

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS CHAPTER 47

In this chapter we have instances,

I. Of Joseph's kindness and affection to his relations, presenting his brethren first and then his father to Pharaoh (#Ge 47:1-10), settling them in Goshen, and providing for them there (#Ge 47:11-12), and paying his respects to his father when he sent for him, #Ge 47:27-31.

II. Of Joseph's justice between prince and people in a very critical affair, selling Pharaoh's corn to his subjects with reasonable profits to Pharaoh, and yet without any wrong to them #Ge 47:13, &c. Thus he approved himself wise and good, both in his private and in his public capacity.

Ver. 1.

Here is,

I. The respect which Joseph, as a subject, showed to his prince. Though he was his favourite, and prime-minister of state, and had had particular orders from him to send for his father down to Egypt, yet he would not suffer him to settle till he had given notice of it to Pharaoh, #Ge 47:1. Christ, our Joseph, disposes of his followers in his kingdom as it is prepared of his Father, saying, *It is not mine to give*, #Mt 20:23.

II. The respect which Joseph, as a brother, showed to his brethren, notwithstanding all the unkindness he had formerly received from them.

1. Though he was a great man, and they were comparatively mean and despicable, especially in Egypt, yet he owned them. Let those that are rich and great in the world learn hence not to overlook nor despise their poor relations. Every branch of the tree is not a top branch; but, because it is a lower branch, is it therefore not of the tree? Our Lord Jesus, like Joseph here, is not *ashamed to call us brethren*.

2. They being strangers and no courtiers, he introduced some of them to Pharaoh, *to kiss his hand*, as we say, intending thereby to put an honour upon them among the Egyptians. Thus Christ presents his brethren in the court of heaven, and improves his interest for them, though in themselves unworthy and *an abomination to the Egyptians*. Being presented to Pharaoh, according to the instructions which Joseph had given them, they tell him,

(1.) What was their business--that they were shepherds, #Ge 47:3. Pharaoh asked them (and Joseph knew it would be one of his first questions, #Ge 46:33), *What is your occupation?* He takes it for granted they had something to do, else Egypt should be no place for them, no harbour for idle vagrants. If they would not work, they should not eat of his bread in this time of scarcity. Note, All that have a place in the world should have an employment in it according to their capacity, some occupation or other, mental or manual. Those that need not work for their

bread must yet have something to do, to keep them from idleness. Again, Magistrates should enquire into the occupation of their subjects, as those that have the care of the public welfare; for idle people are as drones in the hive, unprofitable burdens of the commonwealth.

(2.) What was their business in Egypt--to sojourn in the land (#Ge 47:4), not to settle there for ever, only to sojourn there for a time, while the famine so prevailed in Canaan, which lay high, that it was not habitable for shepherds, the grass being burnt up much more than in Egypt, which lay low, and where the corn chiefly failed, while there was tolerably good pasture.

3. He obtained for them a grant of a settlement in the land of Goshen, #Ge 47:5,6. This was an instance of Pharaoh's gratitude to Joseph; because he had been such a blessing to him and his kingdom, he would be kind to his relations, purely for his sake. He offered them preferment as shepherds over his cattle, provided they were men of activity; for it is the man who is diligent in his business that shall stand before kings. And, whatever our profession or employment is, we should aim to be excellent in it, and to prove ourselves ingenious and industrious.

III. The respect Joseph, as a son, showed to his father.

1. He presented him to Pharaoh, #Ge 47:7. And here,

(1.) Pharaoh asks Jacob a common question: *How old art thou?* #Ge 47:8. A question usually put to old men, for it is natural to us to admire old age and to reverence it (#Le 19:32), as it is very unnatural and unbecoming to despise it, #Isa 3:5. Jacob's countenance, no doubt, showed him to be very old, for he had been a man of labour and sorrow; in Egypt people were not so long lived as in Canaan, and therefore Pharaoh looks upon Jacob with wonder; he was as a show in his court. When we are reflecting upon ourselves, this should come into the account,

"How old are we?"

