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# Protection and Provision

Genesis 46:29 - 47:31

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John Adams is one of the revered and respected fathers of our nation. His greatest biographer, David McCullough, has given us the story of this sacrificial, saintly man. Much of what I am going to say is taken from a talk McCullough gave at Hillsdale College and is taken from *Imprimis*, May 2006, a Hillsdale College Publication.

John Adams was born a poor farm boy. He entered Harvard at 15. He set himself to read "forever". He was a deeply devoted Christian. The correspondence between him and his beloved wife, Abigail, are some of the most amazing letters ever written. He served our country well. He sacrificed often for its advancement. He argued for the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. He chose Jefferson to write the Declaration of Independence. He appointed Washington as head of the army. He appointed John Marshall as Chief Justice.

As he retired from public service, he met with heartache and hardship. He suffered terribly with physical ailments. His wife and daughter both died in the same season of the year. He was abandoned, forgotten, and even vilified. Let me now give you the "feel of his fiber" by McCullough.

One of the few things that Adams had left that he adored in his last years were his fruit trees. But then came one March night a terrible ice storm, and he woke up the next morning to see all of his trees shattered. This could have broken him, but it didn't. Listen to what he wrote:

A rain had fallen from some warmer region in the skies when the cold here below was intense to an extreme. Every drop was frozen wherever it fell in the trees, and clung to the limbs and sprigs as if it had been fastened by hooks of steel. The earth was never more universally covered with snow, and the rain had frozen upon a crust on the surface which shone with the brightness of burnished silver. The icicles on every sprig glowed in all the luster of diamonds. Every tree was a chandelier of cut glass. I have seen a queen of France with 18 millions of livres of diamonds upon her person and I declare that all the charms of her face and figure added to all the glitter of her jewels did not make an impression on me equal to that presented by every shrub. The whole world was glittering with precious stones.

Adams died, as many of you know, the same day Jefferson died. Jefferson had been his closest friend, then his political rival, then his political enemy. After twelve years of neither speaking to each other, Adams initiated the first letter of what was to be one of the great reconciliations in our history. The correspondence between these former presidents lasted until their deaths, and is some of the most wonderful letters in the English language. And then they died on the same day, each in his own bed, surrounded by his books. And it wasn't just any day. It was the 4th of July, 50 years after the Declaration of Independence.

The movement of God's purposes has been constantly forward even through tremendous obstacles. It was true in the life of John Adams. We have seen it week after week through Genesis. Just when it seems hopeless, God moves with his power to fulfill what He has promised. So, now, at this moment, God's people have left the Promised Land in the midst of a terrible famine and seem to be settling into Egypt. How is this a good thing? Abraham had come back to Egypt during famine with disastrous consequence for his reputation. His son, Isaac had done the same. Yet, in Egypt God has chosen to enrich and prosper them both.

This is the constant dilemma for God's people living in exile away from our homeland in heaven. Obstacle after obstacle seems to arise. Just when we seem to be making a great advance, some setback brings us up short. This besets our personal lives and our lives together as God's people. I know that we hoped for a season of growth and advancement and we are plunged into the difficulties of a pandemic. I know that some of you have experienced financial or health reversals when you hoped for further progress.

How will we respond to all this? Does God keep His promises? How do His providences unfold? Do we become fatalists just shrugging our spiritual shoulders at whatever comes to pass? Is there a way to be submissive to God's providences while still engaged in the world around us with wisdom, confidence, and deft spiritual balance? I believe so. I believe this is precisely the question, the dilemma Moses is dealing with here for the sake of all who hear and heed what he says.

### **The Preparation for a Pagan Land (46:28-34)**

Joseph has lived in Egypt for a long time. He knows their customs and their bias's well. So he has to prepare his family to do well in the land of their sojourn.

#### **In the Reunion with his Father (v.28-30)**

This begins with a great reunion with his father.

<sup>28</sup> He had sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to show the way before him in Goshen, and they came into the land of Goshen. <sup>29</sup> Then Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to meet Israel his father in Goshen. He presented himself to him and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while. <sup>30</sup> Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face and know that you are still alive."

