

The Story of Joseph

Joseph's Appearance

Part 30 – October 28, 2012



Senusret II, 4th king of Egypt's 12th Dynasty

When we left off, the king's dream team had failed him. Overwhelming scholarly acceptance of the *High Chronology*, based on Oxford's breath-taking radiocarbon dating project,¹ reported in *Science* (6/18/10), along with an astrological occurrence² dated *during* Joseph's life; *and* taking Biblical time-spans at face value, we can know with near certainty, that Senusret II is the king with the dreams.



Dream Book of Qeniherkhepshef, c. 1220 BC

The oldest existing *copy* of an Egyptian dream decoding manual contains language that dates the original to Senusret III!³

But Senusret's dream team and their dream decoding manual couldn't decipher the meaning of the seven cannibal cows or the bizarre grain-eating heads of grain!



Pharaoh is in a panic to decipher these warnings from the gods before disaster strikes.

It's a telling weakness when a leader, considered to be a deity, can't decipher a message from one of his own!

But Joseph knows nothing of this. He's finishing his duties in the dungeon the same as he has for the past two years, since interpreting the dreams of the royal cupbearer and the baker. All is calm and downright dull in the cool, dark dungeon - until Captain Potiphar bursts through the door, followed by a frantic band of officials, and descends the prison steps two at a time.

Nobody is smiling. Every stern expression is speaking to Joseph over the top of the others as they push and pull him along. He catches the eyes of Potiphar, the most intimidating Egyptian he's ever seen, and sees something he's never seen before: fear!



Other than a lack of hatred, it must've been like when his brothers (enraged by his superior status *and* self-congratulatory assertion of alleged God-given dreams of greatness), grabbed him and tossed him into an empty cistern. Sobbing. Pleading. (Gen 42:21) Praying. Fending off the trapped snakes.

¹ Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit: <http://c14.arch.ox.ac.uk/embed.php?File=egypt.html#science>

² Heliacal Rise of Sirius: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heliacal_rising

³ BC 2,000-1,790; Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum, Edited by Alan H. Gardiner, D.LITT., F.B.A., MCMXXXV



Or when he was seized by spice traders and forcibly marched 300 miles.

Sobbing. Pleading. Praying. Retching on the crushingly pungent, sickeningly sweet, skunk-like scent of the raw materials (Gen 37:25) of the royal fragrance, that had likely attracted Potiphar's attention in the slave market that day.

After an unsuccessful day of attempting to decode the dream, the king's sorcerers and wise men gave up and left him to himself.

Then the chief cupbearer [the king's closest and most trusted official] said to Pharaoh, "Today I am reminded of my shortcomings. [The Hebrew is usually translated as 'sins'; he's speaking of his ingratitude to Joseph] – Genesis 41:9 NIV

God used something, *that day*, to show the cupbearer that he'd made a regrettable, *sinful* error in neglecting Joseph's request. When I read a translation of the dream decoder, I was shocked to find the cupbearer's dream: *pressing grapes into a cup!* And its interpretation was the *removal* of possessions, *not* the *restoration*, as Joseph had prophesied!



[And Joseph had said to him] "... mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. For I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews ..." – Genesis 40:14b-15a NIV

If the cupbearer asked the departing dream team what their decoder had to say about his dream, he would've been shaken to his core.

But notice something: that's the first time Joseph refers to himself as a Hebrew, and he's fully aware that this Egyptian official, whose help he's seeking, finds Hebrews detestable. He had an identity crisis in Potiphar's mansion. He got so comfy managing an Egyptian plantation that when he had the means to send word back to dad, he no longer had the desire. But God's been working in his heart. He's embracing and displaying his *true* identity even now, even here.

How about you? Where do *you* find *your* identity: job, education, money, power, popularity, appearance? Each one is a crisis waiting to happen. Your value, your significance, your identity, can only be found in Christ. You are worthy, you are loved, you are forgiven, you are accepted - *not* because of what you do, but because of who you are ... and *Whose* you are, and what *He's* done!

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! [Do you *get* that? Do you *act* on it and *live* like it? "Oh, I don't have the courage to display my faith at work or school or fill-in-the-blank."] – 1 John 3:1a NIV

It doesn't take courage, it takes compassion. And you'll never find true compassion for the people you're inappropriately using for a sense of self-worth. We usually end up *despising* 'em!

Incarceration transforms Joseph and recalibrates his faith. Sadly, a pit is often required to help us discover our *true* identity.

Joseph's Bible was just Genesis ... up to chapter 38! Imagine how many times he heard the lesson of Adam and Eve who got cozy with a serpent, traded their identity, and had to leave God's garden. Same thing happened to Joseph, only he ended up being banished from Potiphar's plantation. Did you know the serpent was one of the chief symbols of Egypt's power and protection?



This is what's left of the burial pyramid of Sensusret II; tragically, his personal chamber was robbed bare in antiquity.

But, the tomb of his (likely) daughter, Sithathoryunet was intact and undisturbed.



They found jewelry, personal effects, and the princess' crown, with its *uraeus*, the "sacred" serpent, an emblem of sovereignty for rulers and deities. In the garden, a Savior is promised to crush the serpent's head. (Gen 3:15)

when we fall from grace, but then embrace our true identity, it humbles us to more effectively and less offensively display our faith and speak into others.

