

COVENANT RENEWAL

Genesis 1:26-28

Matthew 28:18-20

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NEW COVENANT, NEW FOOD

Transcendence/Calling

Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh (Genesis 41:14).

Hierarchy/Historical Prologue

And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." So Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, "In my dream, behold, I was standing on the bank of the Nile; and behold, seven cows, fat and sleek came up out of the Nile; and they grazed in the marsh grass. And 10, seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and gaunt, such as I had never seen for ugliness in all the land of Egypt; and the lean and ugly cows ate up the first seven fat cows. Yet when they had devoured them, it could not be detected that they had devoured them; for they were just as ugly as before. Then I awoke. I saw also in my dream, and behold, seven ears full and good, came up on a single stalk; and 10, seven ears withered, thin, and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them; and the thin ears swallowed the seven good ears. Then I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me."

Now Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dreams are one and the same; God has told to Pharaoh what He is about to do. The seven good cows are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one and the same. And the seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven thin ears scorched by the east wind shall be seven years of famine. It is as I have spoken to Pharaoh: God has shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do. Behold, seven years of great abundance are coming in all the land of Egypt; and after them seven years of famine will come, and all the abundance will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine will ravage the land. So the abundance will be unknown in the land because of that subsequent famine; for it will be very severe. Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, it means that the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about" (Genesis 41:15-33).

thics/Stipulations

) "And now let Pharaoh look for a man discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. (2) Let Pharaoh take action to appoint overseers in charge of the land, and let him exact a fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven years of abundance. (3) Then let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and store up the grain for food in the cities un-

der Pharaoh's authority, (4) and let them guard it. (5) And let the food become as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish during the famine" (Genesis 41:33-36).

Oath/Judgment

Now the proposal seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his servants. Then Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man like this, in whom is a divine spirit?" Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you" (Genesis 41:37-40).

Succession

(1) And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See I have set you over all the land of Egypt." (2) Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand, and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen, and put the gold necklace around his neck. (3) And he had him ride in his second chariot; and they proclaimed before him, "Bow the knee!" And he set him over all the land of Egypt. Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Though I am Pharaoh, yet without your permission no one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." (4) Then Pharaoh named Joseph Zaphenath-paneah; (5) and he gave him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, as his wife. And Joseph went forth over the land of Egypt (Genesis 41:41-45).

New covenant creates a new menu, a new schedule of food. Take marriage as an example, specifically **my** marriage. Mind you, what I'm about to tell has been cleared with my queen, Susan. I wouldn't dare mention something from the family archives without seeking counsel from my top advisor. In this case, if I hadn't received clearance the recriminations might have been catastrophic. My example comes from one of my wife's meals, shortly after we were married nearly eighteen years ago.

When we were first married, my wife, like any faithful young bride, began to find out what I liked and did not like to eat. In the process, she discovered my love for **beans**. I can eat them almost any time. In fact, the tradition has been handed down to the second generation because my three-year-old redhead, Esther, would love to snack on a bowl of beans more than just about anything.

I really do like beans! Maybe that's why some might think I'm full of them. It really doesn't bother me, because at any moment I just literally might be full of them from one of the previous meals within the last twenty-four hours. Anyway, I think you get the point. I can eat beans as a meal all by themselves, especially with cornbread or mixed

with rice or grits; remember, I'm a Southerner. I can also eat beans with just about any kind of food. I have even been known to have several varieties of them with **one** meal. Man cannot live by bread alone, but I could probably live on beans for an indefinite period, except for one type.

Once my wife learned of my fondness for beans, she secured her mother's **navy bean soup recipe**. She did a wonderful job. I remember well the evening when I thoroughly enjoyed one of my last meals of navy-bean-soup. You read correctly. I said, "one of my last." What happened? My mother-in-law's recipe was for a large number of people and we were only a family of two at that time. My wife came from a family where the kids would normally have friends and guests at supper. Her family is extremely hospitable and enjoys having friends for dinner. So, my mother-in-law's recipes were always for **many** more than two. Don't misunderstand. My mother-in-law is a fantastic cook and so is my wife. It's just that the recipes were big, down-right **HUGE**.

