

Week 11 – Sovereign Provision – Genesis 46:28-47:28

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 11:8-16

Introduction

The television mini-series *Lonesome Dove* ends with a reporter asking the old, former Texas Ranger, Woodrow F. Call, if he was a man of vision as people were saying

It would be hard to think of a description that carries more possibilities – “A man of vision”

History is dotted with examples of people who could be called “people of vision”

People who seemed to see further and with greater clarity than most others of their time and we marvel at their ability even as we wonder about how they were able to see as they did

Joseph was one of those people but we haven’t had to wonder about the source of his keen comprehension

Throughout our study of the life of Joseph we’ve seen how God empowered and upheld Joseph from the time he was a youth when God sent him dreams of a future that even Joseph couldn’t possibly fully understand

We could easily refer to Joseph as a “man of vision” but in reality Joseph was simply a conduit for the working out of God’s vision of provision for his people

And because Joseph never took his eyes off of God and never stopped trusting in God and because he continued to act according to that trust, God allowed Joseph to see things more clearly than anyone else in his day

This morning our passage is **Genesis 46:28-47:28** and you will notice, once again, that we are not following the chapter divisions as we find them in our Bible

That’s because the last three verses of Chapter 47 fit better thematically with what follows them than they do with what we are looking at today so I we are going to look at them next week along with Chapter 48

Last week we considered the momentous journey that Jacob and his entire family undertook as they left Canaan and headed for Egypt and how God personally interacted with Jacob as he assured him of his presence, power, and purpose

And how God restated his promise to prosper Jacob’s progeny and make them into a great nation

This morning we will first see what happened as the caravan arrived in Egypt and Jacob was reunited with Joseph, introduced to Pharaoh, and finally settled in Goshen

Then we will see how God continued to work through Joseph and how Joseph’s integrity and care for the people informed his actions as he continued to guide Egypt through the remaining years of the famine

And how, ultimately, the people of Egypt praised Joseph and credited him with saving their lives

Lastly, we will see how God began to work out the fulfillment of his promise to bless Israel by advancing their fortunes in Egypt in spite of the famine

I. The Arrival in Egypt

We begin this morning in **Genesis 46:28** as Jacob and the rest were coming near to Egypt

And, believe it or not, we have recorded in Scripture a man asking for directions as Jacob sent Judah to inquire from Joseph which way they should go

Presumably, Judah made the inquiry and then travelled back to guide the rest of the family to Goshen [**Goshen Map**] which was in the delta region of the Nile making it a very lush area ideal for herdsmen

And the region is still lush and green and one of the best areas in Egypt today [**Goshen Pic**]

Then in verse 29 [**Genesis 46:29**] we see Joseph make his way to meet his father as soon as he was confident he had arrived in Goshen

A. Reunion of Jacob and Joseph

And we read that *“He presented himself to [Jacob]”*

The Hebrew word translated here as “presented” is typically used for a divine appearance which means that Joseph’s appearance was like having the Lord appear or at least that the hand of the Lord was evident in his appearing

Just imagine what Joseph must have looked like as he arrived in his official state chariot and dressed in his official Egyptian robes

When Jacob had last seen Joseph he had been a lad of 17 dressed in his special coat as he headed off to check on his brothers and now here he is a grown man in all the trappings of his high office

Such an appearing could have been daunting and Jacob could have felt that Joseph had grown beyond him

But we see that Joseph allowed no room for those kinds of thoughts to take hold as he dismounted his chariot to embrace his father

And our text says he wept on Jacob’s neck a good while as years of bottled up emotion was allowed to pour forth

After a long embrace, Jacob finally spoke and he put into words his reaction to seeing his long-lost son who he had presumed was dead by saying that whenever his time might come, he could now face death with satisfied contentment

We aren’t told any more about their reunion as our text turns immediately to Joseph revealing his plans for getting his family settled in Goshen

We’ve already seen what a **skilled administrator** Joseph has proven to be but now we get to see that he was also a **very gifted politician** as he orchestrates all the details to achieve the optimal results that he desires

First, he says he will go and let Pharaoh know they have arrived

As we know, Pharaoh had facilitated their coming and we should expect that he was looking forward to the arrival of the family of his top official so simple courtesy would require letting him know they had arrived safely

We know that Joseph had desired to settle his family in Goshen because that’s what he told his brothers when he sent them back to get their father (**Genesis 45:10**)

