

# Genesis 47: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Date: 17 February 2020

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[ 0 : 00 ] Genesis chapter 47 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, Your father and your brothers have come to you. 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. Then Joseph brought in Jacob his father and stood him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

And Pharaoh said to Jacob, How many are the days of the years of your life? And Jacob said to Pharaoh, The days of the years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty 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. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from the presence of Pharaoh.

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 Ramses, as Pharaoh had commanded. And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents.

[ 1 : 42 ] 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. 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. 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! And Joseph answered, Give your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone. 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. 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. 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.

[ 2 : 54 ] And give us seed that we may live and not die, and that the land may not be desolate. 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. As for the people, he made servants of them, from one end of Egypt to the other. 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. 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. And at the harvest 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.

And they said, You have saved our lives. May it please my Lord, we will be servants to Pharaoh. So Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth.

[ 3 : 56 ] The land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh's. 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.

And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were one hundred and forty-seven years. And when the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, If now I have found favour in your sight, put your hand under my thigh, and promise to deal kindly and truly with me.

Do not bury me in Egypt, 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.

And he said, Swear to me. And he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself upon the head of his bed. In Genesis 47, we are well into the denouement of the story of Joseph.

Joseph presents some of his brothers to Pharaoh, and then Jacob blesses Pharaoh. And then there's the continued events and outcome of famine, and Joseph pledges to his father to bury him in the land of Canaan.

[ 5 : 06 ] Joseph first of all presents five of his brothers to Pharaoh. This number might be associated with strength. It's the number of the hand. It's the number that's associated with military numbering at many points.

And presumably, they have a large company of people at this point. We've read earlier on that Abraham had 318 fighting men. Esau came to meet Jacob with 400 men.

Jacob himself and Isaac, his father, seem to have had large numbers of people around them. So it's likely that they came into Egypt with a number of thousands of people at this point.

But the core people of the family were 70. They settle with these people in the land of Goshen near Ramses, where they will be part of the life of Egypt, but yet also distinct from it.

It's one of the reasons why it's important that they declare themselves to be shepherds. As shepherds, they will be kept apart from the wider nation, and they won't just assimilate. Jacob blesses Pharaoh as a father.

[ 6 : 02 ] And here, one of the things we're seeing is a fulfillment of some of the promises that are given to Abraham and his call. The promise that nations will be blessed through him. Here, Jacob is literally blessing one of the great rulers of his day.

And that ruler is treating him as a father figure, not just as a subject of his authority and rule. Jacob describes his own life experience as a painful one. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life.

Compared with the life of his father and grandfather, it might seem that Jacob suffered a great deal more. Think about the early years of his life, characterized by wrestling with Esau, and the failure of his father to bless him and recognize him as the son that should be favored.

Then he goes to the house of Laban, and he's sorely mistreated there. He has the painful domestic issues of having been forced into a marriage that he did not want, with a wife that he does not love. And then a wife whom he loves, who is barren. And then the rivalry in his family, his sons, and all the tragedy that happens with his sons. Joseph sold into slavery.

[ 7 : 11 ] The actions of Simeon and Levi causing him trouble in Shechem. The actions of his oldest son, Reuben, who tried to stage a coup against him. In all of this, his experience has been a painful one.

He can see God's work in his life, but it has not been easy. They remain sojourners in the land, but they're treated very favorably. They have the trust of Pharaoh. They're given positions of authority. Pharaoh wants more people like Joseph, competent and blessed. And so he offers to take any gifted people among the brothers and the company into his service.

Now, the famine continues at this point. Canaan depends upon rain for its agriculture. And Egypt depends upon the Nile. So it seems that this is a larger breakdown than just one agricultural system.

It's a wider problem for the whole region. And then the money fails. They've run out of money. They can't pay for the food anymore. So at that point, Joseph takes their livestock.

[ 8 : 09 ] And then the next year, they have nothing left, but their land and their bodies. What is steadily happening here is that the people of Egypt are being decapitalised to survive the famine. So they're depending upon the shrewdness of Joseph to provide for them.

And as a result, they become the slaves of Pharaoh. The choice that they have is between dying and becoming dependent upon some provident party. When Joseph buys them as the slaves for Pharaoh, they have to give a fifth of what they have to Pharaoh.

And this situation, it's important to consider what this means. It is not an ideal situation for people to be reduced to this sort of serfdom. It's not an ideal situation, but it's a lot better than dying.

And Joseph, by his provident activity and by reducing the people to slavery and dependence upon his providence, he established the strength of the state of Egypt.

The ideal is that people will be able to provide for themselves, that people will own their own productive property. The Bible speaks about the ideal situation with everyone being beneath their own vine and fig tree, not just working for the state or for Big Fig Incorporated or Megavine.

[ 9 : 18 ] You don't want to be a serf, a slave or even a wage slave. The ideal is that you end up working on your own land and having your own property. But where that's not possible, where you don't have the providence, where you don't have the resources, in that situation, it can be good to have some other party to depend upon, whether that's the state or some big corporation, whatever it is.

Egypt, however, is a house of bondage. And this is one of the ways in which it is a house of bondage. The people of Egypt are the slaves of Pharaoh. They work for him. So the house of bondage is not just the state of Israel within the land.