Nevertheless, Susan assured me there was no problem. She would save the leftovers for another evening. Maybe I should say evenings because it seems as though we ate navy beans for a month. Here was the problem. I like beans but as the saying goes, "Too much of a good thing is bad." My wife and I still cannot eat navy beans to this day. In fact, we ate so many navy beans during those early days of our marriage that it's a family joke whenever we see them served anywhere.

The lesson was covenantal. It had to do with transition from one covenant to another. Some of my wife's recipes wouldn't work for our marriage because they were for too many people. She learned how to cook wonderfully from her mother, but she had to develop her own **menu** for the new household, specifically the **new covenant**. Menu changes from one covenant to another. In this situation, the menu of the older covenant, the covenant with her father, was not adequate for the new covenant with her husband.

A new covenant means new food. Yet, whatever is true in life is true because it is true in Scripture. Menus change with marriage because menus change with each new covenant. The story of Joseph is one among many places where this covenantal principle appears in Scripture.

Old Covenant/New Covenant in Genesis 41

Genesis 41 presents an old covenant/new covenant process. The broader context of the overall interaction between Pharaoh and Joseph follows a covenant pattern. It represents the old covenant between Pharaoh and Egypt, out of which emerges a new covenant between Joseph and Egypt at the end of the sequence.

The Old Covenant

The old covenant between Pharaoh and Joseph is one where Pharaoh is **lord** of the covenant. He is the central figure. As the old covenant unfolds in Genesis 41, however, a transition is brought about. Joseph takes on more and more of a prominent role, until at the end, Joseph has moved to the center because a new covenant has been formed. To see this, an overview of the broader covenant pattern, standing for what I am calling the old covenant between Pharaoh and Egypt, is in order.

First, Pharaoh **calls** Joseph into his **presence**. At the outset, Pharaoh **is** presented as being transcendent Joseph. He calls and Joseph responds, cleansing himself and taking on the appearance of an Egyptian so as not to offend Pharaoh's **presence**. These themes are consistently part of the first segment of any Biblical covenant, old or new. God always opens His covenant with a statement of His transcendence and presence. Thus, man always be-

gins his covenants with statements of transcendence and presence.

Second, Pharaoh tells about the dream he has had and he asks Joseph to be his interpreter. These ideas are part of the second aspect of a covenant: hierarchy and historical prologue. The historical prologue is found in Pharaoh's telling Joseph about the dream from his recent **past**, one that has haunted him and brought him to the point of allowing a son of Abraham to do what he was supposed to be able to do. This leads to the hierarchical idea because Pharaoh is forced to depend on Joseph for an interpretation.

To be precise, Pharaoh is represented by Joseph. We should keep in mind that the monarchs of the ancient world were supposed to interpreters of **dreams**.¹ Their role was one of a divine revealer of the gods. To receive a dream and not be able to interpret shattered their role. This could not be allowed. Magicians and others were supposed to aid the king in his interpretations. When they failed in Pharaoh's case, Joseph was brought forward to do what the Pharaoh should have done. Thus, he **represented** the king of Egypt at one level, but in reality he was representing his true Suzerain, the God of Abraham!

Pharaoh is presented as one whose covenant relationship with God is ineffective. God is there revealing the dream but Pharaoh is not able to respond. The monarch is like the first Adam. He is **covenantally** dead.

Third in the old covenant pattern, Pharaoh is told to issue several commands. The third section of the Biblical covenant always develops the stipulations of the covenant. In Genesis 41, the third segment falls into five categories of commandments that themselves follow a covenantal pattern: (1) the command of new leadership; (2) the command of hierarchy or representation for the new leadership; (3) the command of gathering and storing; (4) the command of sanctioning the gathered grain; (5) the command of transfer from the time of plenty to the time of famine.

