

Scripture Reading: Genesis 47

“13 Now there was no bread in all the land; for the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. 14 And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, for the grain which they bought; and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh’s house. 15 So when the money failed in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, “Give us bread, for why should we die in your presence? For the money has failed.” 16 Then Joseph said, “Give your livestock, and I will give you bread for your livestock, if the money is gone.” 17 So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the cattle of the herds, and for the donkeys. Thus he fed them with bread in exchange for all their livestock that year. 18 When that year had ended, they came to him the next year and said to him, “We will not hide from my lord that our money is gone; my lord also has our herds of livestock. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our lands. 19 Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants of Pharaoh; give us seed, that we may live and not die, that the land may not be desolate.” 20 Then Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for every man of the Egyptians sold his field, because the famine was severe upon them. So the land became Pharaoh’s.

‘Joseph Empowers Pharaoh’

Last week we studied Jacob blessing Pharaoh which we saw as part of the fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham and Isaac that through the Seed of the Woman who would come from their line, our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ, ALL the nations of the earth would be blessed!

- **This is followed by our text this morning where we find Jacob’s son Joseph bringing vast material blessings to this same Pharaoh.**

Now while we cannot avoid the political discussions that we began some months ago, I hope to also show us why this account is a very strong example of what it means to walk as a disciple or servant of the Lord Jesus. With that goal in mind a bit of review might be in order.

As we approached the closing chapters of Genesis we saw Joseph become the ruler of Egypt, but we must remember that his life and work comes in the context of the life of his father Jacob. At the beginning of chapter 37 as Joseph is introduced we read, ‘these are the generations of Jacob’ and we will find the death and burial of Jacob in the final chapter of Genesis, after he blesses his sons who will become the nation of Israel...

- **The keepers of God’s revelation and the line of promise!**

We saw how Joseph prospered as a slave, but then was betrayed and imprisoned where he prospered again, & then was forgotten. Finally, the dreams of Pharaoh bring the memory of Joseph back to the King’s cup bearer and Joseph is brought before the King to interpret those troubling dreams.

- **Joseph is then greatly exalted just as Jesus was after His time of suffering at the hands of wicked men.**

I promised we would ponder an important question when the time came:

- **Why is there such a need for strong civil action in this account?**
- **This was because we then saw Joseph use his new found power to prepare Egypt, & by extension his own family, for the tough years ahead.**

Before considering the early actions by Joseph, I preached a sermon in late January that reviewed just how we here at Church of the King view our responsibility as faithful Christians in the civil realm before addressing the early actions taken by Joseph to prepare for the coming famine. To help distinguish non-negotiables from things we can debate! *[available on Sermon Audio]*

I again pointed out that as we study the actions taken by Joseph as a civil ruler, we will be confronted by some other serious questions: Did Joseph act responsibly or was he being a tyrant? Does Joseph give us an example that can be useful in other times & places or was this only a special case like the later time when Joshua would be commanded to wipe out all the nations of Canaan.

- Did Joseph's actions accomplish what they were intended to accomplish, or did they lead to unintended consequences for the future?

We then considered the early actions by Joseph to collect food for the famine and now as we consider his later actions we must again remember the admonition that Jesus gave to the Pharisees and His own disciples on the road to Emmaus:

- That we are to see Jesus and His work here as we do in all of the Old Testament Scriptures!

I reminded us that when we step back and look at the life of Joseph and the ministry of Jesus we see that the types or parallels truly abound here: The nation of Israel was God's chosen people and Jesus came as the Son of God, the son of Jacob from the tribe of Judah, the beloved of the Father, to be their Messiah and rightful ruler. These descendants of the sons of Jacob rejected Jesus: They cast Him out of the city of Jerusalem and they had the Gentiles crucify Him on a cross.

- What they meant for evil God used for good & Jesus, having saved His people from their sins soon returned as the King of Kings & Lord of Lords!

Back here in Genesis Joseph was also the favored son whose dreams predicted his rule over his brothers. Those brothers rejected him, cast him out and turned him over to foreigners where they were sure he would die as a slave, with no blood on their hands. *[sound familiar?]*

Again, what they intended for evil, God used for good & we soon saw the brothers of Joseph coming to him in an effort to share in the salvation that Joseph has brought to Egypt in the midst of the great famine! The important thing to see in all of this is how by his actions as a faithful Saint Joseph does bring salvation or life to Egypt...