(2.) Jacob gives Pharaoh an uncommon answer, #Ge 47:9. He speaks as becomes a patriarch, with an air of seriousness, for the instruction of Pharaoh. Though our speech be not always of grace, yet it must thus be always with grace. Observe here,

[1.] He calls his life a *pilgrimage*, looking upon himself as a stranger in this world, and a traveller towards another world: this earth his inn, not his home. To this the apostle refers (#Heb 11:13), *They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims*. He not only reckoned himself a pilgrim now that he was in Egypt, a strange country in which he never was before; but his life, even in the land of his nativity, was a pilgrimage, and those who so reckon it can the better bear the inconvenience of banishment from their native soil; they are but pilgrims still, and so they were always.

[2.] He reckons his life by *days*; for, even so, it is soon reckoned, and we are

not sure of the continuance of it for a day to an end, but may be turned out of this tabernacle at less than an hour's warning. Let us therefore number our days (#Ps 90:12), and measure them, #Ps 39:4.

[3.] The character he gives of them is, *First*, That they were few. Though he had now lived 130 years, they seemed to him but a few days, in comparison with the days of eternity, the eternal God, and the eternal state, in which a thousand years (longer than ever any man lived) are but as one day. *Secondly*, That they were evil. This is true concerning man in general, *he is of few days, and full of trouble* (#Job 14:1); and, since his days are evil, it is well they are few. Jacob's life, particularly, had been made up of evil days; and the pleasantest days of his life were yet before him. *Thirdly*, That they were short of the days of his fathers, not so many, not so pleasant, as their days. Old age came sooner upon him than it had done upon some of his ancestors. As the young man should not be proud of his strength or beauty, so the old man should not be proud of his age, and the crown of his hoary hairs, though others justly reverence it; for those who are accounted very old attain not to the years of the patriarchs. The hoary head is a crown of glory only when it is found in the way of righteousness.

(3.) Jacob both addresses himself to Pharaoh and takes leave of him with a blessing (#Ge 47:7): *Jacob blessed Pharaoh*, and again, #Ge 47:10, which was not only an act of civility (he paid him respect and returned him thanks for his kindness), but an act of piety--he prayed for him, as one having the authority of a prophet and a patriarch. Though in worldly wealth Pharaoh was the greater, yet, in interest with God, Jacob was the greater; he was God's anointed, #Ps 105:15. And a patriarch's blessing was not a thing to be despised, no, not by a potent prince. Darius valued the prayers of the church for himself and for his sons, #Ezr 6:10. Pharaoh kindly received Jacob, and, whether in the name of a prophet or no, thus he had a prophet's reward, which sufficiently recompensed him, not only for his courteous converse with him, but for all the other kindnesses he showed to him and his.

2. He provided well for him and his, *placed him in Goshen* (#Ge 47:11), *nourished him* and all his with food convenient for them, #Ge 47:12. This bespeaks, not only Joseph a good man, who took this tender care of his poor relations, but God a good God, who raised him up for this purpose, and put him into a capacity of doing it, as Esther came to the kingdom for such a time as this. What God here did for Jacob he has, in effect, promised to do for all his, that serve him and trust in him. #Ps 37:19, *In the days of famine they shall be satisfied.*

Ver. 13.

Care being taken of Jacob and his family, the preservation of which was especially designed by Providence in Joseph's advancement, an account is now given of the saving of the kingdom of Egypt too from ruin; for God is King of nations as well as King of saints, and provideth food for all flesh. Joseph now returns to the management of that great trust which Pharaoh had lodged in his

hand. It would have been pleasing enough to him to have gone and lived with his father and brethren in Goshen; but his employment would not permit it. When he had seen his father, and seen him well settled, he applied himself as closely as ever to the execution of his office. Note: Even natural affection must give way to necessary business. Parents and children must be content to be absent one from another, when it is necessary, on either side, for the service of God or their generation. In Joseph's transactions with the Egyptians observe,

I. The great extremity that Egypt, and the parts adjacent, were reduced to by the famine. There was no bread, and they *fainted* (**#Ge 47:13**), they were ready to die, **#Ge 47:15,19**.