It's the state of everyone within the land. Slavery is not an ideal, but it's a sort of safety net. But in Egypt, it seems to become a bit more institutionalized. Now, in the case of an extreme famine, there can be a need for a bigger organization to deal with such shocks.

And Joseph is a really gifted administrator. He's the sort of person that a state needs to deal with these sorts of crisis situations. He has worked for his father and for various other masters at this point.

And for each one of them, he has proved himself to be incredibly gifted and to be blessed in whatever he does. But there are dangers to a really gifted administrator, especially if they're serving for people who are not good.

[ 10 : 39 ] When a pharaoh arises that has forgotten Joseph, he still has all the power that Joseph has accrued to the Egyptian state. And so this is a very powerful machine that he now has in his hand.

Joseph is great as the administrator of a good master, but there are limitations when it comes to the situation of the exodus and you have a bad master in charge of all that state machinery that Joseph has established.

You need someone like Levi who has zeal and is even prepared to use violence in a particular way. Kings have a degree of prudence in setting up these sorts of structures and for setting rates of taxation and things like that.

And Joseph seems to illustrate that here in his approach. Now that the people of Egypt are the slaves of Pharaoh as well, there's a lot more possibility to arrange things and organise the people. So there's more scope for central planning. And in particular, in some texts, it mentions that Joseph removed people to the cities. He's seemingly undertaking a new urbanisation project and this enables Egypt to become a far more centralised and organised society.

[ 11 : 50 ] During this time, Israel is settling in the land of Goshen and they're really thriving. They're filling the land, they're fruitful and they're multiplying. Note, this is referring to language that we find in Genesis chapter 1 where they're called to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it and exercise dominion over its creatures.

They're starting to really fulfil the dominion mandate within the context of the land of Goshen. And this comes near the end of Jacob's life. He has been in the land for 17 years at this point and the end of his life is at the age of 147.

Note again, this is one of the patriarch ages with a mathematical pattern. So Abraham dies at 175 which is 7 times 5 squared.

Isaac dies at 180 which is 5 times 6 squared. And then we have Jacob dying at 3 times 7 squared. So there is a pattern here.

Jacob wants Joseph to promise that he will bury him in the land of Canaan with his fathers. And there is a conflict here beneath the surface. And the conflict is between Pharaoh and Jacob to an extent.

[ 13 : 00 ] To which father figure is Joseph going to be faithful? Has Joseph been Egyptianised? Now of course Joseph is pleased to see his father and his family again. But the question is has he become one of the Egyptians?

Is he truly going to be a person that identifies with the covenant people? Or has he so become accustomed to status in Egypt and being seen as an Egyptian that this is where he wants to settle and remain?

Does he value status in Egypt or being part of the covenant people? And the promise that Jacob makes is a very important one because it underlines the fact that Jacob and his family are still destined for the land of Canaan.

They're going to go down into the land but then they're going to come back up again. And so they're not going to remain in Egypt. And burying Jacob in the land of Canaan is a statement to that effect. They have a parcel within the land and this anticipates that they'll one day come into full possession of the land. But in confidence of that fact Jacob wants to be buried there.

[ 14 : 05 ] And by being buried there he is bringing the rest of his family into a greater sense of the knowledge that Egypt is not their home. Egypt is not where they're going to remain.

They're going to be there as sojourners for a period of time and then they're going to come up again. You can imagine if you were Jacob at this time there would be many thoughts going through your mind about what Joseph thought about the situation.

Joseph has come into the land of Egypt he's been in slavery he's been in prison and then he's been taken out of that by Pharaoh and Pharaoh has treated him literally royally.

He's been someone who's been given the second status in the land he's been treated like the firstborn son of Pharaoh he's been given immense rule and power he's been given status and privilege he's even been given a wife by Pharaoh and in all these different ways he's been treated as if he was Pharaoh's own son.

Now Jacob comes along Jacob's a man with influence and power but nothing remotely near that of Pharaoh and you can imagine that in his mind he's wondering to whom does Joseph look to as his true father the man who he remembers from when he was a kid in his teens or the man who has blessed him in all these different ways in his adulthood and at whose side he has been serving these last few decades these are the big questions that he will be wrestling with at this point and you can imagine that Pharaoh would not be particularly keen on Joseph bearing his father back in the land of Canaan it would be an unwelcome sign Joseph is the saviour of the people of Egypt we want to count him as an Egyptian he is a great hero of our people and now he's going to bury his father back in the land from which he came he was taken as a slave from that land he doesn't belong in that land anymore why would he ever think of returning to a place where all he knew was difficulty why wouldn't he want to think himself one of these people we've treated him so well why wouldn't he want to be one of us and if he's burying his father there surely that's a bad sign and so for Joseph it would be very easy to go along with the willow Pharaoh at that point but the fact that he is faithful to his father and makes this pledge is a great sign first of all of Joseph's faithfulness and also it's a source of comfort for Jacob at the end of his life that things have come full circle he may have had questions about the faithfulness of Joseph near the beginning of his life was Joseph merely in it for himself for his own advancement but now he sees that Joseph is truly faithful to him a question to consider

[ 16 : 49 ] Jacob lives in the land of Egypt for 17 years when have we last read about 17 years and why might this be significant so■