

Scripture Reading: Genesis 41:53 – 42:3:

“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. 42:1 When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, “Why do you look at one another?” 2 And he said, “Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die.””

I Timothy 2:1 “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, 7 for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.”

“Famine in the Land”

In my last message from this Book of Beginnings I laid the foundation for our discussion of civil government because we will now begin to consider the actions of Joseph as a civil leader in Egypt.

We were reminded by Dr. Rushdoony about how the word government today has come to mean only civil government in the minds of most... This of course has led to inaction or wrong actions in many areas!

We learned that only when the other areas of government, especially the family, the church and individual self-government are taken seriously and take up the tasks given to them in God’s Word, will we see the reduction in the power and scope of civil government that many of us desire.

- **Now of course the actions we will see taken by Joseph may seem to run very contrary to that desire, which is why I suggested that those actions will give us much to ponder!**

Now as we unpack this account, we need to remember two important control factors if you will for how we are to interpret Joseph’s actions. *[perhaps think of guard rails on the road]* As we have done in all our studies here in Genesis we are trying to remember the admonition that Jesus gave to the Pharisees and His own disciples on the road to Emmaus:

- **That we are to see Jesus and His work here in all of the Old Testament Scriptures!**

Now when we step back and look at the life of Joseph and the ministry of Jesus it is not hard to see the types or parallels that abound here: The nation of Israel was God’s chosen people and Jesus came as the Son of God, the son of Joseph from the tribe of Judah to be their Messiah and rightful ruler.

These descendants of the sons of Jacob rejected Jesus: They cast Him out of the city of Jerusalem and they had the Gentiles crucify Him on a cross. What they meant for evil God used for good and Jesus soon returned as the King of Kings & Lord of Lords!

Thus Peter declared at Pentecost, ““Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

The Messiah, whom Israel thought was only to be for them, had now brought salvation to the Gentile world and yet still offered the same life to them as we see in the rest of the Book of Acts!

In the same way Joseph was given dreams about his rule over his brothers and parents.

Those brothers rejected him, cast him out and turned him over to foreigners where they were sure he would die as a slave, with no blood on their hands.

What they intended for evil, God also used for good and soon we will see the brothers of Joseph coming to him in an effort to share in the salvation that Joseph has brought to Egypt in the midst of the great famine! Thus I hope we can see in the coming weeks that Joseph by his actions does bring salvation or life to Egypt...

- **It is important to see even his actions as a civil ruler in this light.**

If we cannot come to see their submission to Joseph in the same way we are to see our submission to Jesus, we may need to clear our heads a bit from all the modern clouds of freedom and liberty.

- **As I said it should give us much to ponder.**

The second control factor, or guard rail, is the Scriptures themselves because we are given in Psalm 105 a divine commentary on this portion of Joseph's life:

Psalm 105: 16 "Moreover He called for a famine in the land; He destroyed all the provision of bread. 17 He sent a man before them—Joseph— who was sold as a slave. 18 They hurt his feet with fetters, He was laid in irons. 19 Until the time that his word came to pass, The word of Jehovah tested him. 20 The king sent and released him, The ruler of the people let him go free. 21 He made him lord of his house, And ruler of all his possessions, 22 To bind his princes at his pleasure, And teach his elders wisdom."

- **So I would argue that if those elders in Egypt were being taught wisdom by Joseph, perhaps we should learn some wisdom here as well.**

So I will begin with one of the questions I said we would need to ponder:

- **Does Joseph give us a civil example that can be useful in other times and places or was this only a special case, like when Joshua later destroyed all the nations of Canaan.**

I want to argue that it can be both: The obvious "one time" aspect is the fact that God is no longer giving civil rulers dreams or the interpretation of dreams that outline specific events that will occur in the future, near or far. And yet, the Palmist clearly states that Joseph was teaching wisdom to the elders of that land, so we can also learn some lessons as well. So in our text the famine has begun:

"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."

- **So why was there bread in Egypt?**

There was bread in Egypt because Joseph had used the power given to him by Pharaoh to collect and store 20% of the grain raised in the seven years of plenty.

Now we could debate what the best course of action Joseph could have taken in terms of proper economic theory or we can rejoice in the picture that God has provided here that is certainly fulfilled when His Son Jesus comes as the Bread of Life, the Bread that came down from heaven!

It is no accident that we have bread set before us each week as we remember the work of Jesus on our behalf.

As we move on in this account we are going to see the incredible price that the Egyptians will pay for this bread, but again rather than see it with our modern eyes which seem to only focus on enslavement, we should remember these were starving people and that Joseph was providing the bread of life!

Just think of some of the parables of Jesus in this light for a moment...

Matthew 13: “44 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 45 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, 46 who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

- Jesus clearly taught that for a man to save his life, he must lose his life.

He commanded us to seek first the Kingdom of God and then the other blessings would follow. If we seek those or cling to them we are turning back, which Jesus warned against.

I would also argue that this image is confirmed when Joseph explains what has happened to his brothers in chapter 45:7 “And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. 8 So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.”

