

Beneath Joseph's Technicolour Dream Coat Feast and Famine – Genesis 47:11 - 31

After Joseph was reunited with Jacob, and Jacob's 12 sons and their families were all relocated in Egypt, the story returns to the famine that was ravaging the land.¹ Genesis 47 paints a stark contrast between the people of Egypt, who were slowly but surely being reduced to slavery (47:13 – 26), and the special care and provision that God showed to Jacob's family during this time (47:11- 12, 27). The Bible doesn't make any moral comment about Joseph's plan to collect a 20% per annum grain-tax from the people during the seven years of plenty and then sell it back to them during the seven-year-famine (41:34 – 36). But it's striking that the Bible reveals that it was *Joseph* (not Pharaoh or the famine) who reduced the Egyptian people to servitude (47:21). Ironically, 400 years later another Pharaoh came to power who knew nothing about Joseph, and made slaves of Jacob's descendants – although Joseph's compassion on the people of Egypt stands in stark contrast to the cruelty to which this Pharaoh subjected Israel (Exodus 1:8 - 14). It's no wonder that after the Exodus, God commanded Israel to safeguard each other's property by requiring sold land to be returned to its original owners every 50 years, in The Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:25 - 28). Ultimately we know that it was God who predetermined that Egypt would be the furnace in which the nation Israel would be forged (see Genesis 15:12 - 14 and 46:2 - 4).² Later in Israel's history, Jesus Christ would use the imagery of the Exodus and the Passover to explain to his 12 Israelite disciples his own plan to rescue his people from slavery to sin (e.g. Mark 14:16 – 25). In other words, God has used physical human history to reveal and explain to us *His* plan to save the world from the curse of sin and death that is devastating our world.

1. Why do you think God sent the seven years of fruitfulness and famine in the first place? (For a possible explanation see Genesis 1:27 – 2:3 and 3:17 – 19)
2. Read Genesis 47:11- 12, 27. Why did Jacob's family fair so well in the midst of this devastating famine?
3. Read 47:13 – 21. What does it mean that Joseph reduced the people to servitude (47:21)? What do you think of Joseph's actions? (I.e. were they right, wrong, unavoidable, avoidable?)
4. Why do you think Genesis mentions that Pharaoh allowed his priests to keep their land by providing for them during the famine? (47:22)
5. Having purchased for Pharaoh everything that the Egyptian people owned (including themselves), why is it significant that Joseph provided them with seed and allowed them to keep 80% of their harvested crops (47:23 – 26)? How did the people feel about Joseph's plan?
6. Read Genesis 47:28 – 31. Why is it significant that Jacob asked Joseph to bury him back in the land of Canaan with his forefathers?
7. Write down or reflect upon any actions or principles within this story that inspire, challenge, disturb or confuse you.

¹ It's interesting that God used a famine to lead Israel into Egypt, and a similar devastation to bring them back out again (Compare Genesis 47:1 – 4 with Exodus 9 – 10).

² Compare this with the way that the diverse African tribes that were sold into slavery in North America eventually became African-Americans: A people who now share a common history, and also common heroes (e.g. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.)