But he also knew that it would be wise to get Pharaoh’s direct permission before actually doing it

Nepotism has always been frowned on and it would look really bad for Joseph to take the best land for his family even though he had the authority to do so and Pharaoh had previously said that he would “give them the best of the land of Egypt” (**Genesis 45:18**)

So, rather than have them present themselves to Pharaoh as soon as they arrived, Joseph wisely parked them in Goshen

Then he revealed his plan to his family that when he went to Pharaoh he would not only tell him that they had arrived safely but that he would also reveal that they were shepherds who had brought their animals with them

And he told them that they should be sure to tell Pharaoh that they weren’t just shepherds now but their family had been shepherds for generations

The reason being that *“every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians”* as we see in verse 34 (**Genesis 46:34**)

The Egyptians were farmers and, as such, they despised shepherding because sheep could be harmful to their crops

Previously, we saw that the Egyptians wouldn’t eat with a Hebrew but their dislike of shepherds applied to their own people as well as to foreigners

When shepherds are depicted in Egyptian art they are constantly shown as lanky, withered, distorted, emaciated figures

Whereas being a shepherd was a noble occupation in the time of the patriarchs, it seems the Israelites long sojourn in Egypt caused them to take on the Egyptians attitudes toward shepherds

And after the exodus shepherding became the vocation of a lower class in Israel as well as in Egypt

Joseph wisely discerned that Pharaoh would not want to disparage Joseph's family by banishing them to some isolated section of Egypt nor would he want them to be too close

And Goshen, in spite of its advantages, was sparsely populated in those days so not too many Egyptians would complain about their new neighbors

So the easiest course of action for Pharaoh would be to ratify the whole arrangement and let them stay where they were since that's where they wanted to be anyway

B. Introduction to Pharaoh

So Joseph took five of his brothers and presented them to Pharaoh who asked them their occupation just as Joseph thought he would

And the brothers answered as Joseph had coached them

But notice that they brothers also told Pharaoh that they had come to "sojourn" in Egypt

Meaning that they had only come to stay temporarily because of the famine and the addition of stated intention not to stay longer than necessary had to have served to put Pharaoh at greater ease with their presence

Then the brothers finished up by making the modest request that they be allowed to settle in Goshen

And in **Genesis 47:5-6** we see Pharaoh make his official pronouncement

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt is before you. Settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land. Let them settle in the land of Goshen, and if you know any able men among them, put them in charge of my livestock."

In this pronouncement Pharaoh basically restated what he had already said back in **Genesis 45:18**

He says, as far as he is concerned, Joseph's family can settle wherever they please as he puts all of Egypt at Joseph's disposal

Then he proceeded to confirm the plan that Joseph had set in motion

Actually, it's interesting to see the way Pharaoh did it

First he commanded Joseph to settle his family in the best of the land so there could be no complaint from anyone when they took over the good land **and then** he says to permit them to settle in Goshen which is what Joseph wanted in the first place

And then he demonstrated the full extent of his goodwill by suggesting that if Joseph thought any of his family was worthy Joseph should appoint them to be in charge of his own livestock

Joseph next introduced his father and Pharaoh

It was a notable meeting in that we see Jacob is not intimidated by Pharaoh but immediately pronounced a blessing on him

This is significant because to the Egyptian way of thinking, Pharaoh was no mere mortal – he was the earthly embodiment of the sun god Ra which made Pharaoh a god

Therefore, one would have expected the blessing to go the other direction because as **Hebrews 7:7** makes clear the lesser is blessed by the greater

But Jacob knew he was a child of God and that he therefore had more to offer by way of blessing than any earthly monarch could offer him and that made him the greater of the two

It was a demonstration of true faith on Jacob's part and he does it not once but twice – both when he meets him and when he departs

Then we want to notice some things in Pharaoh's question to Jacob and Jacob's response

First, in verse 8 (Genesis 47:8) Pharaoh asked Jacob, “How many are the days of the years of your life?” instead of simply asking, “How old are you?”

