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PHARAOH'S DREAMS

(Gen. 41:1 – 36)

It was now Pharaoh's turn to dream—
For monarchs aren't as immune as they seem
To worrying about what the future might bring,
And whether their subjects
Will weep or sing.

Standing by the Nile, where the reeds grow dense,
He beheld a sight that made no sense:
From the reed grass seven cows stepped out,
Well-fed and sturdy, handsome and stout.

Before long came the heavy sound of feet:
Seven more cows, each pale as a sheet;
Ugly and gaunt, thin as a rake,
They approached the fat cows and proceeded to take
Them into their mouths and swallow them down;
At which Pharaoh awoke—
On his forehead a frown!

After tossing and turning, he fell back to sleep,
But, sadly for him, this didn't keep
Him from having a dream, much the same—
Not of cows this time,
But of stalks of grain.

Seven ears of sturdy corn
Grew on a single stalk;
Behind them sprouted seven thin ears,
The east wind had dried like chalk.

The withered ears then swallowed up
Their neighbors, fresh and full,
At which point Pharaoh awoke again,
Fearful in spirit and dull.

He called his magicians to elucidate,
But most were mystified;
When they began to concoct scenarios,
Pharaoh knew that they had lied.

‘‘If, by tomorrow, I don’t have the truth,’’
He sternly told his court,
‘‘Heads will roll from the palace roof—
I won’t be sold short!’’

That was enough to frighten
The butler out of his wits:
‘‘Your majesty, I now recall
An interpreter who sits
In your royal jail suffering
A truly sorry fate;
A Hebrew youth, once employed
On Potiphar’s estate.

‘‘Fellow prisoners were we—
The baker and myself—

When we were both condemned for
Endangering the king's health.

''On the same night we both had dreams,
Comprising the most bizarre themes;
When that lad revealed just what they meant,
It left him dejected, but me content.

''The baker's most alarming dream,
Of birds picking at bread,
He explained as a portent that
He'd shortly lose his head.
And as for my squeezing of grapes
Into Pharaoh's cup,
He said that it betokened
The restoration of my luck.''

''Hurry,'' said Pharaoh, ''bring me that lad;
It matters not if his appearance looks bad.
Just wash him well and change his shirt,
For no disaster can I avert,
And with no foe can I contend,
Without knowing what the gods intend.''

Pharaoh related his dream to the Hebrew slave
Who stood before him, surprisingly brave,
His spirits making a sudden revival,
With this chance to secure his own survival.

''Your majesty's dreams of cows and grain—
Both of them have the same aim:

The Hebrew God, who guides my fate,
Now offers a life-line to the Egyptian state.

‘‘The seven fat cows and ears of corn
Denote seven years about to dawn,
Yielding an abundance of goodly food;
Putting Egypt into a euphoric mood.

‘‘But just as the lean ones followed in tow,
And devoured the fat, though no one would know,
So, seven lean years will then arrive,
Bringing starvation that few will survive.

‘‘The double dream was God’s revelation,
Intended to convey his determination
To create with speed this situation—
As well as its alleviation.’’

‘‘What do you mean, lad, by ‘alleviation’’’?—
Interrupted Pharaoh, with agitation—
‘‘Your words strike me as prevarication,
For one can’t thwart God’s premeditation!’’

‘‘Your Majesty, my words are true;
For God has given me the clearest view
Of how to avoid this catastrophe,
Through storage of grain and a tax levy.’’

‘‘Speak on, young man,
You have my ear,’’
Urged Pharaoh,

Bringing Joseph near.

‘‘The plan, sir, needs an overseer;
An agronomist whose way is clear
To build storage-plants throughout the land,
For corn levied
By royal command.

‘‘His men will assess fields nationwide,
And seize a fifth to be put aside
During the seven years when stocks abound;
So, when famine stalks,
Food may be found.’’

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JOSEPH’S RISE TO POWER

(41:37 – 57)

Pharaoh’s courtiers looked in dismay
At Joseph who’d offered an ingenious way
To avoid the looming devastation,
And convert it into sweet salvation.

‘‘I’ve never beheld one so wise,’’
Exclaimed Pharaoh with surprise,
‘‘In whom God’s spirit so resides—
A veritable seer in a slave’s disguise.

‘‘I hereby place you in total charge,
Not just for this project of State;
For I shall entrust to your hands
The country’s entire fate.

‘‘Your commands shall be obeyed
As if they were my own;
Above you there is but one rank,
And that’s the royal throne.’’

He then invested Joseph
With a robe, signet and chain;
Calling him *Zafnat Paneah*—
‘Revealer of the arcane’—
To be used as a replacement
For his Hebrew name.

He gave him, as wife, Asenat,
Daughter of the Priest of On;
Assigning to him a royal chariot
And a most impressive home.

Heralds ran ahead of him,
Commanding all, *Abrek*!—
‘Attention! The ruler comes! -
Let everyone bend their neck!’

Joseph was but thirty
When he attained that high rank;
But, recalling his youthful dreams,
He knew he’d God to thank.

The seven years of plenty came,
Just as foretold;
And much of each year's harvest
Was stored, rather than sold.

During that time, Asenat
Bore Joseph two boys,
Named Manasseh and Ephraim,
To express his new-found joys:
Manasseh— "God made me forget"—
All my youthful woes;
Ephraim— "He made me prosper"—
In the land of my sorrows.

The seven years of famine
Really began to bite.
No swelling Nile in Summer months—
An eagerly awaited sight—
The result of torrential rain
In the basin of the upper Nile,
Flowing to the Delta below,
To render it fertile.

But now those parts were arid;
No water was carried down;
And the fields that once were
Moist and green,
Were now all yellowy brown.

All the citizens of Egypt

Came starving to the king.

‘‘Speak to Joseph,’’ he replied,

‘‘I’ve given him my ring!’’

Joseph opened the granaries

Throughout Egypt’s land;

Even serving out the rations

With his own royal hand.

All the surrounding countries

Suffered the same fate;

Children staring blankly

At an empty plate.

They all turned to Egypt

For help in their plight;

And hence it was that Jacob

Had that country in his sight.