Jacob had sent Judah to connect with Joseph. Together, they would show the way into and make sure all was ok in the land of Goshen. Judah led the way and Joseph joined them after. What a moment for this father and son. So many years of suffering and hardship and unexpected advances. So many years of grief and sorrow. Now, in foreign land, in a place set aside for them, this aged father meets again his much loved son.

Israel is content now. Grief has been turned to gladness. Hopelessness has been reversed with joy revived. Now, old and frail, he is ready to die. He knows his son is alive. All is well.

#### **In the Instruction to his Family (v.31-34)**

But there is very careful instruction to his family.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh and will say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me. <sup>32</sup> And the men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock, and they have brought their flocks and their herds and all that they have.' <sup>33</sup> When Pharaoh calls you and says, 'What is your occupation?' <sup>34</sup> you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our fathers,' in order that you may dwell in the land of Goshen, for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians."

First Joseph tells them what he is going to tell Pharaoh. Joseph is open and honest with the Pharaoh. This is treating the Pharaoh with respect. He expects that the Pharaoh will respond well even though there was a terrible bias against shepherds. The Egyptians were cattle people. They hated sheep. They despised shepherds as dirty and as an abomination. It seems that Joseph was banking on the respect he had earned with the Pharaoh to overcome his bias against shepherds.

Then Joseph tells how they must identify their vocation. Because of the Egyptian view of shepherds, the Israelites in Goshen, when talking with Egyptians from other parts of Egypt should be careful how they speak of their livelihood. They should say that they take care of livestock. This is true without playing into the bias of the Egyptians.

This raises a question. Is this sinful? Is this evidence that Joseph has been in Egypt too long? Is he telling his family to lie? Is what they are to say, sin?

We have seen this already and will see it over and over again in the Old Testament.

We owe the truth to believers. We owe truth wrapped in love. But this is part of what Jesus later will call being “wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”

There are times, particularly with unbelievers, when it is unwise to tell all the truth you know. Yet, this is not a falsehood. They do care for livestock. They just are not to be specific about the kind of livestock they care for.

Now, for many of you this is totally unsatisfying. You live in a black and white world where truth is absolute and lies are absolute. The Bible will not sustain such a view. And frankly, you cannot live with grace, kindness and Christian charity with such a view. And I certainly could not have gone into some of the countries I have. I have not told Chinese interrogators all I knew – in fact, little of what I knew. I do not owe unbelievers and particularly, the enemies of God’s people, the whole truth. Sometimes, to tell the whole truth is to side with evil.

And, Joseph is living in the Old Testament, before the Law...

## **The Interaction with a Pagan King (v.1-18)**

One of the great challenges facing the leadership of God’s people is how to interact with pagans in authority. Joseph is the second in command in Egypt. But he still must engage the Pharaoh in seeking a place and protection for his own people.

In this unit, Moses highlights the wisdom of Joseph who models how to engage pagan people as God’s kind of man. Here the providence of God has brought the son of Israel to have first place in the pagan world as he supplies them bread and brings them to servitude under an earthly king. Joseph’s admirable faithfulness and diligence have brought him to positions of leadership wherever he has been. But we have not been told how. Now we see how Joseph’s leadership functioned.

### **In the Procuring of His Favor (v.1-6)**

Joseph’s presents himself before the Pharaoh.

**47** So Joseph went in and told Pharaoh, “My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan. They are now in the land of Goshen.” <sup>2</sup> And from among his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh. <sup>3</sup> Pharaoh said to his brothers, “What is your occupation?” And they said to Pharaoh, “Your servants are shepherds, as our fathers were.” <sup>4</sup> They said to Pharaoh, “We have come to sojourn in the land, for there is no pasture for your servants’ flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. And now, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen.” <sup>5</sup> Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Your father and your brothers have come to you. <sup>6</sup> The land of Egypt is before you. Settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land. Let them settle in the land of Goshen, and if you know any able men among them, put them in charge of my livestock.”

He carefully announces the arrival of his brothers and his father with all they have and own. As he had asked earlier, he has settled them in the land of Goshen. Joseph wants to ensure that this is not just a temporary situation. He is going to secure this part of Egypt as a permanent portion as long as they dwell there.

