

YOUR HUDDLED MASSES, YEARNING TO EAT WHEAT

GENESIS 41:46-57 DECEMBER 14, 2022

Despite being the richest country in the world,¹ America is not so great at saving. We rank 15th out of 34 by the OECD on percentage of disposable income saved. We're surpassed by nations like Norway, Mexico, Estonia, and Chile.² More than two-thirds of Americans believe the economic recession is going to get worse before it gets better,³ yet 56% of Americans would be unable to cover an unexpected \$1,000 bill with cash on hand.⁴

For Egypt, it was time to start saving. They were about to experience the best of times followed by the worst of times. Joseph's prediction was coming true. It wasn't just a neat parlor trick by a court magician. This was a life and death situation for many multitudes of people.

Joseph not only sounded the alarm, he also accomplished the rescue. His rags-to-riches story proves that God can do whatever He wants and what He wants is to save lives. These verses are full of a *lifefulness* for Egypt and the surrounding nations and for Joseph himself. God is all about life. He's all about saving, all about growth.

When we left off, Joseph had been suddenly installed as Prime Minister. Researchers tell us that he would've had several titles in the government. One of them was "Chief Steward of the Lord of the Two Lands." Another would be "Royal Seal-Bearer."⁵ He had total authority *and* total responsibility for the future of the nation. Mark Twain is quoted as saying, "The secret of getting ahead is getting started." That's what Joseph did. He started work immediately.

Genesis 41:46 - 46 Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Joseph left Pharaoh's presence and traveled throughout the land of Egypt.

Joseph was 17 when he was trafficked by his brothers. By the time the seven years of plenty were over, he would have lived longer in Egypt than he had in Canaan.

He shows a remarkable compassion for the people around him. Remember: They had enslaved him. They had unjustly imprisoned him. They had forgotten him. Now, he had the power to help them *or* to hurt them. He could've been like Galen Erso in *Rogue One*, who spent years quietly serving the Empire, all the while setting a trap that led to the Death Star's destruction. Joseph could have let Egypt starve. Instead he dedicated the next 14 years to saving as many lives as he could. Ultimately, the next 80 years of his life were lived as a public servant.

¹ Based on GDP, not GDP per capita.

² <https://www.finder.com/best-and-worst-household-savers>

³ <https://news.nationwide.com/americans-concerned-us-economy-will-get-worse-before-it-gets-better/>

⁴ <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/01/19/56percent-of-americans-cant-cover-a-1000-emergency-expense-with-savings.html>

⁵ Nahum Sarna *Understanding Genesis*

At the same time, he never considers himself fully Egyptian. He remains true to the God of his fathers. When we listen in on his thoughts, they're about the Lord's goodness and faithfulness.

As Prime Minister, Joseph didn't play favorites. He went throughout the *entire* land. He didn't care about one city more than another - *every* city would need the same kind of help once the famine hit, whether it was rich or poor, urban or rural, cosmopolitan or backwoods.

There's a principle here when it comes to our thoughts about church planting. Often you'll hear people say, "*We need* to plant churches in major cities." Or, "*This* specific region is the most 'unchurched.'" There's also a curious trend where churches happen to get planted in places where there's a lot of money. There's never a shortage of church plants in Orange County or San Diego.

The reality is, *every* place needs the Bread of Life. Every town, city, or hamlet needs Bible-teaching, Gospel-preaching churches. It's not *strategy* we need, it's the *superintendence* of the Holy Spirit, Who will guide us where to go. Because God doesn't prefer Orange County to Orange Cove.

Genesis 41:47 - ⁴⁷During the seven years of abundance the land produced outstanding harvests.

This simple report is an understatement. Joseph's plan was to take 20% of each crop's harvest for the next seven years and save it. That percentage would end up being enough food to feed the entire nation *and* all the nations around it for seven years. In fact, there was so much saved we'll see they stop counting after a while.

The land produced because the Lord *provided*. As always, the Bible highlights the immeasurable grace of God, poured out from heaven on undeserving sinners. These were pagan idolators. These were sinful people. But God loved them and wanted them to live and not die.

God provides so much for humanity out of His grace it's impossible for us not to take it for granted. He doesn't have to do *any* of it. But He *loves* us and is a God of grace and mercy and compassion and tender kindness.

Consider this: Right now, mankind produces enough food to feed billions more people than are alive on planet earth.⁶ There's not just one grove of fruit trees in one spot on earth.

