

They gave up their land and freedom

This article is from the "Among Friends" section of the Church of God Big Sandy's Web site, churchofgodbigandy.com. It was posted for the weekend of Dec. 12-13, 2009.

By Dave Havir

BIG SANDY, Texas—Many years ago Joseph, the son of Jacob, participated in the implementation of slavery in the land of Egypt.

You remember some of the background.

Joseph had two dreams (Genesis 37:5-10) that irritated his brothers (verses 11, 19).

At first the brothers plotted to kill him (verses 18, 20), but they decided to throw him into an old well instead (verses 21-24).

The brothers next sold Joseph to Midianite merchants (verses 25-28) who ended up selling him to Potiphar of Egypt (verse 36).

Joseph was falsely accused (Genesis 39:14-19) and thrown into prison (verse 20).

After Joseph correctly interpreted some dreams while in prison (Genesis 40:5-23), he was summoned to interpret two dreams of Pharaoh (Genesis 41:1-36).

Pharaoh advanced Joseph to reign directly under him in authority in the land of Egypt (verses 37-45).

Joseph gathered up food during the seven years of plenty (verse 48). Then the drought came (verse 54).

Joseph made decisions

When the drought came, the people of Egypt went to Pharaoh for bread, and he sent them to Joseph (Genesis 41:55).

Joseph sold grain to the Egyptians (verse 56). People from other countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain (verse 57).

We will not take time here to talk about the details of Joseph's various dealings with his brothers. Although those accounts are interesting reading, we will fast-forward to Genesis 47.

A few weeks ago I saw a story on E-mail talking about an apparent sermon given by a non-Church of God pastor that used Genesis 47 to liken the present government administration of the United States to Pharaoh.

For the record, while I am personally alarmed and troubled by various policies of the United States government, I believe the apparent preacher made a mistake in ignoring Joseph's role in the movement toward economic slavery in Egypt.

You may ask: What's the difference? In my response, I would like to make two comments.

Shared responsibility?

First, Joseph deserves shared responsibility with Pharaoh. From my perspective, they were either wrong together or they were right together.

Second, since Joseph is mentioned favorably in the Bible (including Hebrews 11), a person may wonder how God was involved in the economic slavery of Genesis 47.

We, as believers, conclude that God and His will reign supreme in the universe. However, we have differences of opinion about how much God deals in the details.

For the record, I believe God at times is intricately involved with details (like the prophecies concerning the birth of our Savior) and at other times allows events to occur in the lives of the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45).

Maybe God just allowed Joseph and Pharaoh to follow their own will in creating problems for the people. Or maybe Joseph's involvement in the matter helps us realize that God was very involved in the economic slavery.

Either way, people were hurting.

Empty promises

At this time let me caution you about church leaders who make promises on which they cannot deliver. They often present imaginations from their own heart (Jeremiah 23:16-17).

Some church leaders say you will be protected from coming trials *if* you demonstrate allegiance to them and to their church organization. They quote Revelation 3:10 to support their presumptuous claim.

However, they neglect to quote verses like Luke 14:27, Acts 14:22, Romans 8:17, Revelation 6:9-11 and Revelation 20:4.

Besides, any and all protection that God graciously grants to people will be based upon a relationship with Him and will not come because of allegiance to men who exalt themselves (Isaiah 2:11, 22).

I recommend you trust in the Eternal (Isaiah 40:18-31).

Growing government involvement

Let's notice the progression of Genesis 47:13-26.

There was no bread in all the land of Egypt (verse 13).

Joseph sold corn to the people and stockpiled the money in Pharaoh's house (verse 14).

When the money failed in the land of Egypt, the Egyptians approached Joseph to ask for bread (verse 15). They said something like: "We'll soon be dead because our money is gone."

Joseph instructed the people to give their animals in exchange for food (verses 16-17). The people were bartering.

The people offered to give their land to Joseph, and he accepted (verses 18-19). The people offered to become slaves of Pharaoh, and Joseph accepted (verse 20).

The ruler of Egypt ordered some of the people to move from the country to the city (verse 21).

When Joseph gave seed to the people (verse 23), he instructed them that they could keep four fifths of their increase and to give one fifth of their increase to Pharaoh (verse 24).

Joseph helped to orchestrate the collection—the taxation—of increase back in that time. In fact, Joseph made a law over the land of Egypt concerning this practice (verse 26).

Thankful for slavery

When we consider Genesis 47:25, I am truly amazed.

The people said something like this: "You have saved our lives. We are glad to be Pharaoh's slaves."

You know, the trials of their lives must have become intense for the people to consider slavery a blessing.

Please remember that Genesis 47:13-26 is a history lesson. Please understand I am not proclaiming this section of Scripture as a prophecy for our countries today.

I just hope that history does not repeat itself with a progression of economic troubles that leads to slavery.

And I certainly would not want to see events get so bad that we would come to appreciate slavery.