This demonstrates a profound truth that Pharaoh obviously understood – **that the years of our lives are made up of individual days so we dare not discount or disparage the days of our lives**

Second, Jacob describes his 130 years of life as a “sojourning” which shows that he knows the earthly life of any man is a journey to an eternal home

This truth is powerfully proclaimed in **Hebrews 11:13-16** which was part of our Scripture reading this morning

Listen again to what those verses say:

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

And Jacob says his pilgrimage has been far too shallow and superficial and that it’s going to prove to be too short

C. Settlement in Goshen

Then we see that Joseph settled his family in Goshen giving them a possession in the best of the land of Egypt just as Pharaoh had said

And that he provided each family within his father’s family with food according to their needs

God had given Joseph the insight and ability to handle a delicate situation with the utmost of diplomacy and tact whereby he didn’t insult his family or presume upon Pharaoh’s generosity

Rather, he walked the fine line necessary to see to it that his family was settled precisely where they could flourish relatively free from Egyptian interference in a land that provided ideal conditions for their flocks and herds

II. The Administration of Food

But the famine was ongoing and would continue for the next five years so Joseph still had a vital job to do

When we read verses 13-26 with modern eyes and sensibilities we might well wonder at what Joseph did

And we might even recoil from it a bit and wonder if what Joseph did was proper and just

After all, he takes everything the people have and makes them servants of Pharaoh in the end

But once more, we are going to see that Joseph acted according to his God-given wisdom and the way he administered the distribution of food was actually brilliant

A. Joseph Operated with Integrity

First of all, Joseph operated with integrity throughout the ordeal

We have already looked at how Joseph prepared for the famine to come by commanding the people of Egypt to bring a fifth of their harvest during the seven years of plenty to storehouses located in various cities as a deposit to be used in the lean years

And then we saw that when the famine hit and people came to Pharaoh he sent them to Joseph and commanded they do whatever he said to do

So Joseph began naturally enough by selling the grain to the people for money – including people from outside of Egypt as we saw in the case of Joseph’s brothers who came down from Canaan

But now we see in verse 15 (**Genesis 47:15**) that a day came when the people had spent all of their money and the people were still in need of food so they came once more to Joseph

And Joseph’s answer was that he would give them food in exchange for their livestock

At the end of another year, the livestock had all been exchanged for food and still the famine continued so the people came to Joseph and offered up themselves and their land in exchange for food and seed so that they could at least try to grow crops

And Joseph bought all the land in Egypt for Pharaoh except for the land owned by the priests and the people became tenant farmers who worked for Pharaoh

And Joseph gave them the seed they asked for telling them that they owed Pharaoh 20% of all that they were able to harvest but that they could keep 80% for food and for seed in future years

We all know the stories of self-serving politicians and how people who serve in public office today seem to have a way of enriching themselves during their years of service

But not Joseph – he acted with integrity

Notice in verse 14 (**Genesis 47:14**) that he sold the grain and brought all the money into Pharaoh's house

Joseph was the sole overseer of the sale of the grain and he could have easily skimmed a portion off the top for himself

And he could have rationalized that he was owed it for his years of being mistreated and for coming up with the brilliant plan he was now overseeing

But he didn't – he turned it all over to Pharaoh

It seems his honesty was apparent to all because nothing is recorded about anyone mistrusting him or accusing him of wrongdoing

B. Joseph Treated the People with Dignity

Joseph acted with integrity to be sure but he also treated the people with dignity

We might look at the situation and be tempted to think Joseph should have simply handed out the grain to the people

But that would have been a great mistake as any nation that has done so since has discovered

Back in the days of the Irish famine the government put the people to work building roads in exchange for their food

These roads are known today as Famine Roads and they served to preserve the dignity of those who had no other means of support

Nothing damages a person's self-respect like not being able to receive help without being able to pay for it in some way even if small

I was blessed some years ago by a godly couple who went to the same church I did

They ran a dairy farm and when I was laid off from my work they would find something they suddenly needed help with and they would call me up and I would go and help them out

They always insisted on feeding me lunch when I was there and paid me at the end of the day for my labors

I knew then that they didn't really need my help but they found a way to help me without harming me in the process by giving me bald charity

Joseph took the people's money to be sure but it appears he returned their livestock to them although it was now owned by Pharaoh otherwise they would not have been able to farm the land

But the livestock was now the responsibility of Pharaoh and that would have been a blessing to those who were having trouble even feeding themselves to not also have to worry about how to feed their animals

And while ownership of their land was transferred to Pharaoh, they were given seed to plant and charged what was really not a heavy tax to be able to live on and farm what was truly fertile land

