

# Genesis

## Chapter 47



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**McGee Introduction:** We have seen how Jacob and all his family have arrived in the land of Egypt. Joseph, as a move of strategy, brought them into the land of Goshen. This actually was the richest land in that day, but right now they are in the midst of a famine and no land is very valuable to the owner at this particular time.

We are going to find that this is the best chapter in the life of Jacob so far. Jacob doesn't appear in a good light when we first meet him in Scripture. In fact, not until he makes his trip to Egypt do we begin to see that he has become a man of faith. This chapter, more than any other, reveals that.

The famine becomes more intense as it draws to an end. Although the people of the world are involved in this, Canaan and Egypt are the lands which are mentioned because they are the particular areas in the development of the story which is told to us here.<sup>1</sup>

### **Genesis 47:1**

**Then Joseph came and told Pharaoh, and said, My father and my brethren, and their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have, are come out of the land of Canaan; and, behold, they *are* in the land of Goshen.**

[Joseph came and told Pharaoh] He always had access to the king.

**Joseph . . . told Pharaoh, My father and my brethren**—Joseph furnishes a beautiful example of a man who could bear equally well the extremes of prosperity and adversity. High as he was, he did not forget that he had a superior. Dearly as he loved his father and anxiously as he desired to provide for the whole family, he would not go into the arrangements he had planned for their stay in Goshen until he had obtained the sanction of his royal master.<sup>2</sup>

Joseph is going to present his father and his brothers to the Pharaoh of Egypt. He put them in the land of Goshen before he asked for a place for them. You can see the strategy in that. If they were already there, Pharaoh would be more apt to give them that land. After all, they would already be moved in and have unpacked their goods.<sup>3</sup>

### **Genesis 47:2**

**And he took some of his brethren, *even* five men, and presented them unto Pharaoh.**

[five men] Why only five is not explained.

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<sup>1</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:184). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>2</sup>JFB Commentary

<sup>3</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:184). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**He took some of his brethren**—There is something very strange in the original; literally translated it signifies “from the end or extremity (מקצה *miktseh*) of his brethren he took five men.” This has been understood six different ways. 1. Joseph took five of his brethren that came first to hand—at random, without design or choice. 2. Joseph took five of the meanest-looking of his brethren to present before Pharaoh, fearing if he had taken the sightliest that Pharaoh would detain them for his service, whereby their religion and morals might be corrupted. 3. Joseph took five of the best made and finest-looking of his brethren, and presented them before Pharaoh, wishing to impress his mind with a favorable opinion of the family which he had just now brought into Egypt, and to do himself honor. 4. Joseph took five of the youngest of his brethren. 5. He took five of the eldest of his brethren. 6. He took five from the extremity or end of his brethren, i. e., some of the eldest and some of the youngest, viz., Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, and Benjamin—Rab. Solomon. It is certain that in Judges 18:2, the word may be understood as implying dignity, valor, excellence, and pre-eminence: And the children of Dan sent of their family FIVE men מקצותם *miktsotham*, not from their coasts, but of the most eminent or excellent they had; and it is probable they might have had their eye on what Joseph did here when they made their choice, choosing the same number, five, and of their principal men, as did Joseph, because the mission was important, to go and search out the land. But the word may be understood simply as signifying some; out of the whole of his brethren he took only five men, etc.<sup>4</sup>

### **Genesis 47:3**

**And Pharaoh said unto his brethren, What is your occupation? And they said unto Pharaoh, Thy servants *are* shepherds, both we, *and* also our fathers.**

[**said unto Pharaoh**] Joseph had already told them what to say (Genesis 46:34).

### **Genesis 47:4**

**They said moreover unto Pharaoh, For to sojourn in the land are we come; for thy servants have no pasture for their flocks; for the famine is sore in the land of Canaan: now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen.**

[**sojourn**] A temporary sojourn—until the famine was over—was the intention, but they received such a welcome they remained until they were were forced to stay as slaves, fulfilling Genesis 15:13-15.

**For to sojourn . . . are we come**—The royal conversation took the course which Joseph had anticipated (Genesis 46:33), and they answered according to previous instructions—manifesting, however, in their determination to return to Canaan, a faith and piety which affords a hopeful symptom of their having become all, or most of them, religious men.

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<sup>4</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary

**Ramban, Nachmanides:** “To sojourn in the land are we come; for there is no pasture for thy servants, flocks.” I wonder about this reason which they told to Pharaoh, for there was also no pasture in Egypt; the famine was as severe in the land of Egypt as it was in the land of Canaan, or even more so, for it was against Egypt that the main decree was directed. Perhaps they said that in the land of Canaan, due to the severity of the famine, people were eating the grass of the field and were not leaving any sustenance for the cattle. However, in the land of Egypt where there is corn, people subsist on that, and thus in Egypt there is a little pasture left. It is possible that in the land of Egypt there was a little pasture in the reed grass on account of the rivers and the ponds.<sup>5</sup>

### **Genesis 47:5**

**And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee:**

### **Genesis 47:6**

**The land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell: and if thou knowest *any* men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle.**

[**best of the land**] The best land for shepherds, not the best part of Egypt.

[**my cattle**] Proving Pharaoh was a shepherd king.

**In the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell**—So it appears that the land of Goshen was the best of the land of Egypt.

**Men of activity**—אנשי חיל *anshey chayil*, stout or robust men—such as were capable of bearing fatigue, and of rendering their authority respectable.

