

Joseph Preserved the People From the Famine

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain that Joseph used his leadership to serve others and keep many people alive during the time of the seven-year famine. In this topic, we will learn more about the details of how the people lived during the famine.

Genesis 47:15-19 says, “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.’ Then Joseph said, ‘Give your livestock, and I will give you *bread* for your livestock, if the money is gone.’ 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. 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. 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.’” The Egyptians continued to buy grain for bread until their money was gone. However, the famine still continued.

Joseph had no intention of letting the people starve. Instead, God had given him this position of leadership so he could save many people alive. The people came to Joseph when they no longer had money to buy grain for bread. That was when Joseph offered to buy their animals in exchange for food. The people willingly brought their animals to Joseph, because they realized his concern to help them remain alive. During that year, Joseph exchanged grain for their animals. The people were eager to exchange their horses, flocks, cattle and donkeys for food. That exchange made it possible for them to live through another year. However, that meant there was still going to be four more years of famine.

This time, the people came with their suggestion about how to survive through the rest of the famine. The people said they only had two things they could exchange for grain to make bread and offered those two things in exchange for grain to get them through the rest of the famine. They said they would gladly exchange their bodies and their lands for grain. Then, they asked Joseph to buy their bodies and their lands for Pharaoh, so they would have food to eat during the rest of the famine. Here, we have an example of what happens when people become desperate for food. Their statement shows that their only thought was survival. The people were willing to do whatever Joseph would require, in order to receive enough food to survive until the end of the famine.

Genesis 47:20-26 says, “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. And as for the people, he moved them into the cities, from *one* end of the borders of Egypt to the *other* end. Only the land of the priests he did not buy; for the priests had rations *allotted to them* by Pharaoh, and they ate their rations which Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their lands. Then Joseph said to the people, ‘Indeed I have bought you and your land this day for Pharaoh. Look, *here is* seed for you, and you shall sow the land. And it shall come to pass in the harvest that you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh. Four-fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and for your food, for those of your households and as food for your little ones.’ So they said, ‘You have saved our lives; let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh’s servants.’ And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt to this day, *that* Pharaoh should have one-fifth, except for the land of the priests only, *which* did not become Pharaoh’s.” We see that Joseph followed the suggestion of the people and bought their land for Pharaoh.

By this time, none of the people had any grain left to provide food for themselves through the rest of the famine, because it was so severe. This meant major changes in the land of Egypt. Now, all of the land belonged to Pharaoh. The only land that did not belong to Pharaoh was the land of the priests of the Egyptian religion. The reason for this exception was due to the fact that the priests had long received rations of food from the Pharaohs, because they were the leaders of their religion. As a result, they continued to receive the rations of food that Pharaoh gave to the priests, so it did not become necessary for the priests to sell their land to Pharaoh. Meanwhile, Joseph moved the rest of the people into the cities. This meant that all of the people were near the places where the grain was stored so it would be much easier to distribute the grain to the people. The word translated “cities” does not mean the cities had to be large. Many times, when a city is mentioned, we see that the leaders gathered at the gate of the city. This meant that cities had walls for protection from enemies, while un-walled towns and villages did not have a wall for protection.

Joseph also changed the way that people lived both during, and after, the famine. They became sharecroppers instead of owners. Pharaoh would provide the grain to sow the crops for the following year, at the end of the famine, and the people would plant and raise the crops until the time of harvest. As sharecroppers, the people were to give one-fifth of their crops to Pharaoh and then keep the other four-fifths of the crop for themselves. Once the famine was over, the people were to keep some of the four-fifths of grain as seed to replant the following year, and the rest would be for their own food. In this way, most of that four-fifths of the grain of the people would be for their own food.

The people were filled with joy when they heard the words of Joseph. It meant that they would have food until the famine was completed at the end of the seven years. As a result, the people said, “You have saved our lives; let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh’s servants.” The people were very willing to sell their land

and serve Pharaoh, in exchange for food to survive. Then, Joseph made the plan for the people to become sharecroppers by giving one-fifth to Pharaoh as the law of the land. That way, the people knew what they could expect in the future. At the same time, Joseph explained that the law would not apply to the priests of Egypt because their land was not sold to Pharaoh like the land of the rest of the people.

Genesis 47:27-31 says, “So Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions there and grew and multiplied exceedingly. And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the length of Jacob’s life was one hundred and forty-seven years. When the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, ‘Now if I have found favor in your sight, please put your hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me. Please do not bury me in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers; you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place.’ And he said, ‘I will do as you have said.’ Then he said, ‘Swear to me.’ And he swore to him. So Israel bowed himself on the head of the bed.” Once the descendants of Israel were in the land of Egypt, they started to multiply from a large family to a great nation of people. Their possessions increased and the number of people also greatly increased.

We see that Jacob lived for a total of seventeen years after he reached the land of Egypt. That meant he had the opportunity to see the beginning of the growth of his descendants toward the point when they would become a great nation. Jacob was also able to enjoy those last years because he knew that Joseph was alive and was able to come and see him from time-to-time. As he came close to the end of his life, those seventeen additional years meant that Jacob lived a total of one hundred and forty-seven years. However, the time came when Jacob realized that he would soon die. Since Jacob did not know the exact time he would die, he asked for Joseph to come see him, because he had one request to make of Joseph before he died.

When Joseph arrived at the house where Jacob was living, the first thing Jacob did was to ask Joseph to make him a promise. In that day, the way the people would make a promise was to place their hand under the thigh of the person who was requesting the promise. Jacob asked Joseph to deal kindly and truly with him. By that, he meant that he wanted Joseph to make a promise that Joseph would keep after the death of his father. Then, Jacob made his request. Jacob said, “Please do not bury me in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers; you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place.” Here, we see that Jacob did not want to be buried in the land of Egypt. Instead, he wanted to be buried in the land God had promised would one day belong to his descendants. This was an important request because it showed that he expected the Lord to fulfill that promise, about the land, in the future.

Jacob wanted to be buried in the same place his father and grandfather were buried in the land of Canaan. He asked Joseph to promise to take his body to the land of Canaan and bury it in the burial place of his fathers. Joseph promised his father that he would do exactly as his father had requested. Jacob was so concerned that he be buried in Canaan,

that he asked Joseph to take an oath that he would do exactly as he had said. Joseph had the same confidence, as his father, that God would return their people to the land of Canaan. Genesis 50:25 says, “Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, ‘God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.’” We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why these actions by Jacob and Joseph showed that they looked forward to the fact that God would keep His promises. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things.