Or consider how much water the Lord has provided. By one estimate, the average American might use 1.8 million gallons of water in their life.⁷ If you take just groundwater - no desalinization, no rivers or lakes or glaciers, just groundwater - 45% of it is fresh. Based off what we know, there's 119 million gallons of groundwater for every person on earth.⁸

⁶ <https://medium.com/@jeremyerdman/we-produce-enough-food-to-feed-10-billion-people-so-why-does-hunger-still-exist-8086d2657539>

⁷ <https://www.watercalculator.org/footprint/indoor-water-use-at-home/>

⁸ <https://earthhow.com/how-much-water-is-on-earth/>

Now, don't get me wrong, there are a lot of hungry people out there. There are a lot of people who don't have access to clean water. But the reason is not one of *supply*, it's one of *sin*. Human corruption and waste and selfishness are the problems, not that God didn't supply enough.

God prepared this earth so that mankind could thrive and grow and develop and discover. In His grace He gifts these things, in addition to all the other things He gives. He gives a nearly unlimited supply of ingenuity. Can you imagine talking to Abraham or Joseph about space travel or quantum computing? This week the big news is that there's been a breakthrough in the field of nuclear fusion. That capacity for understanding and development and discovery is all thanks to the outstanding grace of God. And He gives it because He wants people to live and not die.

Genesis 41:48 - ⁴⁸ Joseph gathered all the excess food in the land of Egypt during the seven years and put it in the cities. He put the food in every city from the fields around it.

There wouldn't be one central location. Joseph's plan was more complex, but in the end, more efficient. Of course, each storehouse would have to have a staff of people who would need to be on board with what they were trying to do. They would have to be people of understanding and integrity. Joseph's plan could not afford leaky buildings. They couldn't afford to have administrators who could be bribed to let people steal the grain, or workers who would allow infestations in the vaults. It's not so easy to store food to be eaten 14 years from now.

Ideas are important, but execution is just as important. Sometimes a church gets an idea about something they want to do in their community and they get all excited about it, but no one wants to talk about the execution. We need to have enough Godly wisdom to look at an idea and say, "Ok, *how* is that going to be done? Let's look down the road and see what sort of challenges might present themselves or consider how this idea is going to work itself out."

Genesis 41:49 - ⁴⁹ So Joseph stored up grain in such abundance—like the sand of the sea—that he stopped measuring it because it was beyond measure.

Again we see the grace of God. Joseph gathered what God gave. The grain was in such abundance that it was beyond measure.

We'll learn that part of God's motivation was that the family of faith would move to Egypt and survive the famine. But it wasn't *just* them God was thinking about. He gave enough grain for the "whole world" to come and be fed. He wanted *everyone* to have a chance to live.

In verse 49 we read that phrase, "like the sand of the sea," and are reminded of the Abrahamic covenant. God told Abraham, "I want *you* to live and to thrive and to become more fruitful than you could possibly imagine, *AND* I want all the nations of the earth to be blessed through you."⁹ Joseph's work was one of many ways the Lord was accomplishing what He promised.

⁹ Genesis 18:18, 22:17

1 Timothy 1 says God strengthens His people and appoints us to ministry, and that His grace abundantly overflows to us beyond measure.¹⁰ He does this because His desire is to save lives and He uses *us* to demonstrate His mercy and His patience and His love so that people will see and believe and live and not die. His grace is beyond measure, stored up for the people of earth!

Genesis 41:50 - ⁵⁰Two sons were born to Joseph before the years of famine arrived. Asenath daughter of Potiphara, priest at On, bore them to him.

Joseph had a very important job - not just from the human perspective, but also in the plan of providence. He would be incredibly busy for 14 years making sure the global food supply chain didn't collapse. But God was not only making his professional life thrive, but his personal life, too.

I saw an article on *NBC News* the other day titled, *Science proves kids are bad for Earth. Morality suggests we stop having them.*¹¹ This is a question people have sometimes. "Should I bring children into such a terrible world?"

For Christians the answer is this: You should have kids if the Lord leads you to have kids. The world has *always* been bad. God has always been good! Looking down the barrel of a historic famine, the Lord gave Joseph two sons. And, Biblically speaking, his raising of two sons would have a longer and more significant impact than his professional work as Prime Minister.

Being a faithful dad wouldn't be easy. We're reminded that Joseph was married into a profoundly pagan family. There would be a lot of very bad influences seeking to syphon off his sons. How would Joseph approach this new phase of life?

Genesis 41:51-52 - ⁵¹Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh and said, "God has made me forget all my hardship and my whole family." ⁵²And the second son he named Ephraim and said, "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."

Joseph leads his family with purpose. We've seen in Genesis that usually it's the *mothers* who name the kids. But in this case Joseph says, "I'm going to see to it that these boys are *Hebrew*." He was making a stand. His whole life was lived among the Egyptian aristocracy.¹² The names Ephraim and Manasseh were quite a statement of devotion and separation to the God of Abraham, not Egypt.

We're also given the impression that Joseph was a loving and Godly father. Both of these names praise the Lord for His goodness and faithfulness.¹³ He looked down at Manasseh and essentially says, "Little man, I love you so much that I don't even remember my 13 years of slavery and imprisonment." That's pretty tender! His words radiate affection toward his boys and his God.