**Rulers over my cattle**—מִקְנֵה *mikneh* signifies not only cattle, but possessions or property of any kind; though most usually cattle are intended, because in ancient times they constituted the principal part of a man’s property. The word may be taken here in a more extensive sense, and the circumstances of the case seem obviously to require it. If every shepherd was an abomination to the Egyptians, however we may understand or qualify the expression, is it to be supposed that Pharaoh should desire that the brethren of his prime minister, of his chief favorite, should be employed in some of the very meanest offices in the land? We may therefore safely understand Pharaoh as expressing his will, that the brethren of Joseph should be appointed as overseers or superintendents of his domestic concerns, while Joseph superintended those of the state.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

<sup>6</sup> Adam Clarke’s Commentary

The faithfulness of Joseph affected his entire family. When he was in the pit and in prison, Joseph must have wondered about his future. Instead of despairing, he faithfully obeyed God and did what was right. Here we see one of the exciting results. We may not always see the effects of our faith, but we can be sure that God will honor faithfulness.<sup>7</sup>

**Torah Class:** The ceremony begins, and Joseph begins the pre-planned agenda by formally announcing to the Pharaoh the arrival of his family. And, of course, right on cue, Pharaoh asks their occupation. And, doing their part, the 5 brothers chosen to represent the whole family, respond that they are shepherds and that they have come to request that Pharaoh might let them come to Egypt as the famine is so severe in their homeland, Canaan, that they can no longer survive there.

It is interesting in verse 4 that the term used to describe the stay the Hebrew brothers seek, is to “sojourn”. That is, to stay temporarily. To be guests, not citizens. It is clear that while Jacob knows they’re going to be in Egypt a long time, either he has not revealed this to his sons.....the ones that are currently speaking with Pharaoh..... or, more likely, they choose not to believe such a pessimistic assessment.

In a magnanimous gesture of friendship befitting of royalty, Pharaoh offers the Israelites the land of Goshen. And, further befitting of royalty, Pharaoh does NOT respond to these lowly Hebrew shepherds, he turns to Joseph and gives his reply.<sup>8</sup>

### **Genesis 47:7**

**And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.**

**[Jacob blessed Pharaoh]** This perhaps included saluting him (2 Kings 4:29); offering gifts (2 Samuel 8:10); prayer for his welfare (Numbers 6:23-27); and giving thanks for his kindness.

**Jacob blessed Pharaoh**—Saluted him on his entrance with Peace be unto thee, or some such expression of respect and good will. For the meaning of the term to bless, as applied to God and man,

**Joseph brought in Jacob his father**—There is a pathetic and most affecting interest attending this interview with royalty; and when, with all the simplicity and dignified solemnity of a man of God, Jacob signaled his entrance by imploring the divine blessing on the royal head, it may easily be imagined what a striking impression the scene would produce (compare Hebrews 7:7).

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<sup>7</sup> Life Application Notes

<sup>8</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

## **Genesis 47:8**

**And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou?**

**Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou?**—The question was put from the deep and impressive interest which the appearance of the old patriarch had created in the minds of Pharaoh and his court. In the low-lying land of Egypt and from the artificial habits of its society, the age of man was far shorter among the inhabitants of that country than it had yet become in the pure bracing climate and among the simple mountaineers of Canaan. The Hebrews, at least, still attained a protracted longevity.<sup>9</sup>

## **Genesis 47:9**

**And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.**

**[pilgrimage]** Hebrew: *maguwr* (HSN-4033), temporary abode. A pilgrim was one who took a religious journey, submitting to many hardships and privations to attain his goal. This was true of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 6:4; Psalm 119:54; Hebrews 11:10-16; 1 Peter 2:11).

**[hundred and thirty years]** Jacob was 130 years old. This makes Reuben about 51; Simeon about 50; Levi 49; Judah 48; Dan 46; Naphtali 45; Gad 44; Asher 43; Issachar 42; Zebulun 41; Dinah 40; Joseph 39; and Benjamin about 30.

**The days of the years of my pilgrimage**—**מגורַי** *megurai*, of my sojourning or wandering. Jacob had always lived a migratory or wandering life, in different parts of Canaan, Mesopotamia, and Egypt, scarcely ever at rest; and in the places where he lived longest, always exposed to the fatigues of the field and the desert. Our word pilgrim comes from the French *pelerin* and *pelegrin*, which are corrupted from the Latin *peregrinus*, an alien, stranger, or foreigner, from the adverb *peregre*, abroad, not at home. The pilgrim was a person who took a journey, long or short, on some religious account, submitting during the time to many hardships and privations. A more appropriate term could not be conceived to express the life of Jacob, and the motive which induced him to live such a life. His journey to Padan-aram or Mesopotamia excepted, the principal part of his journeys were properly pilgrimages, undertaken in the course of God's providence on a religious account.<sup>10</sup>

**Have not attained unto the—life of my fathers**—Jacob lived in the whole one hundred and forty-seven years; Isaac his father lived one hundred and eighty; and Abraham his grandfather, one hundred and seventy-five. These were days of years in

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<sup>9</sup> JFB Commentary

<sup>10</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary

comparison of the lives of the preceding patriarchs, some of whom lived nearly ten centuries!

