**Chapter 11**

**Genesis 47**

**Words and Deeds**

When we were last in the study of Joseph, Jacob and his family arrived in Egypt. And there was a royal and yet tender reunion of Joseph and his father. Pharaoh had offered Jacob’s family the best of the land of Egypt. And now that they were in the land Joseph presented some of his brothers and his father to Pharaoh.

This was the appropriate and civic thing to do. Plus they needed the repeated, official pronouncement that Jacob’s family could reside in Goshen. The climax of this royal event was the meeting of the powerful Pharaoh with he aged patriarch Jacob.

Then Joseph went and told Pharaoh,

and said, “My father and my brothers,

their flocks and their herds and all that

they possess, have come from the land

of Canaan; and indeed they *are* in the

land of Goshen.” 2And he took five men

from among his brothers and presented

them to Pharaoh. 3Then Pharaoh said to

his brothers, “What *is* your occupation?”

And they said to Pharaoh, “Your servants

*are* shepherds, both we *and* also our fathers.”

4And they said to Pharaoh, “We have come

to dwell in the land, because your servants

have no pasture for their flocks, for the famine

*is* severe in the land of Canaan. Now therefore,

please let your servants dwell in the land of

Goshen.”

5Then Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, saying,

“Your father and your brothers have come

to you. 6The land of Egypt *is* before you.

Have your father and brothers dwell in the

best of the land; let them dwell in the land

of Goshen. And if you know *any* competent

men among them, then make them chief

herdsmen over my livestock.”

7Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob

and set him before Pharaoh; and Jacob

blessed Pharaoh. 8Pharaoh said to Jacob,

“How old *are* you?”9And Jacob said to

Pharaoh, “The days of the years of my

pilgrimage *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 pilgrimage.” 10So Jacob blessed

Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh.

(Genesis 47:1-10)

Upon meeting the Pharaoh Jacob pronounced a blessing upon him, undoubtedly in the name of the one true God, Yahweh. The blessing was in gratitude for Pharaoh’s generosity in allowing Jacob and his family to survive the famine by living in Egypt. In fact, Jacob blessed Pharaoh twice, once when they first met and then when Jacob departed.

It is interesting that a number of Bible scholars treat Jacob’s blessings lightly. They are no more important than a polite hello and good bye. I don’t like to criticize, but the commentaries of these scholars are technical and detailed, but they lack heart. There is little spiritual insight about how important the words of believers can be.

The Hebrews placed enormous importance to words, especially in formal occasions. A word spoken led to reality—to a deed done. Proverbs 12:14 states “A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of *his* mouth.” Verse 18 says, “There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, But the tongue of the wise *promotes* health.” And Proverbs 18:21 declares, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.”

In the New Testament, in Ephesians 4:15 we are encouraged to “speak the truth in love” that we may mature spiritually. And Colossians 4:6 exhorts “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt.” Just as salt ads flavor to food and prevents corruption our words should be a blessing to others and a purifying influence in a decaying world. This is not always easy to do. But the more of God’s Word you put into your heart the more words of truth and kindness will be on your lips.

So Jacob blessed Pharaoh asking for the goodness and grace of God to be upon him. And in doing so Jacob gave testimony to the fact that Yahweh could do what in reality none of the deities of Egypt could do. Here was mighty Pharaoh, considered God incarnate in Egyptian theology, being blessed with the favor of the one true God by a ragged old man. Status in life is not as important as the truth you hold in your heart.

The second thing I want us to notice are the comments Jacob made when asked about his life. First, he stated that his life of 130 years was a pilgrimage. Since neither Abraham, Isaac or Jacob ever owned the land of Canaan except for a burial plot, describing his life as a pilgrimage was fitting. Speaking of the patriarchs Hebrews 11 says,

These all died in faith, not having received

the promises, but having seen them afar off

were assured of them, embraced *them* and

confessed that they were strangers and

pilgrims on the earth.

(v. 13)

We too are pilgrims. This world or age is not our home. And we have not seen a resurrection or the return of Jesus Christ. We have not seen the coming kingdom and a renewed earth. But we are assured of these truths and we embrace them by faith.

Jacob also said that his life of 130 years was short and evil. No matter how long you live life is too short. And one terrible situation in life to one too many. And so Psalm 90:12 says, “So teach *us* to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom.” And Ecclesiastes 9:10 teaches us, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do *it* with your might; for *there is* no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.”

I’m not trying to be morbid here. But each day is a gift—be present in it. Do your best at whatever you are doing. Love, give, serve, forgive, have compassion. Be kind. Speak and model the truth. Do all of your works as unto the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be rewarded.

And Joseph situated 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 Rameses, as Pharaoh

had commanded. 12Then Joseph provided

his father, his brothers, and all his father’s

household with bread, according to

the number in *their* families.

(Genesis 47:11-12)

Joseph set his family in the land of Goshen, later called Rameses. And he provided them with grain in bread in a rationing system according to the size of each of his brothers’ households.