[The cupbearer explains] Pharaoh was once angry with his servants, and he imprisoned me and the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard. [Potiphar] Each of us had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. Now a young Hebrew was there with us, [This also serves as an excuse as to why he hadn't thought to mention him sooner; he's young, he's a Hebrew, and he's] a servant of the captain of the guard. [Potiphar, as a palace official, would undoubtedly have been brought into the discussion; and his guarded input could *only* have been favorable] We told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the interpretation of his dream. ["And he didn't give nebulous generalizations and vague predictions like that dream decoder. He was precise, with startling specifics, and he didn't mince words or hold back. He didn't even use a manual! In fact, he contradicted the manual and proved it wrong! And both prophecies were opposite in their outcome. And did I mention he was astonishingly accurate?"] And things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was hanged." [i.e. *impaled*] ["This extraordinary thing happened two years ago and you're *just now* telling me?!" "Has it *been* two years? Wow, time flies."] So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, [he would've sent Potiphar – he escorted the cupbearer and baker in, and assigned Joseph to serve them – he would've sent a *very anxious* Potiphar to fetch the innocent prophet he has *unjustly imprisoned* and *managing* the *King's* dungeon under his house. What will Joseph say to Pharaoh? Will Potiphar be held responsible? How much explaining will he have to do?] and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. [Emphasizing Sensusret's eagerness, impatience, and desperation] – Genesis 41:10-14b NIV

The groomers, clothiers, perfumers, valets, and court decorum officials burst in with Potiphar and rush Joseph up the stairs, through the streets, and into the columned corridors of the palace, all while reeling off imperative instructions: "This is how you enter, this is how you bow, this is how you speak, this is ... *impossible!* A completely unprepared *Hebrew slave* is about to meet with Pharaoh! How is this *happening?!?*"



When he had shaved and changed his clothes ... [There's so much here!] – Genesis 41:14c NIV

Egyptian culture was *crazy* for shaving! High status Egyptian men *and* women often shaved their heads and wore wigs. This is a reconstructed wig, made from princess Sithathoryunet's solid gold wig rings! And we can digitally put her serpent crown back on her head – *we can rebuild her!*



One of the reasons Egyptians detested Hebrews was because they were so *hairy*. The Hebrews liked their beards! (2 Sam 10:4-5; Ezra 9:3) Remember, Joseph is running the royal holding pen for Egyptian officials and VIP's. If Joseph has a beard, he's embraced the distinguishing mark of his Hebrew identity in a very public way! How do you display *your* true identity (in Christ)? Do you put it away in certain settings, out of embarrassment? For instance, do you pray over meals at home, but *not* in restaurants? If so, why?

What's on your walls? What do you wear? What music do you play? Does it reinforce or distract from your true identity? Surround yourself with stuff that reminds you who you are and whose you are. Memories. Passions. Inspiration. Beauty. Love. God's Word. What we put on display seeps into our heart.

So, if Joseph's beard is a display of his faith and identity, is shaving it off a compromise of convictions? No. He's not ashamed or embarrassed. It's a judgment call, a cultural concession. It's not about beards, it's about staying true. This time he won't shave off his *Hebrew-ness* along with his beard. Know how we know? He later gives both his sons *very public* Hebrew names!



These are princess Sithathoryunet's gold and copper razors! This is what they would've been shaving Joseph with ... from head to toe! It wasn't necessary to shave for a public audience, which means Joseph is going into Pharaoh's private quarters. This is huge! Because Pharaoh is considered a deity, his residence is treated like a temple. Like a priest, Joseph had to be completely hairless, dressed in white, and circumcised – thankfully *that* was already taken care of; at least there's *one thing* Hebrews and Egyptians agreed on!



He's now ready to face the most important and powerful man in the world. Imagine the thoughts racing through his head as he's marched through these halls of power.

"I'm facing Senuset! If I speak my belief in One True God, I'll be beheaded. I don't have that kind of faith or courage! I'm not ready! God, give me two more years in that safe, dull dungeon!"

[But before he knew it] ... he came before Pharaoh. [And when those chamber doors opened he didn't know what to expect; he expected the worst; but he certainly didn't expect to be overwhelmed by the smell of God's grace and sovereignty: a sickeningly sweet smell of sobbing and pleading and praying!] – Genesis 41:14d NIV

The royal fragrance triggers flash-card memories: coat of many colors, brash arrogance, his brother's jealousy, the pit, spice traders, slave market, Potiphar, Potiphar's fields, Potiphar's house ... Mrs. Potiphar! The Pit of Despair, the warden, the cupbearer, the baker, dreams, interpretations, the white space, it's all led to *this* moment ... and it's *all* been in God's hands!



And on Sensusret's headdress, that serpent! I told you that Sensusret's burial chamber had been robbed bare. That's not entirely true. While clearing the tomb, a glint in a crack, caught the eye of a worker. One lone item dropped and left behind. It's the actual gold uraeus, the "sacred" serpent, from Sensusret II's royal headdress. This may well be what Joseph saw when "he came before Pharaoh"!

And suddenly, between the snake and the smell, God becomes *huge* and the Pharaoh becomes quite small and human and worried and vulnerable. And Joseph can see the desperation and anxiety and hopelessness in his face. Joseph's courage doesn't need to be mustered, it's suddenly just natural, because of grace and gratefulness and compassion.



Joseph the Hebrew servant, unjustly accused and condemned and called from the pit by the god-king; what an incredible foreshadow of Jesus. He changed *His* clothes on the way too.

[Peter] saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. – John 20:6b-7 NIV

On the third day Jesus rose again to triumph over the grave, leaving His burial clothes of death behind in the pit. And when Jesus came before God He *also* did so without His beard.

[As Isaiah prophesied on Jesus' behalf:] I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard ... – Isaiah 50:6a NIV

This is what it took for our Savior to crush the head of that serpent of sin and death, as promised clear back to Adam and Eve. (Gen 3:15)

How can we *not* embrace our identity in Christ? How can we *not* display God's heart to those around us? How can we *not* be motivated by love and grace and gratefulness and compassion?

Joseph is about to tell Pharaoh that he's not God. And Potiphar is about to have a heart attack.

And this is where we have to close God's story for today.