Joseph also chooses five of his brothers to bring before the Pharaoh. We are not told the reasons for choosing only five. But it is a conscious act both in how many he chooses and in the ones he chooses. This is a bit of “putting your best foot forward.” However, the idea here is not appear in a way that encourages a mingling with the Egyptians, but rather highlights the desirability of separateness.

There are two challenges here then. They are going to need space and identity. They must have space for their present flocks and future prosperity. They must also be able to maintain their uniqueness as God’s people. They must live in Egypt without becoming Egyptian. They will want to pursue their vocation under God and continue to grow and multiply as God’s people. Their challenge is like ours. We must live here in this world. But we must not become a part of the world. We must learn to live in and engage with the world without being poured into its mold. Israel prospered and maintained her identity. But the wilderness wanderings are full of how much Egypt had gotten in God’s people while God’s people were in Egypt. This is what all God’s heart work in hard providences is all about. It is the uprooting of Egypt from our hearts so that we will love God and neighbor.

So, Pharaoh asks the obvious question men ask of each other all through time and all over the world, “What do you do for a living?” Based on their occupation as shepherds (which the Egyptians despised), they ask for the separate land where they are now pastured called Goshen. The Pharaoh offers them any land they want and is glad for them to take the land they request. Recognizing their abilities, the Pharaoh even turns over his own flocks and herds to their care.

### **In the Presenting of His Father (v.7-12)**

Joseph then brings in his father to present him to Pharaoh.

<sup>7</sup>Then Joseph brought in Jacob his father and stood him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. <sup>8</sup>And Pharaoh said to Jacob, “How many are the days of the years of your life?” <sup>9</sup>And Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning.” <sup>10</sup>And Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from the presence of Pharaoh. <sup>11</sup>Then Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. <sup>12</sup>And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father’s household with food, according to the number of their dependents.

Surely, he has told the Pharaoh stories of his family and father. Given all the Pharaoh seems to know about God, Joseph has related this family history to God’s promises and provisions. So here is the grand patriarch of this great tribe. Here is the man to whom God had affirmed the covenant and through whom God would bring about the 12 tribes. He stands before this pagan ruler and he conveys a blessing upon the Pharaoh. This is not just a greeting. This is God’s man, the covenant head of the future messiah and father of a nation. The Pharaoh may be the one upon the throne, but nevertheless, the greater is blessing the lesser.

The Pharaoh asks him how old he is. Ah, he is 130 years old. Further, Jacob responds with by apparently complaining of his lot in life. Compared to his forefathers, his life has been relatively short. And all his days have been full of hardship, grief and evil. It is hard to be kind to Jacob at this point. Here, I believe, he succumbs to one of the sins of old age – the troubles of the past are magnified, and the blessings of the present are minimized. Here is an opportunity to exalt God, to show in the midst of the hardness of life, the amazing and unforeseen greatness of what God has done. But no, all he can say is that he has lived 130 years and it has been really tough. May God give us the grace in the senior years of life to be seasoned with spiritual joy and hope even in the midst of physical decline.

Just a brief note – Jacob giving his age here also helps with establishing a timeline to Adam. Here is another milestone, among others, that mark the years from Noah’s flood through Abraham’s call to Israel’s leaving at the Exodus.

The closing of this day sees Joseph busily settling everyone in, providing for their needs and making all at home. His careful faithfulness and wisdom has secured a great place for his people and all with the favor and smile of the Pharaoh.

### **The Provision for a Pagan People (v.13-26)**

We have seen how Joseph brought his needs and requests to the pagan ruler. Now we see how he implemented a program for distributing the stockpiled food.

#### **In the Selling of the Larder/Largesse (v.13-18)**

The Egyptian people begin to run out of their own private stores.

<sup>13</sup> Now there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished by reason of the famine. <sup>14</sup> And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, in exchange for the grain that they bought. And Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh’s house. <sup>15</sup> And when the money was all spent in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, “Give us food. Why should we die before your eyes? For our money is gone.” <sup>16</sup> And Joseph answered, “Give your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone.” <sup>17</sup> So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the herds, and the donkeys. He supplied them with food in exchange for all their livestock that year. <sup>18</sup> And when that year was ended, they came to him the following year and said to him, “We will not hide from my lord that our money is all spent. The herds of livestock are my lord’s. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our land.”

