth abundantly. So he gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities... Joseph gathered very much grain, as the sand of the sea, until he stopped counting, for it was immeasurable...

Then the seven years of plenty which were in the land of Egypt ended, and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said... So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, ‘Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do.’ The famine was over all the face of the earth, and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians... So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine was severe in all lands.” (Genesis 41:14-57)

### JOSEPH REUNITED WITH HIS FAMILY

So here is what will be the opportunity for Joseph to be reunited with his family. The famine weighed heavily on the land of Canaan where we find his father and brothers. When Jacob learned that there was food in Egypt, he sent his ten older sons there to buy some. He did not want to risk the life of his last son, Benjamin (or Benyaameen among Muslims), so he did not allow him to go with his brothers.

When the ten brothers arrived to buy grain, Joseph was present and recognized them. It is evident that Joseph had changed more than his brothers. He was still an adolescent when they sold him and he was now at least 37 years old. He was dressed and shaved in the manner of the Egyptians. He spoke the Egyptian

language and, of course, he occupied a position of great authority and that would have been totally unexpected.

When they came and bowed before him with their faces to the ground, Joseph remembered the dreams he had had about them but he did not make himself known to them. Instead, he was going to use the situation to test them and see if their hearts were as hard as they had been before. Time will not permit us to tell this interesting part of Joseph's story today. So we will make it the subject of our next study. But before finishing this one, let us highlight certain ideas concerning an element of Joseph's story that we saw repeatedly today. It is about dreams.

### THE QUESTION OF DREAMS

The story of Joseph includes three pairs of dreams: the two dreams of Joseph where he saw first the sheaves of wheat and then the sun, moon and stars bowing down to him; then the two dreams that Joseph interpreted in prison, those of the cupbearer and baker; and finally, the two dreams of Pharaoh—where he saw seven fat cows devoured by seven gaunt ones and the seven full ears of grain swallowed by the seven withered ears. Joseph told Pharaoh clearly that it was God who had revealed through these dream what would happen. As for Joseph's dreams, his brothers had thought selling him into slavery would certainly prevent them from coming true, but those dreams were, in fact, divine predictions. God was still behind those dreams.

But what can be said of the dreams that you and I have? Should we attach importance to them? It is good to point out first of all that even in the time of Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon or Jesus, most dreams were not inspired by God. The Old Testament tells us in Ecclesiastes 5:3, "For a dream comes through much activity..." When we have many worries... when we have a lot going on during the day, we very often continue to think about these things in our sleep. Only these thoughts take other forms in our dreams. These are not messages from God.

Secondly, we can suppose that if God or his angels have the ability to communicate with a man in his sleep, evil spiritual beings—that is, Satan and his demons—could have the same ability. But Satan and his allies are liars, and we should not listen to what they say. Several Bible passages speak of "deceitful" dreams and advise us to keep a certain amount of

distrust toward our own dreams, and more so toward the dreams other people claim to have had. For example, God said in Jeremiah 14:14, "These prophets are prophesying a lie in My name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a false vision, worthless divination, the deceit of their own minds."

Finally let us realize that any dream to which we want to attach a spiritual importance must be subjected to the test of scripture. If a dream is not in harmony with the truth and the will of God as revealed in the Bible, it must be rejected. Consider the advice of Paul in Galatians 1:8: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel other than what we have preached to you, a curse be on him!" Should an angel appear to you in person or in a dream, it doesn't matter. Once his words deviate from the gospel of Jesus, the *Injeel* so often referred to by Muhammad in the Qur'an, you must not listen to this angel.

There is one more very interesting part of the story of Joseph that we have not seen yet. So keep reading to learn the rest of Joseph's story.