

Free to be Slaves

Egypt vs. Israel

- ¹ So Joseph went in and told Pharaoh, "My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan. They are now in the land of Goshen."
- ² And from among his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh.
- ³ Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, as our fathers were."
- ⁴ They said to Pharaoh, "We have come to sojourn in the land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. And now, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen."
- ⁵ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you."
- ⁶ 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."
- ⁷ Then Joseph brought in Jacob his father and stood him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.
- ⁸ And Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many are the days of the years of your life?"
- ⁹ And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning."
- ¹⁰ And Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from the presence of Pharaoh.
- ¹¹ Then Joseph settled his father and his brothers 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.
- ¹² And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents.

- ¹³ Now there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished by reason of the famine.
- ¹⁴ And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, in exchange for the grain that they bought. And Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house.
- ¹⁵ And when the money was all spent in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us food. Why should we die before your eyes? For our money is gone."
- ¹⁶ And Joseph answered, "Give your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone."
- ¹⁷ So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the herds, and the donkeys. He supplied them with food in exchange for all their livestock that year.
- ¹⁸ And when that year was ended, they came to him the following year and said to him, "We will not hide from my lord that our money is all spent. The herds of livestock are my lord's. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our land."
- ¹⁹ Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for food, and we with our land will be servants to Pharaoh. And give us seed that we may live and not die, and that the land may not be desolate."

- ²⁰ So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for all the Egyptians sold their fields, because the famine was severe on them. The land became Pharaoh's.
- ²¹ As for the people, he made servants of them from one end of Egypt to the other.
- ²² Only the land of the priests he did not buy, for the priests had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh and lived on the allowance that Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their land.
- ²³ Then Joseph said to the people, "Behold, I have this day bought you and your land for Pharaoh. Now here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land.
- ²⁴ And at the harvests you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and as food for yourselves and your households, and as food for your little ones."
- ²⁵ And they said, "You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be servants to Pharaoh."
- ²⁶ So Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth; the land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh's.
- ²⁷ 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.
- ²⁸ And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were 147 years.
- ²⁹ And when the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "If now I have found favor in your sight, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal kindly and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt,
- ³⁰ but let me lie with my fathers. Carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place." He answered, "I will do as you have said."
- ³¹ And he said, "Swear to me"; and he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself upon the head of his bed.

Genesis 47:1-31

Be Ye Separate...

“**What accord has Christ with Belial?**” Paul asks the Corinthians (**2Co 6:15**). **Belial** (or Beliar) is a name used for the devil in the Dead Sea Scrolls and other places. For example, “**Moses and Aaron, by the hand of the prince of lights and Belial, with his cunning, raised up Jannes and his brother**” (**CD A 5.18-18**; cf. **2Ti 3:8**).¹

2 Samuel 22:5 refers to the “**torrents of Belial**” which has a parallel in the Psalms which refers to the “**snare of death**” and the “**cords of Sheol**” (**Ps 18:5**). Sheol is that watery underworld of the OT. One commentator writes that the torrents of *belial* “**is a symbol of ... evil, depicted as a river of fire which sweeps through the entire world and destroys everything in its path.**”²

Often, Belial is found in apocalyptic contexts in ways that are strikingly similar to Revelation (**1QH^a Col. XI, 26-35**). He and his people are opposed to the

¹ Belial is parallel with the serpent in the Dead Sea Scrolls (**1 QH^a Col. XI, 17-18; XIII, 26-27**); He is the angel/prince of wickedness and ruler of this world (**MartIs 2:4, 4:2; 1QM 1:5-6**); the head of a legion of angels (**TAsh 6:4**), and the accuser (**Jub 1:20**).

² **Michael A. Knibb**, *The Qumran Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 181.

people of the lot of God,³ and eventually he leads the forces of darkness and malevolence against the sons of light. This is especially interesting in light of Paul's context. The next part of the verse says, "Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever" (2Co 6:15)? In the verse right before it, "What fellowship has light with darkness" (2Co 6:14)?

The application here is "Go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you,⁴ and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty" (2 Co 6:17-18). **Separation.** It is all about sanctification by not being like others, but rather by being holy. "Says the Lord" forms a series of quotations from the OT. Just before the great Suffering Servant song of Isaiah 53, it says, "Depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the LORD" (Isa 52:11). The context is God baring his "holy arm before the eyes of all the nations" and bringing "the salvation of our God" (10). Because he will save you, you must be holy.

"I will welcome you" comes from Eze 20:34 LXX. Again the context is the same. God will "take you out⁵ of the lands wherein ye were dispersed, with a strong hand" ["a mighty hand and an outstretched arm" (ESV)]. Egypt is on the prophet's mind here. "And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face. As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you, declares the Lord GOD" (Eze 20:35-36).

Finally, "I will be a father to you" comes from 2Sa 7:14 and the great covenant promise to David. The point of all this is that God separates his people out from others so that they might actually be and act separate from the nations. "What agreement has the temple of God with idols" (2Co 6:16)? "Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God" (2Co 7:1). So while the context of Belial might make us think about our own future, the context of the other quotes makes us think about the cross. More on this later.