¹⁰ 1 Timothy 1:12-14

¹¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/science-proves-kids-are-bad-earth-morality-suggests-we-stop-ncna820781>

¹² R. Kent Hughes *Genesis: Beginning And Blessing*

¹³ Bruce Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary*

Did God want Joseph to forget his family? We know that God sent Joseph ahead in order to save his father's family. But his family *had* been a hardship to him. Even still, God's desire was that Joseph help them and intercede for them.

It seems that Joseph hasn't figured that out yet. I mean, he knows that a serious famine is coming, yet (as one scholar notes) he makes *no* attempt to contact his family.¹⁴ Joseph still had growing to do, but that's true of all of us! In his story we see growth in heart, in home, in his work, his relationships, and his walk with the Lord. God continues developing us and shaping us, day by day.

Joseph says, "God has made me *fruitful* in the land of my affliction." I love his perspective. He wasn't defined by his previous suffering. He wasn't defined by his affliction or adversity or his new, powerful position or any of his circumstances. He was defined by God's *lifefulness*.

God wants to make you and me fruitful in whatever land we find ourselves in. Jesus said, "I've appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain." In Jeremiah we're told that the person who trusts in the Lord is like a tree planted by water, unafraid of heat, evergreen, one that always produces fruit even during a drought.¹⁵

Genesis 41:53-54 - ⁵³Then the seven years of abundance in the land of Egypt came to an end, ⁵⁴and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every land, but in the whole land of Egypt there was food.

When that first year of shortages came, it hit like a freight train. That word, *famine*, is used six times in four verses with descriptors like "stricken" and "severe."

Every land had the same problem, but the only solution was found in Egypt. There wasn't anywhere else to go. Luckily, God sent salvation through one man, who suffered and served so that even those who wronged him had the chance to be rescued. If the hungry would simply believe and humble themselves and come to Joseph, they would live and not die.

Genesis 41:55 - ⁵⁵When the whole land of Egypt was stricken with famine, the people cried out to Pharaoh for food. Pharaoh told all Egypt, "Go to Joseph and do whatever he tells you."

Joseph was now effectively *ruling* over all Egypt and, by extension, the nations of the world. All were at his mercy, *but* he was willing to receive any who would come. He gave grain to friends and grain to strangers.

There's a lovely lesson here for us. In your moment of need, in your hurt and lack, go to Jesus and do whatever He tells you. His court is open. His grace and mercy and love have been stored up *for you*. Don't miss out on what He wants to do in your life.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Jeremiah 17:7-8

Genesis 41:56 - ⁵⁶Now the famine had spread across the whole region, so Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt.

At first it seems a little Scroogey that Joseph *sold* the grain instead of just giving it to these hungry people. But selling it would accomplish several important goals. First, it would keep people from hoarding too much too soon.¹⁶ This was the only supply they had and they couldn't afford to run out in year 1 or 2. Think about it this way: When the COVID lockdowns happened and there was no toilet paper in stores, it was a problem. If the government said, "Come to this distribution center and take as much as you want for free." Well, they'd be empty in about an hour I'm guessing. But if they said, "You're going to have to buy toilet paper at 2 bucks a pack," it controls the flow.

Joseph would also have to distribute to other nations. By charging a fee, he'd be able to control the price so that profiteers couldn't step in and take the grain and gouge everyone else.

But there's a theological application here as well. Joseph's work in Egypt whispers to us of Christ's work of salvation. He has done all the work. But now He says to us, "Come, everyone who is thirsty, come to the water; and you without silver, come, buy, and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without silver and without cost!"¹⁷ How do we 'buy' without silver and without cost? We pay with our hearts. We pay with our lives. We give *ourselves* to the One Who saves us. We abandon our way and return to the Lord, embracing His Word and the life He wants to give us, full of joy and provision and growth. We *buy* what He offers and instead of the thorn bush, a cypress tree comes up. We trade our starvation for His everlasting covenant.

Genesis 41:57 - ⁵⁷Every land came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, for the famine was severe in every land.

The inhabitants of these nations had nowhere else to go. But God had made a way for them to live if they were willing. There was enough for anyone and everyone. And, in a few verses, we'll find that word got out *quick*.

God wants to save today just as much as He did in Genesis 41. He cares about hunger and hurts and the people around us who are about to die forever. He also cares about filling *your* life with *His* life. In your work, in your family, in your relationship with Him. God is all about *lifefulness*. Be led by Him, be cultivated by Him. Bear the fruit He has appointed you to by embracing His Word, listening for His Spirit, and dedicating yourself to His purposes. Joseph was a "Steward of the Lord," a "Seal-bearer." Those titles are ours, too. As God goes on saving and filling us, we can go through the land be a part of His effort to save everyone else.

¹⁶ Andrew Steinmann *Genesis*

¹⁷ Isaiah 55:1