They must come to Joseph to do what the foreigners coming had to do: pay for the grain that he had stockpiled.

First, over a year they spend all their money. Joseph sells them the grain as the famine deepens. He gathers up the money coming in and adds it to the Pharaoh’s wealth. He continues to sell the grain as long as the people have the money to buy it. The effect over the duration of the famine is to move all the currency from general circulation and put it at the disposal of the king.

Once the Egyptian people begin to run out of money, they come to Joseph again for the grain. He makes them an offer. They can trade their livestock for grain. So, for over a year, the Egyptian people buy the grain they need by exchanging their livestock for it. Joseph is

accumulating vast wealth and resources for the Pharaoh. Surely, the effect is to impoverish the people. Eventually, this will begin to serve to impoverish the nation.

### **In the Purchase of the Land (v.19-22)**

In accordance with what would later be codified in God's Law, Joseph sells the food to the Egyptians in exchange for their freedom and their land.

<sup>19</sup> Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for food, and we with our land will be servants to Pharaoh. And give us seed that we may live and not die, and that the land may not be desolate."

<sup>20</sup> So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for all the Egyptians sold their fields, because the famine was severe on them. The land became Pharaoh's. <sup>21</sup> As for the people, he made servants of them from one end of Egypt to the other. <sup>22</sup> Only the land of the priests he did not buy, for the priests had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh and lived on the allowance that Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their land.

Now for many, this is troubling. Why, given their increasing plight and dire hardship does he simply not give it to them? Leviticus 25:14-43 addresses parallel situations for Israel as they receive God's law. It was a great act of charity to buy the land of the destitute and bring them on as servants so as to provide for them. The modern welfare system of forcible taking from one group who has, in order to freely give to those who don't have or won't work is unbiblical and immoral.

We who have grown up under a welfare system. We have so breathed its air that it is difficult to accept what the Bible clearly says. In the both the Old and New Testaments, the people of God were to care for each other in personal and corporate ways. In the Old Testament, every farmer was to leave the corners of the fields unharvested for the poor to come and glean. But the poor had to come and work for what they received. Never did the Jewish government nor Levitical tax system force the taking of money or harvest from producers in the economy to simply dole out to those who were needy.

Yet, the Bible commands people to love neighbor in such a way that we take care of one another. In Leviticus 25, if a person was so destitute that they had nothing, they could offer themselves and their lands for sell. It was considered a great mercy when someone stepped up to accept the offer. The term of the sale was limited - it could only last until the next Sabbatical year or, by agreement, to the next Jubilee (70<sup>th</sup> Year). The person could be redeemed by a relative or could redeem themselves if they inherited wealth. What appears to us to be taking advantage of their plight is in God's view, an act of charity and compassion.

The New Testament radically changes this: the corporate benevolent care is for God's people. It is always voluntary. It may be covenanted or promised. Personal, individual charity to neighbors, whether they are believers or not, is also commanded. This reflects God's way in salvation. The benefits of salvation are freely given by the free-will of God who dispenses His mercy and benevolence as He sees fit. There is no room for demand on our part. We are supplicants who give up all to our King when He gives by grace to us who are utterly depraved, destitute and desperate.

So, the providence of God in bringing the famine and in placing Joseph where he was is being worked out. Part of God's purpose in the famine was to bring the whole economy under the

ownership and control of the Pharaoh. Further, Israel was not subject to this as they owned and grazed their own lands. God had promised to preserve them and to prosper them. Now, he does so in a most surprising places and in most unusual ways.

### **In the Making of the Law (v.23-26)**

Now that the Egyptians had begun to sell their land to the Pharaoh, Joseph proposed a way for them to live on the land and be able to pay the Pharaoh for the privilege.

<sup>23</sup> Then Joseph said to the people, “Behold, I have this day bought you and your land for Pharaoh. Now here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land. <sup>24</sup> And at the harvests you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and as food for yourselves and your households, and as food for your little ones.” <sup>25</sup> And they said, “You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be servants to Pharaoh.” <sup>26</sup> So Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth; the land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh’s.