### **Jacob's Pilgrimage**

Jacob told Pharaoh that his years had been "few and evil." They were few compared to the days of Abraham (175 years, Genesis 25:7) and Isaac (180 years, Genesis 35:28-29). "Evil" comes from the Hebrew *ra'* (HSN-7451), meaning adversity, affliction, sorrow, wretchedness. His years had been full of these conditions. He had lived a hard life, enduring many privations and sufferings: his troubles with Esau, Laban, his sons, and life in general among the giant nations multiplying in the land of promise; his work as ruler of such a large tribe, migrating from place to place with no permanent land to call his own—these explain his "evil" days (Genesis 15:13-15; Acts 7:5-17; Hebrews 11:9).

Jacob compared his life to Abraham and Isaac who were also pilgrims in a strange land with the view of another home (Acts 7:3-7; Hebrews 11:8-16). From the time when God called Abraham, 215 years had passed—half of the 430 years of the whole sojourn of the chosen race (Exodus 12:41; Galatians 3:17; see Sojourn of Abraham's Seed). These 215 years included the 25 years before Isaac was born (Genesis 12:4; Genesis 21:5); 60 years before Jacob was born (Genesis 25:26); and the 130 years that Jacob lived before going into Egypt (Genesis 47:9). They also include the story of Abraham from his call at the age of 75 until his death—100 years (Genesis 12:1-25:11); including the story of Isaac from his birth until his death in Jacob's 120th year—180 years (Genesis 21:1-35:29); the story of Jacob's life before going into Egypt—130 years (Genesis 25:19-47:9); and the story of Joseph and his brothers over the last 22 years (Genesis 37:1-47:9). The lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph overlapped during this period. The last 215 years were from Jacob's entrance into Egypt to the 80th year of Moses (Genesis 47:9 - Exodus 12:41). Israel left Egypt "the selfsame day"—in the 430th year after God called Abraham to leave for Canaan (Genesis 12:1-4; Exodus 12:40-51).<sup>11</sup>

**The days of the years of my pilgrimage, &c.**—Though a hundred thirty years, he reckons by days (compare Psalm 90:12), which he calls *few*, as they appeared in retrospect, and *evil*, because his life had been one almost unbroken series of trouble. The answer is remarkable, considering the comparative darkness of the patriarchal age (compare 2 Tim. 1:10).

Since Jacob dies at 147 (47:28), he has two periods of seventeen years with Joseph, the first seventeen of the latter's life (37:2) and the last seventeen of his own. See 25:7 n.; 35:28n.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

<sup>12</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

## **Genesis 47:10**

**And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh.**

The presentation of Joseph's father **before Pharaoh** must have been a grand occasion. But surprisingly, **Jacob blessed Pharaoh** (vv. 7, 10). Pharaoh as the host might have thought of pronouncing a blessing on Jacob because of his great admiration for Joseph. But instead the visitor blessed the host in the name of the living God! Literally Jacob obeyed God's command to Abram's descendants to "be a blessing" (see 12:2).<sup>13</sup>

*Bade farewell* can also be translated "blessed." The theme that contact with the family of Abraham results in blessing for Gentiles (or at least for those Gentiles who treat them well) is widespread in Genesis (12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; 30:27-30; 39:5, 23).<sup>14</sup>

## **Genesis 47:11**

**And Joseph placed his father and his brethren, 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.**

**Torah Class:** Next, Jacob is presented to Pharaoh. This is a separate meeting from the one the brothers just concluded with Pharaoh. And, it says that Jacob blessed Pharaoh. Now, that might sound a little odd....for it really kind of reverses their stations in life. It would seem that the humble and simple shepherd like Jacob, a refugee, would have NO business or place blessing such a great man as Pharaoh. But, what this amounted to was the respect that existed in that day for the aged. And, Jacob was probably the most aged man in all Egypt, perhaps the oldest man Pharaoh had ever met. Egyptian records simply don't show Egyptians living nearly as long as the Hebrews. In fact, Jacob's elderliness so intrigued Pharaoh that he says to Jacob in V8 "How old ARE you?!" And, Jacob responds that he's 130 years old, and most of those years have NOT been pleasant. But, then he also tells Pharaoh that 130 years old is nothin'. His ancestors lived to much older ages than he.

So, Jacob and all his clan are settled in the land of Goshen, and there they will remain for the next 4 centuries.<sup>15</sup>

**[Rameses]** A later name of Goshen (Genesis 46:34). So named for the old city Rameses in that province. It was later rebuilt by the Israelites (Exodus 1:11).

**district of Rameses.** An equation is made here between the "district of Rameses" and the land of Goshen (see Genesis 45:10). This northeastern section of the Delta region was known to be inhabited by Semites and it is the center of Hyksos activity during the eighteenth to sixteenth centuries B.C. It will also be equated with the Tanis district, where the storehouse cities of Pithom and Rameses were said to be constructed by the Hebrew

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<sup>13</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

<sup>14</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

<sup>15</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

slaves (Exodus 1:11). Pharaoh Rameses II, who did build and expand cities in this region during the mid-thirteenth century B.C., may be anachronistically referred to in this phrase.<sup>16</sup>

**Joseph placed his father and his brethren . . . in the best of the land**—best *pasture* land in lower Egypt. Goshen, "the land of verdure," lay along the Pelusiac or eastern branch of the Nile. It included a part of the district of Heliopolis, or "On," the capital, and on the east stretched out a considerable length into the desert. The ground included within these boundaries was a rich and fertile extent of natural meadow, and admirably adapted for the purposes of the Hebrew shepherds (compare Genesis 49:24; Psalm 34:10; Psalm 78:72).<sup>17</sup>

### **Genesis 47:12**

**And Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread, according to *their* families.**

[according to their families] Or, as little ones are nourished.