- It is important to see even his actions as a civil ruler in this light.
- If we cannot come to see the submission of these Egyptians to Joseph in the same way that we are to see our submission to Jesus, then I fear we are missing a very important lesson in this account!

Many struggle with the actions taken by Joseph here because they run so counter to many of our modern concepts of freedom and liberty. I said at the time that it would give us much to ponder and I hope many of you have, but now I would like to make the case for why Joseph's actions were in fact righteous actions.

- My first, and primary, argument comes from the Scriptures themselves.

We are given in Psalm 105 a divine commentary on this portion of Joseph's life:

Psalm 105: 16 "Moreover [Jehovah] called for a famine in the land; He destroyed all the provision of bread. 17 He sent a man before them—Joseph—who was sold as a slave. 18 They hurt his feet with fetters, He was laid in irons. 19 Until the time that his word came to pass, The word of Jehovah tested him. 20 The king sent and released him, The ruler of the people let him go free. 21 He made him lord of his house, And ruler of all his possessions, 22 To bind his princes at his pleasure, And teach his elders wisdom."

- So what was some of the wisdom that those elders in Egypt were being taught by Joseph?

If you have been following our suggested readings for July in the Book of Proverbs, you should have run into much wisdom for kings: For example, on Friday we read, “The king’s heart is in the hand of Jehovah, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes. 2 Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, But the Lord weighs the hearts. 3 To do righteousness and justice Is more acceptable to Jehovah than sacrifice.”

Certainly Joseph was teaching those elders wisdom in the civil realm and not just in his personal life!

When we considered the early actions by Joseph to gather up the food that would be needed during the famine we considered a related question:

- Did Joseph give us a civil example that can be useful in other times and places or was this only a special case?

I argued that it was actually both: The obvious “one time” aspect is the fact that God is no longer giving civil rulers dreams or the interpretation of dreams that outline specific events that will occur in the future, near or far.

- And yet, the Palmist clearly states that Joseph was teaching wisdom to the elders of that land, so we can also learn some lessons as well.

Joseph used the power given to him by Pharaoh to collect and store one fifth or 20% of the grain raised in the seven years of plenty. Joseph himself explained the importance of these actions to his brothers in chapter 45:7 “And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. 8 So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.”

We will see it again next week from the people of Egypt who in the end do not see themselves as downcast slaves who have been oppressed, but as willing servants who have been saved & blessed by Joseph... That still leaves us with the question of whether Joseph’s actions as a civil leader can teach us any wise lessons for today. Certainly, we should avoid the mistake of any civil leader thinking they can be a ‘savior’ because in history, the greater Joseph has come and He is now the King of Kings and only Savior.

Whether we must avoid any and all strong civil action is another question!

If you remember, I threw out a hypothetical for discussion:

- What if one of us were suddenly made the ruler of a nation like Somalia tomorrow?

I would hope that such a person would draw heavily on the wisdom for rulers given in Proverbs and many other places in the Scriptures and I suspect that some strong civil actions would be in order, at least until order was restored.

- A leader who saw such a need could, and perhaps should study the example of Joseph.

This certainly should not mean finding a few proof-texts to justify the actions that a leader wanted to take!

- It would require diligent study to make sure the new leader had the proper balance that is found in the Scriptures. *[being a good Berean!]*

In fact, as is the case with most of our theology and life, it is likely the very portions of the Scriptures that do NOT seem to line up with our beliefs and actions that should challenge us the most.

- For example, I would suggest that a powerful King should be reading and meditating on the passages that speak about servant leadership.

That brings us to our text for this morning that we will consider this week and next: I suspect we will see the actions by Joseph as somewhat troubling to our modern minds.

We are certainly not alone in this because Gary North and other commentators write off Joseph's actions as a sign of his times or a short parenthetical part of the story that Moses is telling.

As I said before I think this is a dangerous thing to do with any portion of God's Word... Especially one that is given such positive comments by the Psalmist. So for this morning I want to discuss the actions taken by Joseph, give you a bit of homework and then next week conclude by making my case for the important principles in these actions for us today!

- Now remember that the actions taken by Joseph in our text this morning happened because of the earlier actions that he took to prepare for the famine.