Fourth, Pharaoh passes judgment on Joseph's counsel. The process involves oath and sanction, themes which are the heart of the fourth point of the Biblical covenant where covenant is ratified by oath and sanctioned by blessing and cursing (Deuteronomy 27-30). The oath appears in Pharaohs asking the servants to endorse his decision. He asks them a question and in so doing he invokes an oath of allegiance to him and ultimately to Joseph. The oath, however, is through him to Joseph because this is part of the old covenant. It is an attempt to renew the old power base.

The sanction is found in the decision to bless Joseph by appointing him to be the person in charge of Pharaoh's household. One of the blessings of the Deuteronomic covenant is **exaltation to rule** (Deuteronomy 28:13).

Fifth, Pharaoh makes Joseph his successor (Genesis 41 :41-45). He initiates a covenantal process of enthronement to make Joseph an heir by marrying the Israelite off to an Egyptian. This is clearly a process of succession, paralleling in principle the final section of the Biblical covenant where, for example, Moses selects a successor to take up his leadership role (Deuteronomy 31-34). A new covenant is created between an Egyptian and a Jew, creating a new lineage. As we shall see in a moment, however, **Pharaoh** does not truly enter into covenant with Joseph even though a new covenant is created between Joseph and Egyptian. For a true covenant to have occurred, Pharaoh, the true representative of Egypt, would have needed to come under specific **sanctions**. Here is the problem we shall come to after a discussion of the

1. Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta John Knox Press, 1982), pp. 328-333.

specific new covenant with Egypt. Yet, Joseph is elevated to a place of representation and he makes a new covenant with **Egypt**.

Joseph entered a five-fold covenanted process of adoption into the house of Pharaoh. Joseph became part of Pharaoh's household, but Pharaoh did not become part of Abraham's. Nevertheless, Joseph was literally made part of the ruling house of Egypt (Genesis 41 :5-52). One commentator notes the **five-fold procedure**: "(1) **Royal proclamation (v. 41 :41; cf. Ps. 2:6)**; (2) the insignia of office (v. 42; cf. Luke 15:22-23); (3) public acclamation (v. 43; I Kings 1:25, 39; II Kings 9:13; Phil. 2:9-11); (4) a royal name (v. 45; cf. **Matt. 16:17-18**; Phil. 2:9-11); (5) legitimacy by marriage (v. 45; I Sam. 18:20-29)."²

The parallel between adoption into Pharaoh's house and the Biblical covenant is definite. First, the **royal proclamation** is made. Declaration by **word** begins the covenant. The Biblical covenant of Deuteronomy, and all others such as creation and redemption, starts with Moses' announcement of God's word to him (Deuteronomy 1 :3).

Second, the insignia of office is given. Joseph is made a vice-regent of the land, Pharaoh's representative. The Biblical covenant addresses the issue of representation in the second aspect of its structure (Deuteronomy 1:9ff.).

Third, public acclamation is discovered as Joseph rides with Pharaoh. Here, the pattern breaks slightly with the Biblical covenant, but the connection still appears. The third part of God's covenant refers to public display in terms of ethical obedience (Deuteronomy 5-26). Keep in mind, however, that Pharaoh thought he was co-opting Joseph. Actually it ended up being the other way around.

Fourth, Joseph is given a new name. The fourth part of the covenant refers to the application of signs and seals when the oath is taken. In the Biblical covenant, a new name is associated with sealing the covenant (Genesis 17:1ff.; **28:19-20**).

Fifth, finally Joseph's intentions are legitimated by marriage. As Abraham was father of Israel, Pharaoh was **father of Egypt. Marrying within the bloodline was necessary to the transfer of the Egyptian covenant. It was required but** not necessary for the extension of the Biblical covenant. God's covenant transcended sex and blood. Nevertheless, the final part of God's covenant speaks of legitimacy in terms of the blessing. The fifth part of the Deuteronomic covenant transfers the blessing to Joshua, one who was faithful, not Moses' sons by blood. The contrast to the p a g a n nations is striking. ~ ~ ~

Thus, a new covenant emerges out of the old covenant between Pharaoh and Egypt. It is truly a new covenant because Joseph takes an Egyptian wife through the covenant of marriage. But it is temporary, effective only for a **short period of time. It provisionally imitates a true new covenant**, and it fails to form a permanent lasting new covenant since the covenant was not made between Pharaoh and Joseph.