### **Genesis 47:13**

**And *there was* no bread in all the land; for the famine *was* very sore, so that the land of Egypt and *all* the land of Canaan fainted by reason of the famine.**

### **Genesis 47:14**

**And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, for the corn which they bought: and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house.**

**Gathered up all the money**—i. e., by selling corn out of the public stores to the people; and this he did till the money failed, Genesis 47:15, till all the money was exchanged for corn, and brought into Pharaoh's treasury. Besides the fifth part of the produce of the seven plentiful years, Joseph had bought additional corn with Pharaoh's money to lay up against the famine that was to prevail in the seven years of dearth; and it is very likely that this was sold out at the price for which it was bought, and the fifth part, which belonged to Pharaoh, sold out at the same price. And as money at that time could not be plentiful, the cash of the whole nation was thus exhausted as far as that had circulated among the common people.

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<sup>16</sup> Bible Background Commentary

<sup>17</sup> JFB Commentary

**Ramban, Nachmanides:** “And Joseph gathered up all the money,” Scripture relates this and goes on to complete the subject in this entire section in order to make known Joseph’s excellence in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and that he was a faithful man in that he brought all money into Pharaoh’s house and did not accumulate for himself treasures of money and secret hiding places for wealth in the land of Egypt or send it to the land of Canaan. Instead, he gave all money to the king who trusted him and purchased the land for him, and even the bodies of the Egyptians. Through this endeavor, he found grace even in the eyes of the people, for it is God who causes those who fear Him to prosper.<sup>18</sup>

### **Genesis 47:15**

**And when money failed in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came unto Joseph, and said, Give us bread: for why should we die in thy presence? for the money faileth.**

### **Genesis 47:16**

**And Joseph said, Give your cattle; and I will give you for your cattle, if money fail.**

**Give your cattle**—This was the wisest measure that could be adopted, both for the preservation of the people and of the cattle also. As the people had not grain for their own sustenance, consequently they could have none for their cattle; hence the cattle were in the most imminent danger of starving; and the people also were in equal danger, as they must have divided a portion of that bought for themselves with the cattle, which for the sake of tillage, etc., they wished of course to preserve till the seven years of famine should end. The cattle being bought by Joseph were supported at the royal expense, and very likely returned to the people at the end of the famine; for how else could they cultivate their ground, transport their merchandise, etc., etc.? For this part of Joseph’s conduct he certainly deserves high praise and no censure.

**And Joseph said, Give your cattle**—“This was the wisest course that could be adopted for the preservation both of the people and the cattle, which, being bought by Joseph, was supported at the royal expense, and very likely returned to the people at the end of the famine, to enable them to resume their agricultural labors.”

### **Genesis 47:17**

**And they brought their cattle unto Joseph: and Joseph gave them bread *in exchange* for horses, and for the flocks, and for the cattle of the herds, and for the asses: and he fed them with bread for all their cattle for that year.**

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<sup>18</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

In selling food to the people during the famine that was severe, Joseph accepted money and livestock (horses, sheep, goats, cattle, and donkeys) as payment, and finally the entire land of Egypt itself (except the land of the priests).

**bartering.** Bartering has been a means of exchange from earliest times. The mutually beneficial exchange of property, goods or manufactured items was the basis of the ancient nonmonetary economy. In this case, livestock is used as payment for grain during the famine.

### **Genesis 47:18**

**When that year was ended, they came unto him the second year, and said unto him, We will not hide *it* from my lord, how that our money is spent; my lord also hath our herds of cattle; there is not ought left in the sight of my lord, but our bodies, and our lands:**

[**second year**] Perhaps the second year before the famine ended, for the second year of the famine passed before Jacob went to Egypt (Genesis 45:6). If it refers to the second year of the famine then it happened before or about the time Jacob came into Egypt (Genesis 45:11). In that case the people used all their money and cattle to buy food the first two years, and sold their lands and themselves to Joseph for food for the next five years. If it refers to the second year after Jacob came, then they sold themselves and their land for three years.<sup>19</sup>

**When that year was ended**—The sixth year of the famine, they came unto him the second year, which was the last or seventh year of the famine, in which it was necessary to sow the land that there might be a crop the succeeding year; for Joseph, on whose prediction they relied, had foretold that the famine should continue only seven years, and consequently they expected the eighth year to be a fruitful year provided the land was sowed, without which, though the inundation of the land by the Nile might amount to the sixteen requisite cubits, there could be no crop.

### **Genesis 47:19**

**Wherefore shall we die before thine eyes, both we and our land? buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants unto Pharaoh: and give *us* seed, that we may live, and not die, that the land be not desolate.**

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<sup>19</sup> Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

### **Genesis 47:20**

**And Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for the Egyptians sold every man his field, because the famine prevailed over them: so the land became Pharaoh's.**

[**the land became Pharaoh's**] Joseph's policy has been criticized, but he was just Pharaoh's minister and this was a business proposition. The food was Pharaoh's, for he'd stored it during the seven years of plenty, because God revealed the coming famine. Otherwise there would have been no food for anyone. The people became tenants of Pharaoh, giving him twenty percent after the famine years. There was no other mark of slavery (Genesis 47:24).

### **Genesis 47:21**

**And as for the people, he removed them to cities from *one* end of the borders of Egypt even to the *other* end thereof.**

[**he removed them to cities from one end of the borders of Egypt even to the other end thereof**] This was to save work and feed the people more easily.

