

Seven Years of Plenty and Seven Years of Famine

Genesis 41:46-57

Genesis 41:46-57 - *“Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁷ Now in the seven plentiful years the ground brought forth abundantly. ⁴⁸ So he gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities; he laid up in every city the food of the fields which surrounded them. ⁴⁹ Joseph gathered very much grain, as the sand of the sea, until he stopped counting, for it was immeasurable.*

⁵⁰ And to Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On, bore to him. ⁵¹ Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh. “For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father’s house.” ⁵² And the name of the second he called Ephraim. “For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.”

⁵³ Then the seven years of plenty which were in the land of Egypt ended, ⁵⁴ and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. The famine was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. ⁵⁵ So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do.” ⁵⁶ The famine was over all the face of the earth, and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians. And the famine became severe in the land of Egypt. ⁵⁷ So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine was severe in all lands.”

Background Notes

Genesis 41:46 says that Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, king of Egypt. He was seventeen years old when he was betrayed by his brothers (Genesis 37:2). So he was in Egypt a total of thirteen years before he was elevated to the position of prime minister. Some of that time was spent in Potiphar’s household, and some that time was spent in prison, but we can’t be sure of how many years he spent in each situation.

When Joseph was elevated to the position of prime minister of Egypt, he went right to work. He had storage granaries built in cities all over Egypt. During the years of plenty, 20% of the grain was collected and stored up for the years of famine to come. Genesis 41:34-36: *“Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, to collect one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. Then that food shall be as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish during the famine.”*

The phrase “all the land of Egypt” is used a number of times in this chapter. This is quite significant for dating Joseph’s life and time correctly. Verses 41-44: *“And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.” Then*

Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, "Bow the knee!" So he set him over all the land of Egypt. Pharaoh also said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."

And verse 46, *"Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt."* And verses 54-55: *"...and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. The famine was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do."*

All the land of Egypt means both Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt. Egypt lies along the Nile River. Lower Egypt is in the area of the Nile delta, near the Mediterranean Sea. Upper Egypt is 400 miles south up the Nile. You might be thinking, "Big deal! So what?" Well, it's important for biblical chronology! You see, some scholars have proposed that Joseph came to power at the time of the "Hyksos invasion" of Egypt, about 1730BC. However, the Hyksos didn't rule over "all of Egypt" (both Lower Egypt and Upper Egypt) except for a very brief period. So it appears that Joseph rose to power **before** the Hyksos invasion, around 1900BC. This fits in very well with the biblical chronology for properly dating the Exodus.

I wish we had more time to discuss this topic, but if you want to study further, read I Kings 6:1. Then get out some commentaries and noted Bibles. Read what the Scriptures and the commentaries say about the chronology from Solomon's time back to the time of the Exodus.

Joseph had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. These two sons would become two of the tribes in Israel. There was no "tribe of Joseph" in Israel; the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim took the place of the tribe of Joseph. In this way faithful Joseph got a double portion of the inheritance in Israel! 1 Chronicles 5:1 says: *"Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel—he was indeed the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that the genealogy is not listed according to the birthright..."*

Doctrinal Points

1. Godly believers can wisely plan ahead if they really depend on the Lord's direction.

Godly believers can plan ahead – if they depend on the Lord's direction? That almost sounds like a contradiction, doesn't it? If you plan ahead, are you depending on the Lord's direction - or are you depending your own foresight and self-discipline? If you are depending on the Lord's direction, should you plan ahead? No, it's not a contradiction!

In Matthew 6:34 the Lord said, *"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."* The Lord wasn't saying that it's wrong to plan for tomorrow. We can wisely plan for tomorrow while still depending on the Lord. What the Lord meant was "Don't get uptight, don't get anxious, and **don't worry about tomorrow.**" Tomorrow is in **His** hands!

Was Joseph depending on the Lord? Yes! Did Joseph plan ahead by saving grain in storehouses? Yes! Depending on the Lord, and also planning ahead is not a contradiction. In fact, these things go together. They are complementary. Godly believers can wisely plan ahead if they also truly depend on the Lord's direction, knowing that in His wisdom the Lord can (and may indeed) change our plans. If we're really depending on the Lord for direction, we'll wisely plan ahead for what we're going to do with our time, or our abilities, or our money - and then trust the Lord to show us if He wants you to move in a different direction.