New Food for Pharaoh and Jacob

Even so, the provisional new covenant brought about a change in menu for Jew and Gentile, Jacob and Pharaoh. A seven year period of abundance was followed by seven years of famine. God revealed the dream of this double sabbath from feast to famine to the emperor of the world. Joseph interpreted. Pharaoh knew that his very survival depended on Joseph, the covenant son of Abraham. He had to enter into a covenant with this man. He also realized the dream, its interpretation and fulfillment would

change the food of Egypt, that his people would be reduced to living off stored grain, bread, and not the life that came from the Nile that supposedly flowed from Pharaoh himself. His world as he understood it was about to be changed.

The same was true for Jacob and his sons. They were starving back in the promised land. They had driven off and symbolically killed the son of revelation, the dreamer and interpreter of dreams. Now they too would be driven from their land because of a lack of food. The solution: they had to depend on Joseph and his food from the seven year period of provision in Egypt. They would have to eat the same food as the Egyptians, and like the house of Pharaoh, they would have to eat a different food, the grain (bread) of another land. Yet ironically, for Jacob's and Egypt's salvation both would have to depend on Joseph and both would have to eat the same food, a new food resulting from a new covenant.

This picture beautifully portrays the final New Covenant through Jesus Christ. His covenant brought about new food for Jew and Gentile, the Lord's Supper. It drew both of them together to eat the same food. The Jew was driven from His homeland and forced to eat the food of Gentiles. But as God revealed to Peter, this exodus was necessary for the world to be brought to the same table. The Gentile, on the other hand, was called to eat the same Lord's Supper as the Jew, to eat this food with him. Thus, one of the fundamental concepts of the Biblical covenant is the establishment of new food: new covenant, new menu.

The principle of new covenant, new menu surfaces all through the Bible. It happens when Israel goes down into Egypt under Joseph. It occurs again when Israel leaves Egypt in the Exodus, having to eat manna and quail in the desert; the old eating habits had to be changed because Israel renewed its covenant with Yahweh. It appears when Israel enters the Promised Land, being commanded by Moses to observe the dietary laws; Israel was circumcised **before entering and a new covenant was established.** It takes place when the nation apostatizes during the days of Elijah, when he leads Israel into a new covenant at Carmel and is driven from the land and fed by **ravens**, unclean animals. Of course, the new covenant, new food idea comes into full force when Jesus establishes the New Covenant at the Passover meal with the disciples. Any new covenant of the Bible creates new food.

The New Covenant Crisis for Joseph

The new covenant, new menu was not without its problems for Joseph. Problems often arise in life **as a transition is made from one covenant to another. Something often exists as** part of a previous covenant that makes it difficult to carry out the new one. It may be an old "wine skin" holding back the expansion of the newer covenant. It could be an element of the old trying to pose as part of the new. Perhaps the old covenant attempts to displace the new one. In any event, unless the nature of moving from one **covenantal** order to another is understood, the older covenant will create problems for the new one.

Problems associated with moving from one covenantal structure to another are a major concern. They are important. They vary from menu difficulties to the lack of adequate signs and seals for new covenants. In each situation, however, the older covenant ends up being unable to cope with the dynamics presented by the newer covenant. Joseph's pilgrimage into Egypt is a case in point (Genesis 37-45).

The Abrahamic covenant is the backdrop to the story of Joseph; for that matter it stands behind all of the stories of the Bible after the Tower of Babel incident. At Babel, God raised up a new priesthood, the Jews via Abraham.

He did so for a purpose beyond the Jews. God promised Abraham that he would be a “Father of many nations” (Genesis), specifically nations of **Gentiles**. In other words, God promised to restore the Gentile nations through the line of Abraham, later to be revealed through Judah and David: Jesus Christ the Messiah of the world. Putting it another way, God vowed through to regain the confounded nations of the Tower of Babel debacle. He signified and sealed this promise by means of the rite of circumcision.