1. See here what a dependence we have upon God's providence. If its usual favours are suspended but for a while, we die, we perish, we all perish. All our wealth would not keep us from starving if the rain of heaven were but withheld for two or three years. See how much we lie at God's mercy, and let us keep ourselves always in his love.
2. See how much we smart by our own improvidence. If all the Egyptians had done for themselves in the seven years of plenty as Joseph did for Pharaoh, they had not been now in these straits; but they regarded not the warning they had of the years of famine, concluding that to-morrow shall be as this day, next year as this, and much more abundant. Note, Because man knows not his time (his time of gathering when he has it) therefore his misery is great upon him when the spending time comes, **#Ec 8:6,7**.
3. See how early God put a difference between the Egyptians and the Israelites, as afterwards in the plagues, **#Ex 8:22; 9:4,26; 10:23**. Jacob and his family, though strangers, were plentifully fed on free cost, while the Egyptians were dying for want. See **#Isa 65:13**, *My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry. Happy art thou, O Israel. Whoever wants, God's children shall not*, **#Ps 34:10**.

II. The price they had come up to, for their supply, in this exigency.

1. They parted with all their money which they had hoarded up, **#Ge 47:14**. Silver and gold would not feed them, they must have corn. All the money of the kingdom was by this means brought into the exchequer.
2. When the money failed, they parted with all their cattle, those for labour, as the horses and asses, and those for food, as the flocks and the herds, **#Ge 47:17**. By this it should seem that we may better live upon bread without flesh than upon flesh without bread. We may suppose they parted the more easily with their cattle because they had little or no grass for them; and now Pharaoh saw in reality what he had before seen in vision, nothing but lean kine.
3. When they had sold their stocks off their land, it was easy to persuade themselves (rather than starve) to sell their land too; for what good would

that do them, when they had neither corn to sow it nor cattle to eat of it? They therefore sold that next, for a further supply of corn.

4. When their land was sold, so that they had nothing to live on, they must of course sell themselves, that they might live purely upon their labour, and hold their lands by the base tenure of villenage, at the courtesy of the crown. Note, *Skin for skin, and all that a man hath*, even liberty and property (those darling twins), *will he give for his life*; for life is sweet. There are few (though perhaps there are some) who would even dare to die rather than live in slavery, and dependence on an arbitrary power. And perhaps there are those who, in that case, could die by the sword, in a heat, who yet could not deliberately die by famine, which is much worse, [#La 4:9](#). Now it was a great mercy to the Egyptians that, in this distress, they could have corn at any rate; if they had all died for hunger, their lands perhaps would have escheated to the crown of course, for want of heirs; they therefore resolved to make the best of bad.

III. The method which Joseph took to accommodate the matter between prince and people, so that the prince might have his just advantage, and yet the people not be quite ruined.

1. For their lands, he needed not come to any bargain with them while the years of famine lasted; but when these were over (for God will not contend for ever, nor will he be always wroth) he came to an agreement, which it seems both sides were pleased with, that the people should occupy and enjoy the lands, as he thought fit to assign them, and should have seed to sow them with out of the king's stores, for their own proper use and behoof, yielding and paying only a fifth part of the yearly profits as a chief rent to the crown. This became a standing law, [#Ge 47:26](#). And it was a very good bargain to have food for their lands, when otherwise they and theirs must have starved, and then to have their lands again upon such easy terms. Note, Those ministers of state are worthy of double honour, both for wisdom and integrity, that keep the balance even between prince and people, so that liberty and property may not entrench upon prerogative, nor the prerogative bear hard upon liberty and property: in the multitude of such counsellors there is safety. If afterwards the Egyptians thought it hard to pay so great a duty to the king out of their lands, they must remember, not only how just, but how kind, the first imposing of it was. They might thankfully pay a fifth where all was due. It is observable how faithful Joseph was to him that appointed him. He did not put the money into his own pocket, nor entail the lands upon his own family; but converted both entirely to Pharaoh's use; and therefore we do not find that his posterity went out of Egypt any richer than the rest of their poor brethren. Those in public trusts, if they raise great estates, must take heed that it be not at the expense of a good conscience, which is much more valuable.
2. For their persons, he removed them to cities, [#Ge 47:21](#). He transplanted them, to show Pharaoh's sovereign power over them, and that they might, in time, forget their titles to their lands, and be the more easily reconciled to