And we see it even from the people of Egypt who in the end do not see themselves as downcast slaves who have been oppressed, but as willing servants who have been saved and blessed by Joseph...

Genesis 47: “23 Then 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. 24 And 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.” 25 So they said, “You have saved our lives; let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh’s servants.””

Now this is a big picture view of what we are going to see play out in the next few chapters of Genesis.

- I shared them quickly here in order to address that question of how or whether Joseph’s actions as a civil leader can teach us any lessons for today.

Certainly, we should avoid the mistake of any civil leader thinking they can be a ‘savior’ because in history, the greater Joseph has come and He is now the King of Kings and only Savior.

Whether we must avoid any and all strong civil action is another question!

Let me throw out a hypothetical for discussion: What if one of us were providentially made the ruler of a nation like Somalia tomorrow? I would hope that such a person would draw heavily on the wisdom for rulers given in Proverbs and many other places in the Scriptures and I suspect that some strong civil actions would be in order, at least until order was restored.

- A leader who saw such a need could, and perhaps should study the example of Joseph.

And this brings us to a major problem we have seen down through the years when people look to the Scriptures for guidance in this important realm... I suspect that we all tend to do this: We read what we want to see into the texts, rather than allowing the whole counsel of God to have its full impact...

- What do I mean by that?

If you are a King, or in a nation that has a powerful king, then you would likely look to the examples of Joseph and David and Solomon for making bold moves and tell folks that this is how the Bible commands you to rule!

If you are a Theonomist striving to build a Christian civil order you would spend most, if not all of your time pursuing the various case Laws given to Moses arguing that this is where our rules for civil order are found.

If you were a power-hungry fascist you would study the life and times of Joshua telling folks this is what the Bible teaches about godly rule!

If you were a communist or socialist you would look to those passages in Acts where everyone had ALL in common to prove you are right, right from the pages of the Scriptures!

Our libertarian friends would probably like the time of the Judges to justify having everyone do what was right in their own eyes with their own stuff.

And of course the Two-Kingdom folks would say the Jesus settled things once and for all when he said the His Kingdom was not of this world!

Now what is important to remember in all of this is that there is truth in each of those portions of the Bible that these various folks like to focus on!

There is a time for strong civil action: If you showed up in Somalia on the first day in the midst of major food riots through the land, it would require some strong civil actions to restore order. However, to then argue that there must be a permanent food distribution system run by the civil government to maintain order would be a big mistake. After order was restored you would look to other portions of the Scriptures to build a nation that had true liberty and security.

I could give similar examples from all the other types of civil leaders that I mentioned: But the bottom line is that we should encourage civil leaders or advisors to be “good Bereans” just as we must in all other areas of life. There is some truth to the old saying, that if I have a hammer in my hand everything begins to look like a nail!

Civil rulers, and those who advise them must always take everything they are doing BACK to the Scriptures to see if they are on track. This does NOT mean finding a few proof-texts to justify the actions they want to take or have been taking...

- **It means a diligent study to make sure they have the proper balance that is found in the Scriptures.**

In fact, as is the case with most of our theology and life, it is the very portions of the Scriptures that do NOT seem to line up with our beliefs and actions that should challenge us the most.

A powerful King should be reading and meditating on the passages that speak about servant leadership, while those who have a rebellious mind-set should ponder what the Bible teaches about submission and God’s use of wicked leaders.

Now I am dwelling on this a bit for two important reasons:

My heartfelt prayer is that some of you here today may one day be in a position to serve in the civil realm or be active in advising those who are as I had the privilege of doing for many years [share some perspective]

- **Whether you become a leader or advise a leader it will be very important that your leadership or advise is well grounded in the Scriptures!**

The second reason, which is of vital importance to all of us, is that reflecting on such things helps to inform the prayers that we are commanded by the Apostle Paul to lift up as we saw in the second portion of our morning text from I Timothy 2: “1 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

I will close with some thoughts that Jim Jordon shared in his book *Primeval Saints* reminding us how what we learn here from Joseph can inform those prayers which Paul told young Timothy and all of us to pray:

“While he languished in prison, Joseph had no idea what was going on in Pharaoh’s heart. He did not realize that God the Holy Spirit was at work making Pharaoh dissatisfied.

He did not know that one night God would bring His Word to Pharaoh [*via the two dreams*], and Pharaoh would need someone to interpret it. He did not know that one day his suffering would be rewarded and he would stand before the king of the earth.

This should encourage us. We pray for our rulers and those in authority over us, but we don’t see them change. We have no way of knowing, however, what God may be doing. Our God is still the ‘God of nightmares!’ In our secular humanist society, Christians are often ‘in prison’ in various ways. Yet God’s Word is faithful, and the time will come when secular society will turn to God’s people for help. May we be ready for the day we stand before kings.”

Communion Meditation: Genesis 14

“18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High.

19 And he blessed him and said:

**“Blessed be Abram of God Most High,
Possessor of heaven and earth;**

**20 And blessed be God Most High,
Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.”**

And he gave him a tithe of all.”