In so doing, a tension was created that could not be resolved until the coming of Christ. The purpose of the Jews was to restore the Gentiles. Yet, a Gentile could not enter into the Abrahamic covenant without giving up his identity. To join, a Gentile and his male sons and slaves had to be circumcised, which meant ceasing to be a Gentile. One could not avoid entering the household of Abraham if he were circumcised. This further implied that the nations of the world would all become Jewish should the leaders convert, meaning they would literally be dissolved.

This tension reaches new heights when Joseph is sold into slavery in Egypt. He finds himself a prisoner of the mightiest nation in the world, after his brothers cut him out of the covenant. For this reason, he probably considered himself **covenantally** dead, yet he knew the promise of the Abrahamic covenant was still with him. He has this point made to him time and again.

When he is in prison, he becomes the leader of Potiphar's household. In other words, he dominates his master's house. When he is falsely accused of adultery, he ends up in prison. But he again rises to the top and becomes the leader of the prison. Eventually, he even advances into Pharaoh's household through his ability to interpret the dreams of the Egyptian monarch's cupbearer and baker. He interprets Pharaoh's dream and winds up leading his household as well. Joseph fulfilled the **Abrahamic** covenant, or did he?

Here is the tension. How could Joseph bring Pharaoh into the Abrahamic covenant without circumcision, or specifically without Pharaoh's becoming an adopted son of the household of Abraham? He couldn't. That is, he couldn't unless he became a member of Pharaoh's house.

Joseph became an Egyptian. He introduced one of the first attempts to fulfill the **Abrahamic** Covenant on the Gentiles without the rite of circumcision. In one sense, it worked. In another it was a disaster. It worked in that Egypt came **under** the Abrahamic covenant. The Bible text says, “Joseph became a **father** to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler of all Egypt” (Genesis 45:8). On the

other hand, Joseph's attempts failed because Pharaoh was not circumcised. The great monarch did not come into the covenant. He did not allow the circumcision sanctions of blessing and cursing to be placed on him and his household. He did not become a true son of Abraham. Consequently, Egypt and Israel clashed several years later, eventuating in the Exodus.

The problem centered on transferring the old covenant to the Gentiles. Joseph in a way brought Israel into a “new” covenant. In reality, however, he was unable to apply the old covenant to the Gentiles without either losing his identity as a son of Abraham or forcing the non-Jew to give up his. The Mosaic covenant was a redemptive historical development of the **Abrahamic** covenant in a further attempt to resolve the same problem. It was given to protect the Jews from the corruptions of the Gentiles, while at the same time bring the Gentiles under the Biblical covenant through wisdom. The classic example of the outworking of this was Solomon. But he too failed to apply the Biblical **covenantal** order to the Gentiles. He did as Joseph had done and married foreign wives. He became one of the enemy instead of vice versa.

The problem directly concerns the fourth element of the covenant: **sanctions**. A covenant is only as effective as its sanctions. In Joseph's case, the sanctions of the covenant he made with Egypt were the seven years of abundance, blessing, and the seven years of famine, cursing. As long as Egypt and Pharaoh were under the sanctions, the covenant remained intact. Afterwards the covenant broke down because Pharaoh did not allow the **Abrahamic** covenant to be applied to his person and household by the reception of circumcision. Any permanent covenant in the Bible involves sanctions, symbolically represented in the signs and seals. Pharaoh would not submit to this rite and become a son of Abraham.

The seed of Abraham could not marry the Gentile bride without the eventual breakdown of the covenant. Joseph had **typologically** died and been resurrected through his imprisonment in Egypt and he had married the Gentile. But he was not the true and final Seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ. He was not able to sustain a lasting covenant relationship. Jesus resolved this conflict. He was crucified, resurrected and enthroned. He entered into covenant with the new bride, marrying the **Church/Bride**. He did so, however, only through the reception of sanctions at the brides **baptism**. The result: the covenant was permanent as was its permanent food, the Holy Communion. He inaugurated the New Covenant and new menu of the world!