Now, we have come to a section of Scripture, dealing with the famine, that has been difficult for many Bible teachers and commentaries. In this passage we will see a very stoic and some say ruthless Joseph as he deals with he famine and the lack of food. In fact “The Interpreters Bible Commentary” states that in this section Joseph is a merciless dictator in the image of Hitler and Stalin.

Indeed we do find here a very calculating and serious Joseph. But this is because the last years of the famine were brutal and lives needed to be saved. So we will read the whole section and then I will comment on it.

Now *there was* no bread in all the land;

for the famine *was* very severe, so that

the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan

languished because of the famine. 14And

Joseph gathered up all the money that was

found in the land of Egypt and in the land of

Canaan, for the grain which they bought;

and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh’s

house.

15So 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.”

16Then Joseph said, “Give your livestock,

and I will give you *bread* for your livestock,

if the money is gone.” 17So 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.

18When 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. 19Why 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.”

20Then 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.

21And as for the people, he moved them into

the cities, from *one* end of the borders of Egypt

to the *other* end. 22Only 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.

23Then 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. 24And 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.”

25So they said, “You have saved our lives;

let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and

we will be Pharaoh’s servants.” 26And 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.

(Genesis 47: 13-26)

As the famine took its toll, at first Joseph took money for grain, then animals, then land and finally people were put into servitude to Pharaoh. One Bible study states that moving people from their homes into new towns and taking their land is a tactic of dictators to break up families and customs and traditions to make slaves of a society.[[1]](#footnote-1) And therefore what Joseph did was evil.

People often read into the Bible their own biases, especially if they are not spiritually enlightened by God’s Spirit. We need to understand that the horrible seven years of famine resulted in exceedingly difficult and desperate times. You and I are well fed and have not really known serious hunger, let alone a famine. But in times of severe famine or weather catastrophes or war, draconian measures are often needed to save lives.

There was no United Nations, no World Bank, no Red Cross or Samaritan’s Purse. Starving people will not protest the political system they are under. They need food first and foremost or they will die. And at the end of this section of Scripture the people do not murmur against Joseph for being evil. They praise him for saving their lives.

Joseph was not a merciless dictator. His authority was firm but benign. If I were to put this in terms of the New Testament, according to Romans 12:11, Joseph was “not lagging in diligence, fervent in Spirit, serving the Lord.” But now, while the Egyptians and the surrounding nations struggle with famine, Israel flourished.

So Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt,

in the country of Goshen; and they

had possessions there and grew and

multiplied exceedingly.

(Genesis 47:27)

Here is a lesson to take to heart. God had moved His people from the parched famine land of Canaan. And He placed them in fertile Goshen where they flourished and multiplied. God will meet our needs wherever we are and whatever we face if we trust Him. Times may be tough and we may need to struggle and work hard, but if our hearts are fixed on God, he will see us through. Our Lord Jesus Christ said,

Therefore do not worry, saying,

‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall

we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’

32For after all these things the Gentiles

seek. For your heavenly Father knows

that you need all these things. 33But

seek first the kingdom of God and His

righteousness, and all these things shall

be added to you. 34Therefore do not

worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will

worry about its own things. Sufficient for

the day *is* its own trouble.

(Matthew 6:31-34)

In seeking the kingdom of God our faith our words and our deeds must be God oriented.

And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt

seventeen years. So the length of Jacob’s

life was one hundred and forty-seven years.

29When 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, 30but 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.”

31Then he said, “Swear to me.” And he swore to

him. So Israel bowed himself on the head of the

bed.

(Genesis 47:28-31)

This is the beginning of the death bed scene for Jacob. In fact a total of 73 verses from here on deal with Jacob’s death. This is surprising since the deaths of Bible characters are mentioned in only a few verses or not mentioned at all.

In the ancient Hebrew culture one made a promise or an oath not by shaking hands, but by placing your hand on the other person’s thigh. And Jacob makes Joseph promise to bury him not in Egypt, but back in the promised land. His desire was to resurrected in the land God promised.

Unless the Lord Jesus Christ returns before we die our death is inevitable. In fact today we are closer to the moment of our death than we were yesterday. But there is a difference between the death of a believer and someone who is not saved. Psalm 49 tells us that those who are “foolish” who do not believe God, “Shall be consumed in the grave.” As Jesus said they will perish and be no more. But the same Psalm says of the believer that “God will redeem” our soul or our life “from the power of the grave.”[[2]](#footnote-2) John 3:16 tells us that,

God so loved the world that He gave

His only begotten Son, that whoever

believes in Him should not perish but

have everlasting life.

In the meantime let our words and our deeds, all that we do, be a blessing to others, even in very tough times so that we are a glory to God and a benefit to others. Amen.

1. James M. Boice, Genesis Vol. 3 (Baker Books, 2000), p. 1127-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Psalm 49:13-15 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)