This system we would recognize from history as European feudalism. The local baron or king owns the land. The people live on his lands and farm it. They pay him from what is produced as their rent. They keep the rest for themselves. In this way, the people can sustain themselves at present and in the future. We are not told if Joseph instituted some system of redeeming the land.

So, with the affirmation of the people, Joseph made the statutes permanent. The Pharaoh owned all the land. The people who lived on the land and farmed from the land paid a 20% rent on the produce from the land. Moses is recording this for the sake of the Israelites. They had learned over the 40 years what a hard task master a wicked king is when he has absolute control. They had seen the importance of land to a functioning economy. Having been reminded of all this, they should then welcome the framework and freedom that God’s Law would afford them.

Well, this has been a bit of a tough bit of preaching. But it is important for us to think carefully and Biblically when we make statements about our responsibility to the poor. Hopefully, this morning, you are spurred to take up your Bible and work through some of this for yourself.

### **The Protection for God’s People (v.27-31)**

This final section highlights how Joseph’s wise administration is a part of God’s good providence.

<sup>27</sup> Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen. And they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied greatly. <sup>28</sup> And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were 147 years.

<sup>29</sup> And when the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, “If now I have found favor in your sight, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal kindly and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt, <sup>30</sup> but let me lie with my fathers. Carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place.” He answered, “I will do as you have said.” <sup>31</sup> And he said, “Swear to me”; and he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself upon the head of his bed.

### **In the Prosperity of his People (v.27-28)**

In the land they have settled in, they prosper. For 17 years, they gain much wealth and grow into a great nation. These two verses are the thematic line for the New Covenant. God had sent them down to Egypt. God had protected and prospered them in Egypt. They are away

from the Promised Land. But there, they are subject to God's very great care. Let this be our encouragement, we who are the people of God living away from the Promised Land. We are still under the care of our God. He will protect and He will provide until it is time for the Exodus.

### **In the Promise to his Father (v.29-31)**

Jacob believes God's promises. Though he is now living away from the Promised Land, he believes they will return. But he is coming to the end of his life. He does not want to die and have his remains left in Egypt. So, he summons Joseph. He makes him promise to bring his body back with them when they return to the Promised Land. This is a great expression of his faith. He both believes the promises of God and is submitted to the providences of God.

Here is a simple and yet very hard lesson for us. We want to believe the promises of God. We can take Him at His Word. But we so often crave different circumstances than God has placed us in. Therefore, we must not only believe in Him but must bow to Him. We must do so in a way that looks forward to the future and commits it entirely to His wise and sovereign purposes.

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## **Reflect and Respond**

Now, what instruction is intended for us upon whom the ends of the ages has come?

Seek the way of wisdom in the midst of God's providences. Your difficult circumstances are an opportunity to display the glory and greatness of Christ as He gives you wisdom. Make Him look large as you wend your way through the opportunities and obstacles.

Engage pagan or unbelieving (same thing) authorities with careful wisdom, forethought, and speech. God's people of all people should be people-wise. We should not simply assert our rights or make our demands, particularly from the stance of being a Christian.

Grow old with grace. Be becoming a senior saint who is serious and joyous. Do not magnify your present troubles nor your past hardships except where and when you can magnify God who is sustaining, yes even better, who is causing you to thrive through them.

Be fierce in your adherence to God's Word even when it counters the accepted wisdom of the world. We must passionately care for the needy while not violating God's Word in caring for them. We will find the third way between giving to our own in need and requiring appropriate work in return. For your own study, note how the widows who are taken on for permanent support must have no family to care for them and when they do, they give their days for practical ministry in the church. (See 1 Corinthians 7; 1 Timothy 5; James 1) I do not believe the Bible teaches a welfare system of any sort. I am deeply suspicious of the government's faith-based initiatives for care for the needy.

Let us keep faith with our families. We have miles to go and promises to keep. When we honor our parents by caring for them and providing for them as we can, then God is pleased with us. Give them the honor and support you are commanded. Yet remember to be with your forever family as often as you can.