their new condition of servitude. The Jewish writers say,

"He removed them thus from their former habitations because they reproached his brethren as strangers, to silence which reproach they were all made, in effect, strangers."

See what changes a little time may make with a people, and how soon God can empty those from vessel to vessel who had settled upon their lees. How hard soever this seems to have been upon them, they themselves were at this time sensible of it as a very great kindness, and were thankful they were not worse used: *Thou hast saved our lives, #Ge 47:25*. Note, There is good reason that the Saviour of our lives should be the Master of our lives.

"Thou hast saved us; do what thou wilt with us."

IV. The reservation he made in favour of the priests. They were maintained on free cost, so that they needed not to sell their lands, *#Ge 47:22*. *All people will thus walk in the name of their God; they will be kind to those that attend the public service of their God, and that minister to them in holy things; and we should, in like manner, honour our God, by esteeming his ministers highly in love for their work's sake.*

Ver. 27.

Observe,

1. The comfort Jacob lived in (*#Ge 47:27,28*); while the Egyptians were impoverished in their own land, Jacob was replenished in a strange land. He lived seventeen years after he came into Egypt, far beyond his own expectation. Seventeen years he had nourished Joseph (for so old he was when he was sold from him, *#Ge 37:2*), and now, by way of requital, seventeen years Joseph nourished him. Observe how kindly Providence ordered Jacob's affairs, that when he was old, and least able to bear care or fatigue, he had least occasion for it, being well provided for by his son without his own forecast. Thus God considers the frame of his people.
2. The care Jacob died in. At last *the time drew nigh that Israel must die, #Ge 47:29*. Israel, a prince with God, that had power over the angel and prevailed, yet must yield to death. There is no remedy, he *must die*: it is appointed for all men, therefore for him; and there is no discharge in that war. Joseph supplied him with bread, that he might not die by famine; but this did not secure him from dying by age or sickness. He died by degrees; his candle was not blown out, but gradually burnt down to the socket, so that he saw, at some distance, the time drawing nigh. Note, It is an improvable advantage to see the approach of death before we feel its arrests, that we may be quickened to do what our hand finds to do with all our might: however, it is not far from any of us. Now Jacob's care, as he saw the day approaching, was about his burial, not the pomp of it (he was no way solicitous about

that), but the place of it.

(1.) He would be buried in Canaan. This he resolved on, not from mere humour, because Canaan was the land of his nativity, but in faith, because it was the land of promise (which he desired thus, as it were, to keep possession of, till the time should come when his posterity should be masters of it), and because it was a type of heaven, that better country which he that said these things declared plainly that he was in expectation of, [#Heb 11:14](#). He aimed at a good land, which would be his rest and bliss on the other side death.

(2.) He would have Joseph sworn to bring him thither to be buried ([#Ge 47:29,31](#)), that Joseph, being under such a solemn obligation to do it, might have that to answer to the objections which otherwise might have been made against it, and for the greater satisfaction of Jacob now in his dying minutes. Nothing will better help to make a death-bed easy than the certain prospect of a rest in Canaan after death.

(3.) When this was done *Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head*, yielding himself, as it were, to the stroke of death

("Now let it come, and it shall be welcome"),

or worshipping God, as it is explained, [#Heb 11:21](#), giving God thanks for all his favours, and particularly for this, that Joseph was ready, not only to put his hand upon his eyes to close them, but under his thigh to give him the satisfaction he desired concerning his burial. Thus those that go down to the dust should, with humble thankfulness, bow before God, the God of their mercies, [#Ps 22:29](#).