Recently someone asked me, "What would you do if someone were to give \$10,000 to Growing Christian Ministries?" - and I replied, "I don't know!" Then that person said, "Maybe you'd better plan ahead, because that could happen! Make plans for the future."

You know, he had a point. I need to look ahead and plan wisely as to how the Lord wants me to direct Growing Christians Ministries for the future. (And just in case any of you happen to hand me \$10,000 as I leave this church - yes, I have a plan!) Actually, I'm pretty sure I would use that \$10,000 to buy more radio time. Radio time costs money, and right now I think that would be the best and wisest plan for furthering the gospel and expanding the ministry. But God may have different plans, and I need to be sensitive if He chooses to change my plans.

As a church, are you depending on the Lord? Are you planning ahead as to ministries, or programs, or growth? Depending on the Lord and planning ahead can go together. In fact, Godly believers can wisely plan ahead if they really depend on the Lord's direction.

2. Godly believers can be abundantly fruitful if they really forget past disappointments.

We see that truth taught in the names that Joseph gave his two sons. *"Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh, "For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house." And the name of the second he called Ephraim, "For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction" (v51-52).*

Notice the order: first Manasseh (*"God has made me forget..."*), then Ephraim (*God has caused me to be fruitful..."*). Here's the spiritual principle. Joseph was fruitful in the land of his affliction because he was able to forget the horrible treatment by his brothers and the hardships he had suffered in Egypt. That doesn't mean that those awful events were erased from his memory, but does mean that Joseph did not hold grudges - and he was not bitter. **Joseph was ready to forgive!** He didn't take revenge on Potiphar's wife, or on the butler, or on his brothers. He recognized the providence of God in all of the events of his life. "God had made him forget," and as a result, Joseph was "fruitful in the land of his affliction. "

What about us? Let's ask ourselves, "Am I bitter about something that someone has done to me or said about me in the past? Am I holding a grudge because I have been wronged?" If we're bitter or if we hold grudges, we will never be very fruitful. We must turn past difficulties and problems over to the Lord, and ask Him to help us forget how we have been

wronged. Even if those who have hurt us never ask for forgiveness, we can be fruitful only when we put the past behind us.

Some time ago I spoke with a Christian man who was bitter over something other Christians said about him more than forty years ago. That's all he talked about for two straight hours as we rode together in the car. Sadly, this man is not a very fruitful Christian - and he never will be, because he just cannot turn his grievance over to the Lord and forget his past disappointments.

Can you forget past wrongs? If you want to be a fruitful Christian, you must be able to do this. Godly believers can be abundantly fruitful if they really forget past disappointments.

Practical Application

Have you come to the right place for bread?

Verse 55: *“So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do.”* And verse 57: *“So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine was severe in all lands.”*

Joseph is a beautiful Old Testament picture of our Lord. As Joseph lived among his brothers, but they rejected and betrayed him, so the Lord Jesus came to live among His own people, but they rejected and betrayed and crucified Him. But as Joseph was raised to power and exalted over the whole land, so Jesus Christ has been raised to power and glory, and He is exalted over the whole world.

When the famine came, people couldn't go to the pagan priests or the wise men of Egypt for bread. Everyone had to come to **Joseph** for bread. If they didn't come to Joseph, they perished! And that's another spiritual picture! In John 6:48, Jesus said, *“I am the Bread of Life.”* As everyone had to come to Joseph for grain in order to live, so everyone must come to Christ for life, because He is the Bread of Life. Have **you** come to the right place for bread?

Many people today are not coming to “the right place for bread.” They're looking for the bread of life in religion and religious ritual. They're looking for the bread of life in good works or helping with humanistic projects. They're looking for the bread of life in mystical experiences. But these are the **wrong** places to seek the bread of life! As people had to come to Joseph for bread in order to live, so we must come to Christ, the Bread of Life, for salvation and eternal life.

Is it possible that you are still searching for fulfillment and meaning in life through following a charismatic political leader, or by doing good works, or by volunteering with community groups, or through church sacraments and religious rituals? Why not trust Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? He truly is the Bread of Life!

Have you come to the right place for bread?