**And as for the people, he removed them to cities**—It is very likely that Joseph was influenced by no political motive in removing the people to the cities, but merely by a motive of humanity and prudence. As the corn was laid up in the cities he found it more convenient to bring them to the place where they might be conveniently fed; each being within the reach of an easy distribution. Thus then the country which could afford no sustenance was abandoned for the time being, that the people might be fed in those places where the provision was deposited.

The Masoretic Text seems to refer to a forced transfer of the rural population as part of the program of nationalization of the farmland. Other versions evidence a slightly variant wording with a very different meaning: "He made the population into slaves."

### **Genesis 47:22**

**Only the land of the priests bought he not; for the priests had a portion *assigned them* of Pharaoh, and did eat their portion which Pharaoh gave them: wherefore they sold not their lands**

[**Only the land of the priests bought he not**] All the records of Egypt concur with what is written here.

**The land of the priests bought he not**—From this verse it is natural to infer that whatever the religion of Egypt was, it was established by law and supported by the state. Hence when Joseph bought all the lands of the Egyptians for Pharaoh, he bought not the

land of the priests, for that was a portion assigned them by Pharaoh; and they did eat—did live on, that portion. This is the earliest account we have of an established religion supported by the state.

**priests' exemption.** The observation that the priests had an allotment of food from Pharaoh and therefore did not have to sell their land reflects a common situation of priestly privileges in Egypt. The priesthood often accumulated significant political power to itself and used its sometimes extensive economic resources to wield that power. Many pharaohs found it advantageous to curry favor with them. In contrast, the Israelite system granted no land holdings to the tribe of Levi.

### **Genesis 47:23**

**Then Joseph said unto the people, Behold, I have bought you this day and your land for Pharaoh: lo, here is seed for you, and ye shall sow the land.**

**I have bought you this day and your land for Pharaoh**—It fully appears that the kingdom of Egypt was previously to the time of Joseph a very limited monarchy. The king had his estates; the priests had their lands; and the common people their patrimony independently of both. The land of Rameses or Goshen appears to have been the king's land, Genesis 47:11. The priests had their lands, which they did not sell to Joseph, Genesis 47:22, 26; and that the people had lands independent of the crown, is evident from the purchases Joseph made, Genesis 47:19, 20; and we may conclude from those purchases that Pharaoh had no power to levy taxes upon his subjects to increase his own revenue until he had bought the original right which each individual had in his possessions. And when Joseph bought this for the king he raised the crown an ample revenue, though he restored the lands, by obliging each to pay one fifth of the product to the king, Genesis 47:24. And it is worthy of remark that the people of Egypt well understood the distinction between subjects and servants; for when they came to sell their land, they offered to sell themselves also, and said: Buy us and our land, and we and our land will be servants unto Pharaoh, Genesis 47:19.

Diodorus Siculus, lib. i., gives the same account of the ancient constitution of Egypt. "The land," says he, "was divided into three parts:

1. One belonged to the PRIESTS, with which they provided all sacrifices, and maintained all the ministers of religion.
2. A second part was the KING'S, to support his court and family, and to supply expenses for wars if they should happen. Hence there were no taxes, the king having so ample an estate.
3. The remainder of the land belonged to the SUBJECTS, who appear (from the account of Diodorus) to have been all soldiers, a kind of standing militia, liable, at the king's expense, to serve in all wars for the preservation of the state."

This was a constitution something like the British; the government appears to have been mixed, and the monarchy properly limited, till Joseph, by buying the land of the people, made the king in some sort despotic. But it does not appear that any improper use

was made of this, as in much later times we find it still a comparatively limited monarchy.<sup>20</sup>

### **Genesis 47:24**

**And it shall come to pass in the increase, that ye shall give the fifth *part* unto Pharaoh, and four parts shall be your own, for seed of the field, and for your food, and for them of your households, and for food for your little ones.**

**[fifth part]** A fifth part shows mercy and justice. This supported the government with no additional taxes required. It was Joseph's duty to do business wisely for Pharaoh who was under no obligation to give all he had for charity.

Once the land belonged to Pharaoh, Joseph instructed the people to plant seed, which he gave them. His only stipulation was that Pharaoh must receive a fifth of all the produce. In a word, the people survived but they (except the priests) were *in bondage to Pharaoh*. [Joseph's 20% tax is less than half of ours!]

### **Genesis 47:25**

**And they said, Thou hast saved our lives: let us find grace in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants.**

**[Thou hast saved our lives: let us find grace in the sight of my lord]** This proves the people were grateful and content over the justice received.

**[we will be Pharaoh's servants]** We will be Pharaoh's farmers.

**debt slavery.** Debt slavery was fairly common throughout the ancient Near East. Peasants who had lost their land and possessed nothing but the clothing on their backs would sell themselves into short-term servitude to support themselves and their families. This might be only for a day (Exodus 22:26-27) or for a period of years. In Israel the term of debt servitude could not exceed six years (Exodus 21:2). The Egyptian example in this text, however, suggests perpetual servitude as tenant farmers for Pharaoh. Their rent was paid with one-fifth of the harvest.<sup>21</sup>

### **Genesis 47:26**

**And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt unto this day, *that* Pharaoh should have the fifth *part*; except the land of the priests only, *which* became not Pharaoh's.**

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<sup>20</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary

<sup>21</sup> Bible Background Commentary

**[law over the land of Egypt unto this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth part; except the land of the priests only]** This law has been used in many Eastern lands where twenty percent is given to landlords who supply the seed.