I know I would be thrilled if my entire tax burden was only 20% and I expect most of you would be too

Because when you add up federal and state income taxes, property taxes, sales taxes, fees, and so on it comes to a lot more than 20% for most people

But in the end, the price the people were willing to pay wasn't out of line because their very lives were at stake and they were able to keep their self-respect and dignity by paying for what they received

C. Joseph Received the People's Praise

And Joseph earned the praise of the people

Look with me at verse 25 (Genesis 47:25) – *And [the people] said, "You have saved our lives, may it please my lord, we will be servants to Pharaoh."*

There is a danger any time we look at the past with present eyes and judge the actions of people from the past according to present sensibilities

We have a present-day welfare system where people are given handouts without any expectations but I don't think we can honestly say that our way has led to a better outcome for those who receive the handouts than Joseph's plan did. Still, while Scripture neither commends nor condemns Joseph's actions it would seem that what he did was according to the wisdom God provided to him

He preserved the life of the people and they didn't only trust him; they understood his motive and commended him for it and only sought to continue to receive his favor

III. The Advancement of Israel

The last thing I want to point out is that Israel advanced in Egypt even while the famine continued

Look with me at verses 27-28 (**Genesis 47:27-28**) – *Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen. And they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied greatly. And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were 147 years.*

While the Egyptians were selling their possessions for food, Israel was gaining possessions and growing in number. In other words, they prospered in the midst of the famine

It's a bit of a paradox but God's people actually seem to thrive when times are hard and don't do so well when times are good

When we consider Israel we have already seen that in 215 years in Canaan when things were relatively good, they only grew to fewer than 100 people

But in Egypt during a time of intense persecution they grew to over two million

And what's true of Israel's physical growth is also true of spiritual growth

Look at China where the church enjoyed a relatively peaceful period and grew to somewhere around 840,000 people who claimed Christ

Then in the middle of the 20th century the communists took over and sought to eliminate the church driving them underground

Today, after almost 60 years of the most intense persecution the number of believers is estimated to be over 200 million

However, in the United States today where we have an immense amount of freedom to worship we lament that the church is stagnant and growth, when it exists, is quite small

And we seem to have very little impact on the culture around us – certainly not as much as the culture has on the church. I think that's because we have turned God's expectation that we be in the world but not of the world on its head

Christians have become very much of the world and surveys and statistics show that it's becoming more and more difficult to find any significant differences between those who claim to be believers and the world around us in many metrics

And since we seem to be content to remain in our holy huddles that means we aren't even actually in the world to any meaningful degree so it's no wonder we aren't having a positive impact

Honestly, I hate in many ways to consider it, but God might have to take the church in America through some hard times in order to turn things around and make us the church he wants us to be

Conclusion

This morning we have seen very clearly how God deals with his people and it isn't always exactly as we might expect
Through the wisdom and political savvy of Joseph who walked the tightrope between insulting his own family's honor and presuming too much upon Pharaoh's graciousness and ultimately satisfying both

And in the process settling his family right where God wanted them to be

We saw how God also gave Joseph the insight he needed to be a good administrator who provided for the intense needs of the people while allowing them to keep their dignities intact

Which shows us how God works in very practical, though sometimes counterintuitive ways, to achieve his desired outcomes

It's a hard thing to realize that God, in his wisdom, provided enslavement, imprisonment, and famine as well as the ability to interpret dreams and the wisdom to administer a nation

But God's goal was to settle his people not where they would always be comfortable, but where they could grow in relative safety and become the nation he had promised they would one day be

And he used the methods that he deemed best to accomplish that end

So we see once again how God's thoughts and ways are often different from ours and how we always need to strive to see things from God's perspective and act in accordance to how he has gifted us in the situation where he has placed us

And how, oftentimes, God accomplishes his supernatural purposes through very natural means even when those means aren't what we might choose for ourselves

That should cause us to pray that God would provide us with the gifts and circumstances we need as a church to carry out his plans and for the wisdom and diligence to properly use those gifts within our circumstances

Even as we, like the Old Testament saints, recognize that we are sojourners for a time on this earth who long for the city that God has promised to his children

As we have already seen, the account of Joseph is really the account of how God provided for the line of Jacob

And next week we will begin to see the steps Jacob takes as he sees the end of his life approaching

Let's pray