

## **JOSEPH SAVES THE PEOPLE OF EGYPT** **(Genesis 47:13-27)**

God used Joseph to save the lives of his father, his brothers, and their families—to preserve the chosen people and advance His grand covenant. In the process, God also used Joseph to save the countless inhabitants of Egypt. By interpreting Pharaoh’s dream, Joseph had prepared Egypt during its seven years of plenty to endure seven years of famine. As the famine progressed, the people surrendered their wealth, their property, and their lives in order to survive. They were grateful to Joseph for sustaining them through the famine. God had blessed His chosen people and the people of Egypt as well. When God blesses His people, those blessings often spill over into the lives of others.

**Surrender—God sustains us, so He  
deserves our unconditional commitment (47:13-19).**

The Egyptians progressively surrendered their wealth, possessions, and lives to Pharaoh in exchange for life-sustaining grain. Likewise, because God sustains us He deserves our unconditional commitment.

***Because of the severity of the famine the people spent all their money on the grain that Joseph had stored away (47:13-14).***

Joseph’s story now returns to his intervention on behalf of the people of Egypt. The seven-year famine was severe. Food was scarce. Apart from Joseph’s preemptive actions during the seven years of plenty, the people of Egypt would have starved to death. But Joseph had stored away an ample supply of grain. There was enough to feed the entire population of Egypt as well as that of Canaan. The people willingly paid for this life-sustaining food, and soon their money was gone. But they had survived.

***Because their money ran out the people exchanged their livestock for the grain that Joseph had stored away (47:15-17).***

As the famine progressed, the people of Egypt and Canaan again went to Joseph for relief. With no money to purchase grain, the Egyptians surrendered their livestock in order to purchase food. Joseph took possession of all the horses, sheep, goats, cattle, and donkeys in Egypt. In exchange, the people of Egypt were able to eat for another year.

***Because their resources were depleted the people exchanged their land and their lives for the grain that Joseph had stored away (47:18-19).***

The next year the famine continued. The people acknowledged that they had no money or livestock—all had been turned over to Joseph. Therefore the people suggested an exchange of their land and their bodies for food. Rather than succumbing to death, the people asked Joseph to purchase their land and their lives. They would willingly submit

to servitude in order to receive food to sustain them and their families. They offered themselves to Pharaoh in exchange for food to eat and grain to plant. Life is dear, and no sacrifice is too great when it comes to feeding our families. The people of Egypt willingly surrendered themselves to Pharaoh, granting him authority over their land and their lives. Spiritually speaking, we all live under the destitution of a famine of the heart. We need God's life-giving, life-sustaining grace. Through Jesus Christ, the "Bread of Life" (John 6:35), we have eternal life. Our submission to His grace and His will makes good sense in light of our deep spiritual need.

**Gratitude—God saves us, so He  
deserves our unrestrained thanksgiving (47:20-26).**

Reading Genesis 47:20-26 through modern eyes may taint our impression of the Egyptian's plight—we may focus on their servitude rather than their gratitude. But these people narrowly escaped death by starvation due to a severe and protracted famine. They were more than willing to subject themselves to the life-sustaining provision of Pharaoh through Joseph. They were grateful to be alive, saved by Joseph's wisdom and foresight. Likewise, we depend on God for our eternal salvation and are grateful for His grace.

***Joseph acquired all the land in Egypt and the subjection of the people for Pharaoh due to the strain of the famine (47:20-22).***

Joseph purchased all the land in Egypt on behalf of Pharaoh, giving the people grain in exchange to save them from starvation. The people were more than eager to make this exchange. After all, their very lives were at stake. In addition, Joseph secured the servitude of the people, again at their request and in exchange for food. Verse 21 poses a textual problem due to the change of just a couple of Hebrew letters. Either Joseph moved the people into the cities from all over the land to better accommodate the distribution of grain or he subjected the people to servitude all over the land. The latter concept seems to best fit the context. The people likely continued to live and work on the property they had formerly possessed, but now their labor and produce belonged to Pharaoh. All the land in Egypt now belonged to Egypt's monarch, a centralization of power that often characterized the history of this ancient land. However, the priests were exempt from selling their land because Pharaoh himself provided food for them. The priestly class in ancient Egypt often enjoyed special privileges, privileges that were maintained in the days of Joseph.

***Joseph supplied the people with grain and required them to give one-fifth of their crops to Pharaoh (47:23-24).***

Having acquired the land and the lives of the people of Egypt, Joseph distributed grain to sustain the lives of the people. He also provided grain for planting the fields, probably basing this distribution on the timing and severity of the famine. Although the land and lives of the Egyptians now belonged to Pharaoh, Joseph generously allowed the people to retain eighty percent of their crops. This they could use for food and for

replanting in the following season. The other twenty percent of the produce belonged to Pharaoh. These allotments appear to have been extremely equitable, given the productivity of the land in Egypt when there was no famine.

***The people of Egypt expressed their gratitude to Joseph for saving their lives (47:25).***

The people of Egypt declared to Joseph, “You have saved our lives!” Without Joseph, and ultimately without God working through Joseph, the population of Egypt would have been decimated. Joseph had indeed saved the lives of countless thousands of Egyptians. These Egyptians were extremely grateful. They asked Joseph to grant them his favor and they renewed their willing commitment to be Pharaoh’s slaves. They would willingly work the land for Pharaoh, retain their allotment, sustain their families, and provide Pharaoh with his share of the crops. Having stared death in the face, the people of Egypt were happy to be alive and grateful to Joseph who had saved their lives.

***Joseph’s policy of taxing one-fifth of all produce became a lasting law in Egypt (47:26).***

Joseph’s influence in Egypt lasted long beyond the seven years of famine. Even at the time of the writing of Genesis—the days of Moses, some four hundred years later—the taxation rate in Egypt followed the plan established by Joseph. Pharaoh received one-fifth of the produce while the people retained four-fifths for themselves. The priests, however, retained the full rights to their land and its produce. The people of Egypt were grateful for Joseph’s saving work. On a spiritual level, the saving work of God in our lives makes it possible for us to be delivered from eternal judgment to eternal life through Jesus Christ. This eternal salvation makes us, God’s people, eternally grateful. God deserves every ounce of thanksgiving that we can render to Him.

**Multiplication—God prospers us, so He  
deserves our undivided recognition (47:27).**

God had promised to make Abraham’s descendants into a great nation. So far Abraham’s descendants numbered seventy. But God would multiply them in the land of Egypt, fulfilling His grand covenant. Likewise, God deserves the credit for any and every blessing in our lives.

***The Israelites settled in the region of Goshen in Egypt (47:27a).***

Genesis 47:27 serves as a bookend to the narrative that describes the arrival of Joseph’s brothers in the region of Goshen (Genesis 47:11-12). The descendants of Jacob have now become known as the Israelites. They made their home in Goshen, the best part of the land of Egypt, especially for raising cattle and living as shepherds.

***The Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly in Egypt (47:27b).***

Joseph's father and brothers took possession of the land of Goshen. There, simply stated, they "were fruitful and multiplied." This phrase is reminiscent of the command of God to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, using the same words to convey the concept of divine blessing (Genesis 1:28). The Israelites grew from a family into a nation during their sojourn in Egypt because God blessed them. The Egyptians were saved from starvation and the Israelites were preserved to fulfill God's divine plan. When God blesses His people, those blessings often spill over into the lives of others.