**And Joseph made it a law**—That the people should hold their land from the king, and give him the fifth part of the produce as a yearly tax. Beyond this it appears the king had no farther demands. The whole of this conduct of Joseph has been as strongly censured by some as applauded by others. It is natural for men to run into extremes in attacking or defending any position. Sober and judicious men will consider what Joseph did by Divine appointment as a prophet of God, and what he did merely as a statesman from the circumstances of the case, the complexion of the times, and the character of the people over whom he presided. When this is dispassionately done, we shall see much reason to adore God, applaud the man, and perhaps in some cases censure the minister. Joseph is never held up to our view as an unerring prophet of God. He was an honored instrument in the hands of God of saving two nations from utter ruin, and especially of preserving that family from which the Messiah was to spring, and of perpetuating the true religion among them. In this character he is represented in the sacred pages. His conduct as the prime minister of Pharaoh was powerfully indicative of a deep and consummate politician, who had high notions of prerogative, which led him to use every prudent means to aggrandize his master, and at the same time to do what he judged best on the whole for the people he governed.<sup>22</sup>

**government ownership of land.** Government acquires land through forfeiture of debt, through failure to pay taxes and because a family lacks an heir. When the Egyptian people have nothing else to pay for grain during the famine, they must sell their land to the government and become tenant farmers working for Pharaoh.

### **Genesis 47:27**

**And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions therein, and grew, and multiplied exceedingly.**

**[Israel]** This word is used 2,540 times in Scripture as the name of Jacob and his descendants. The word Jacob is used the same way 446 times.

**[multiplied exceedingly]** As God promised (Genesis 12:2; Genesis 13:16; Genesis 15:5; Genesis 22:17; Genesis 26:3-4,24; Genesis 28:3,14; Genesis 32:12; Genesis 35:11; Genesis 46:3-4).

Whereas the Egyptians lose their land to Pharaoh because of Joseph's administrative policy, the Israelites acquire holdings through the generosity of Pharaoh, grateful for Joseph's managerial skills. Similarly, the fertility and increase of Israel contrast with the

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<sup>22</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary

devastation and impoverishment of the Egyptians, once again underscoring the special role of the former in God's designs.

**Verses 13-27:** Joseph saves and enslaves the Egyptians. This passage describes the progressive impoverishment of the Egyptian population, Joseph's rescue of them through skillful administration, and, finally and most troublingly, his enslavement of them to Pharaoh. The tables have indeed turned: the man who was brought to Egypt as a slave now reduces the Egyptians to slavery, all the while, however, saving their lives, just as he saved the lives of his own family. The cruelty of Joseph's enslavement of Egypt does not seem to bother the narrator. When Joseph died, however, and "a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph" (Exod. 1:8), the House of Israel found themselves once again on the wrong end of the enslavement process.<sup>23</sup>

**Torah Class:** Now we are told that the famine was continuing, even more severe than before, and the Egyptian people, along with foreigners, more and more came to depend on the grain stockpiled by Joseph because the yield of the land became less and less. And, we also see how it came to be that Pharaoh not only gained ownership of all the land of Egypt, but also extended Egypt's influence into Canaan and the Middle East. For as the people's food ran out, then their money was exhausted, then their livestock was sold, they next traded their land for food, and eventually sold themselves into the service of the Pharaoh. But, it is key to notice that to the folks giving up their money, land, and liberty, it was JOSEPH the Hebrew they were dealing with.

Of course, the land was rather useless to Pharaoh without somebody to tend the flocks and herds he now owned, and to till the soil. So, Joseph entered the now dispossessed Egyptian people into a tenant/landlord relationship with Pharaoh, as regards the land. That is, the people were allowed to remain on the land they had given up to Joseph and live there, but they had to give a substantial portion of its increase to Pharaoh as rent. This arrangement, which is commonly called serfdom, was closer to enslavement than a business deal. Only the priests of Egypt were exempted from this arrangement, as they were really wards of the state anyway, and it was Egypt's obligation to care for them. Now, although I mentioned it last week, let's estimate for a moment what Joseph must have been in the eyes of the people of Egypt, and even into parts of Canaan. For, it was Joseph's plan, Joseph's decrees, Joseph's implementations of his own plan that caused the people to become paupers and serfs. It was Joseph's face the people saw confiscating land and livestock. Joseph, while certainly saving their lives during that period of famine, was now their owner: he, as Pharaoh's representative, owned their lands, AND he owned them.

If we want to see the beginning of the hatred of the Egyptians towards the Israelites, and the seminal moment that was the beginning of the steady path towards fulfillment of the prophecy to Abraham of his descendant's enslavement, this must be it. The current Semite Pharaoh, of course, could have cared less what the Egyptian people wanted. But, years later, when the Egyptian people overthrew the hated foreigners, the Hyksos rulers of Egypt, and installed an Egyptian Pharaoh, they were now free to exact retribution for a

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<sup>23</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

100 years of built-up anger and envy towards these Hebrews, led by Joseph who had taken their land and their freedom.

To make matters worse, we see in V27 is that at the same time the Egyptian people were being forced to give up their land in exchange for food to survive, the Israelites were ACQUIRING land in Goshen. And, in that land that they, unlike the Egyptian population, now owned, they prospered and grew dramatically in number.