We covered those back in chapter 45 where we saw Joseph collect 20% of the grain in the years of plenty to store up for the famine.

- We discussed whether this was the best or most efficient way of storing up the needed food.

Now obviously drastic action was needed because a divine warning had been issued... For example, California would have been better prepared for the recent draught if we had known of it five years ago.

Of course the important question to wrestle with was whether having the civil government take those actions was better than warning everyone and trusting them to take the proper actions on their own to store up food.

- While individual actions, or market forces would be more efficient, would they be the most effective in this case?

I think this is an example of where human nature often conflicts with efficiency or the ideal way!

- A modern example could be the various programs designed to help people get out of debt.

Now if a family is in trouble on this front we know the most efficient way to attack the problem:

- Get yourself on a budget, live within your means and begin to pay down the debt!

You start with the debt that has the highest interest rate and work down to the debt with the lowest interest.

- It is efficient because you pay the minimum amount of interest!

Those who have listened to Dave Ramsey know that he is often attacked for having an inefficient program which he calls the debt snowball. He tells those in trouble to also establish a budget and to live within their means [we have agreement there]: But then he tells them to list debts from the smallest to the largest in dollar amounts and to ignore the interest rates. You then go after the smallest and when it is paid off, you move on to the next biggest debt.

- Obviously in the end this person or family is going to have paid more interest than they would have with the more efficient plan.

So why is the second method more effective? Something Mr. Ramsey can clearly show to be true after years of experience with helping real people. It revolves around that little thing called human nature in our fallen world!

- What happens is that when people begin to see those smaller amounts actually paid off it encourages them to stick to the program and even to work harder on the next level.

Thus, I would argue that Joseph chose a wise plan to make sure there was sufficient food for the famine... AND when we see what happens during the famine I think his wisdom is confirmed: It would NOT have been a secret that a massive famine was coming because that is why the food was being collected.

- And yet it appears that no one saved up any extra food on their own, even there in Egypt!

Yes, just as with our dependency programs today, they likely said, ‘hey, we don’t have to plan for the future because the government is taking care of that!’ However, we are also going to find that they did NOT save enough money to buy the food that would be needed! These are all things to ponder when someone, whether they come from a socialist or libertarian political camp, argues that they have the ideal way that society should be organized! As Christians, we should certainly be strong in our arguments that God has given us the best wisdom for how a society should be organized...

➤ BUT Scripture also reminds us that all such societies will still be made up of fallen citizens.

So we will certainly keep that balance in mind as next week we dig into our text from chapter 47 where we are going to have to consider actions by Joseph that really upset our modern worldly mindsets...

The famine will hit and Joseph will take ALL the money people have selling them food, and then all the animals they own in trade for more food, then all the land that they own and finally he enslaves the people of Egypt under Pharaoh for life!

Surely there is no way to see these as righteous actions by Joseph or any other ruler, and yet that is exactly what I think we should see if we are going to see Jesus here in the Book of Beginnings...

And of course that is what we are supposed to do, so to get us started I do have a bit of homework as I promised: We are going to be dealing with some difficult texts and actions next week with regard to being a disciple of Jesus. Most of us have on-line access to our Bibles these days, so begin with a word search in the New Testament for ‘hate.’

You will find it used in a variety of ways, but you will find a pretty good hint about the theme I am looking for in John 12 “24 Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. 25 He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.

➤ As you do this search, you will find there some very difficult verses or concepts.

If you are one who marks up your Bible, make some notes and if not jot them down and see if you can relate them to the story of Joseph here in the Book of Beginnings.

If you want some extra credit you could include lose & lost in your search as well, since the world would certainly look at the citizens of Egypt as the BIG losers in this account!

Obviously, there will be some very practical applications we will see in all that...

➤ And some may ask why I did not get right to them instead of spending more time considering the actions by Joseph as a civil ruler and what our rulers of today might learn from him?

Again, there are a couple of important reasons:

First we certainly hope and pray that some or even many of our young people will one day be involved in the civil realm and we want them to be prepared to serve well when called upon to make such decisions.

The second reason, which is of vital importance to all of us, is that reflecting on such things helps to inform the prayers that we are commanded by the Apostle Paul to lift up on behalf of our civil rulers so that we might live quiet and peaceful lives and that the advance of God’s Kingdom might continue.

I Timothy 2: “1 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”