Now we see that Jacob would live 17 years in Egypt before he died at the age of 147. Jacob, the last patriarch, would be the only one to die on foreign soil. But, before he died, when he knew his time was near, Jacob called Joseph to his side and made him promise not to leave Jacob buried in the sands of Egypt, but that his remains be returned to the Promised Land. Jacob had no need to worry if this promise would be carried out, because before he had arrived in Egypt, God had assured Jacob that this wish would be granted. Now, Jacob loved God and trusted God; but just exactly HOW God operated (as far as Jacob was concerned) he basically knew from the well-established and common beliefs and traditions of all the Middle Eastern cultures. So, let me remind you of the issue for Jacob that made the location of his burial so critically important to him. This was not some idealistic matter, nor was it about honor. This wasn't even about nationalism, like when a country makes every effort to bring their soldiers who died in battle on foreign soil, home to be interred in their native land. The issue for Jacob involved the all-important matter of ancestor worship. How was he to be buried and gathered to his kin, if his kin (Abraham and Isaac) was in Canaan, but he was in Egypt? The spirits of the dead didn't travel. How was his essence to continue on, after his death, by means of his spirit being tended and honored by his sons, grandsons, great-grandsons, and so on, if those sons were in Canaan, but his spirit was still in Egypt? If a spirit weren't tended, it would come to an end; that person's essence would evaporate for all time. And, besides, it was the gods of each territory who had rule over their own kingdoms of the dead. So, for Jacob, he wanted to ensure that he indeed would be taken back to Canaan so he could live with his ancestors and his spirit would be properly looked after by his descendants. But, Jacob had some further duties, as head of the clan, to perform before he passed. He had to transfer the rights he possessed as leader and ruler of the family of Israel along with being the possessor of its wealth, over to the one who would carry on. That is, the first-born rights had to be transferred to the one who would be the next leader of Israel; and along with it, blessings and instructions not only to the next leader of Israel, but to all 12 of his sons. And, what Jacob does next, but hours and days before his death, is quite dramatic and has the most serious, far-reaching, even eternal, consequences for US. I cannot find the words to stress enough that for us to fill with meaning the remainder of the Torah as well as the whole of the Old Testament, we must grasp the significance of the events about to unfold in the last days of Jacob's life. And, after understanding all that, even the New Testament will take on a deeper and fuller meaning to us, as will the rapid unfolding of current events occurring in Israel even as I am speaking to you.

And, those blessings and instructions we will find in the next 3 chapters, which will bring Genesis to a close. Next week we will start looking at those blessings in detail.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

### **Genesis 47:28**

**And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years: so the whole age of Jacob was an hundred forty and seven years.**

[**Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years: so the whole age of Jacob was an hundred forty and seven years**] He was 130 when he entered Egypt and 147 when he died (Genesis 47:9,28).

### **Genesis 47:29**

**And the time drew nigh that Israel must die: and he called his son Joseph, and said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt:**

[**time drew nigh**] This time will come to all until the time of the rapture and the Millennium (1 Cor. 15:24-28; Hebrews 9:27).

[**Israel must die**] This refers to Jacob, not to all his seed as in Genesis 47:27; Genesis 32:28.

**the time drew nigh that Israel must die**—One only of his dying arrangements is recorded; but that one reveals his whole character. It was the disposal of his remains, which were to be carried to Canaan, not from a mere romantic attachment to his native soil, nor, like his modern descendants, from a superstitious feeling for the soil of the Holy Land, but from faith in the promises. His address to Joseph—"if now I have found grace in thy sight," that is, as the vizier of Egypt—his exacting a solemn oath that his wishes would be fulfilled and the peculiar form of that oath, all pointed significantly to the promise and showed the intensity of his desire to enjoy its blessings (compare Numbers 10:29).

[**under my thigh**] "Thigh" was a euphemism for the procreative organ. Putting a hand under the thigh was a sign of making a promise, much like shaking hands today. Jacob had Joseph promise to bury him in his homeland. Few things were written in this culture, so a person's word then carried as much force as a written contract today. People today seem to find it easy to say, "I didn't mean that." God's people, however, are to speak the truth and live the truth. Let your words be as binding as a written contract.

### **Genesis 47:30**

**But I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their buryingplace. And he said, I will do as thou hast said.**

**I will lie with my fathers**—As God had promised the land of Canaan to Abraham and his posterity, Jacob considered it as a consecrated place, under the particular

superintendence and blessing of God: and as Sarah, Abraham, and Isaac were interred near to Hebron, he in all probability wished to lie, not only in the same place, but in the same grave; and it is not likely that he would have been solicitous about this, had he not considered that promised land as being a type of the rest that remains for the people of God, and a pledge of the inheritance among the saints in light.

### **Genesis 47:31**

**And he said, Swear unto me. And he sware unto him. And Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head.**

Jacob exhorted Joseph to swear that he would bury him where his fathers had been buried. He referred, of course, to the Cave of Machpelah which had been purchased by Abraham (Ch. 23). Jacob desired to be buried in the land that God had promised him. He never possessed the land; looks forward to resurrection.

**[Swear unto me]** Make a promise or solemn vow. Many oaths are recorded in Scripture. God made the first one to Cain (Genesis 4:15).

**[bowed himself upon the bed's head]** This isn't the same as "leaning upon the top of his staff" in Hebrews 11:21. Genesis 47:31 refers to the time of a vow and Hebrews 11:21 refers to his death ("when he was dying") as proved by Genesis 48:1 which says "after these things."

**And Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head**—Jacob was now both old and feeble, and we may suppose him reclined on his couch when Joseph came; that he afterwards sat up erect (see Genesis 48:2) while conversing with his son, and receiving his oath and promise; and that when this was finished he bowed himself upon the bed's head—exhausted with the conversation, he again reclined himself on his bed as before. This seems to be the simple meaning, which the text unconnected with any religious system or prejudice, naturally proposes. But because שָׁחָה *shachah*, signifies not only to bow but to worship, because acts of religious worship were performed by bowing or prostration, and because מִטָּה *mittah*, a bed, by the change of the points, only becomes מַטֵּה *matteh*, a staff, in which sense the Septuagint took it, translating the original words thus: Καὶ προσεκύνησεν Ἰσραὴλ ἐπὶ τὸ ἀκρον τῆς ραβδου αὐτου, and Israel worshipped upon the top of his staff, which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Hebrews 11:21, quotes *literatim*; therefore some have supposed that Jacob certainly had a carved image on the head or top of his staff, to which he paid a species of adoration; or that he bowed himself to the staff or scepter of Joseph, thus fulfilling the prophetic import of his son's dreams! The sense of the Hebrew text is given above. If the reader prefers the sense of the Septuagint and the Epistle to the Hebrews, the meaning is, that Jacob, through feebleness, supported himself with a staff, and that, when he got the requisite assurance from Joseph that his dead body should be carried to Canaan, leaning

on his staff he bowed his head in adoration to God, who had supported him all his life long, and hitherto fulfilled all his promises.<sup>25</sup>

**burials of ancestors.** Once a family tomb was established, it would have become traditional for each family member to be entombed with all of the others. This tied the generations together and further strengthened a family's claim to the land where the tomb was located.

**McGee Summary:** I think there are several factors which entered into Jacob's request to be buried back in the land of Canaan. First of all, he is now 147 years old, and he becomes alarmed that he will die in the land of Egypt. I think that is clear to him now. Then, the success of Joseph in acquiring all the land for Pharaoh makes him believe that his family might become comfortable in Egypt and never want to return to Canaan. His age certainly told him that he would die shortly.

We need to recognize this request as an evidence of the faith of Jacob in the covenant which God had made with his fathers. We need to note this because it will come up several times as we go through the Bible. The hope of the Old Testament is an *earthly* hope. Abraham believed that he would be raised from the dead in that land, so he wanted to be buried there. Isaac believed the same. Now Jacob is expressing that same faith. You see, the hope in the Old Testament is not to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and enter the city of the New Jerusalem, which is the eternal and permanent abode of the *church*.

The hope of the Old Testament is in Christ's kingdom which will be set up on this earth. When that happens, Israel's great hope will be fulfilled, and these people will be raised for that kingdom. The first thousand years of it will be a time of testing, and after that the eternal kingdom will continue on and on. This is why Jacob does not want to be buried in Egypt. If he had no faith or hope in God's promise to him, what difference would it make where he was buried?

For the believer today it makes no difference where we are buried. At the time of the Rapture, wherever we are, we shall be raised, and our bodies will join our spirits; that is, if we have died before the Rapture takes place. If we are still living, then we shall be changed and caught up to meet the Lord in the air. So it won't make any difference if we are buried in Egypt or in Canaan or in Los Angeles, or in Timbuctoo. The living "in Christ" and the dead "in Christ" in all of these places will be caught up. It won't make any difference where we are. We don't need to go to a launching pad in Florida and take off from there. No, our hope is a heavenly hope!

The hope of the Old Testament is an earthly hope, and the fact that Jacob wants to be buried back in the land is an evidence of his faith in the resurrection. He hopes to be raised from the dead in the Promised Land. Jacob is now becoming a man of faith.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary

<sup>26</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:187). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**Bible History, Old Testament, Eidermein** Before settling him in Goshen, Joseph presented his father to Pharaoh, who received him with the courtesy of an Eastern monarch, and the respect which the sight of age, far exceeding the ordinary term of life in Egypt, would ensure. In acknowledgment of Pharaoh's kindness, "Jacob blessed" him; and in answer to the question about his age, compared "the days of the years" of his own "pilgrimage" with those of his fathers. Abraham had lived one hundred and seventy-five, Isaac one hundred and eighty years; while Jacob was at the age of only one hundred and thirty, apprehending the approach of death. Compared to theirs, his days had not only been "few" but "evil," full of trial, sorrow, and care, ever since his flight from his father's house. Yet, however differing in outward events, the essential character of their lives was the same. His and theirs were equally a "pilgrimage." For,

*"these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country, . . . a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city."(Hebrews 11:13, 14, 16)*

And in such wise also must each of our lives, whatever its outward history, be to us only a "pilgrimage."

But seventeen more years were granted to Israel in his quiet retirement of Goshen. Feeling that now the time of his departure had really come, he sent for Joseph. It was not to express weak regrets, nor even primarily to take such loving farewell as, under such circumstances, might be proper and fitting. Israel, as he is here again characteristically named,\* was preparing for another great act of faith. On his dying bed, he still held fast by the promises of God concerning the possession of Canaan, and all that was connected with it; and he exacted an oath from his son to bury him with his fathers, in the cave of Machpelah. Having obtained this solemn promise, it is said,\*\* "he bowed himself in worship over the head of the bed."

\* It is most instructive to notice in this history the frequent change of the names of Jacob and Israel.

\*\* We translate literally. The Greek translators, or LXX, from whom the quotation is made in Hebrews 11:21, have, by the slightest change in the Hebrew word, rendered it, "worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff." The meaning is substantially the same.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Bible History, Old Testament, Eidermein