The roots of this kind of separation are found in Genesis. Hints are given in Genesis 5 that there are two different lines of people. Though the text does not actually tell us that all of Cain's descendants were godless and all of Seth's were godly, the idea of godly and godless people has been implied by many. Throughout the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob we have seen the need for the promised seed

³ 1QS 1:16-2:8.

⁴ "Welcome you" is *exerchomai*, the only time the word appears in the NT.

⁵ *Exerchomai*.

to not be mixed with foreigners. But the real beginnings of this kind of separation are to be found in our story today.

Israel Exalted

Genesis 47 continues the episode begun in the previous chapter. There we saw Jacob pick up and leave his homeland of Canaan, forever. He came to Egypt and finally saw his long-lost, presumed dead, and favorite son—Joseph. Their reunion was a meeting for the ages. They considered the kindness of God and wept a good long time together.

But that story was not completed, for it left Israel his seventy sons **homeless** and at the mercy of the greatest power of the ancient world: Egypt. What would happen to Israel? Would he survive? Would he assimilate? Would he die of starvation?

So Joseph hatched a **plan**. The plan was to set up a meeting with Pharaoh which would result in Israel being set apart from the Egyptians in relative safety in the land of Goshen. Genesis 47 begins with the fulfillment of that plan. The fulfillment of this plan takes place in two stages. First, Joseph and five of his brothers get an audience with Pharaoh (47:2-6).

“So Joseph went in and told Pharaoh, ‘My father and my brothers, with their flocks and hers and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan. They are now in the land of Goshen’” (vs. 1). Joseph will be the liaison between the unclean brothers and king Pharaoh. Joseph presents his brothers (2), then Pharaoh, as predicted (46:33) asks them their **occupation** (3). If new citizens are to come into your land, you need to know how they can help the economy. And this chapter is saturated with economics and politics.

As told, they replied that they are **shepherds** (3). Joseph wanted them to say this because shepherds were regarded as an abomination or detestable or loathsome to the Egyptians (46:34). The goal was to have the family stop in Goshen and then, because of this occupation, have them stay there. **Matthew Henry** says, “He would have them to live by themselves, separate as much as might be from the Egyptians, *in the land of Goshen*, which lay nearest to Canaan, and which perhaps was more thinly peopled by the Egyptians, and well furnished with pastures for cattle. He desired they might live separately, that they might be in the less danger both of being infected by the vices of the Egyptians and of being insulted by the malice of the Egyptians.”⁶ It is a key analogy for the way Christians are to be in the world but not of it, today.

⁶ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 88.

They continue, “We have come to sojourn in the land, for there is no pasture for your servant’s flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. And now, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen” (47:4). A key term here is famine. We have seen it for several chapters and we will look at it more later. Another key idea is “to sojourn.” Israel is not coming here forever, but on a temporary basis. Furthermore, they ask, “Please let your servants dwell...” This is terribly important, for it establishes the basis upon which Israel went into Egypt.

Pharaoh responds, “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” (6). They came as freemen and were freely given the best part of the land. Calvin notices, “The law of hospitality was wickedly violated when the Israelites were oppressed as slaves ... in violation of this compact, they were most severely oppressed, and were denied that opportunity of departure, for which they had stipulated.”⁷ Their temporary sojourning would be forced permanence. This shows the wickedness of the later Egyptian Pharaoh, but it also sets up the second half of the story today, a story that is filled with irony when we consider the future slavery of Israel.

I want you to think about two things here. First, why was Pharaoh so generous? I mean, this is the ruler of Egypt and he just gives these strangers the best pasture land available. Is it a trick? Is there a catch?

No, the answer is because he favored Joseph. “Your father and your brothers have come to you” (47:5). “I am so happy for you, Joseph. What can I do to help. Up to half my kingdom!” Joseph had risen to an exalted position due to his honesty, integrity, wisdom, savvy business smarts, and an obvious sense that God was with him. For these things, Pharaoh loved him like a son.

Too many Christians think that in their worldly employment, the only reason they are there is to evangelize the pagans. Meanwhile, their work often suffers, because they just don’t see it as very important to God. But winning someone over through hard work and integrity of character is a much better way to get a hearing on the day it is truly needed—be that a proclamation of the gospel or the saving of one’s family. Besides, God delights in our hard work and integrity! The end is to glorify God in all that you do. If you will love your work, treat people as you should, and desire their salvation, then opportunities for this last thing will certainly arise. You would do well to remember that from the story of Joseph.

⁷ John Calvin and John King, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 402.

Second, notice the **exalted position Pharaoh gave them**. Again, he gives them the best of the land. Goshen was later called Rameses (**vs. 11**) and was located in the fertile farm land of one of the eastern forks of the Nile Delta.



The Delta would have been one about the only part of Egypt that was able to produce any grassland to feed livestock. So God provided a home in a marvelous way. But more than this, Pharaoh offered them all jobs, which would have given them privileges with the Egyptian government beyond other sojourners. Of course, it would have also allowed the brothers to continue to care for their families so that they could continue to carry out the blessing to be “**fruitful and multiply**” (**vs. 27**). You see, when God makes a promise through his Word, you can be absolutely certain that he will carry it out, perhaps not in your time (Joseph’s 20+ years of service) or the way you want (in a foreign land), but he is faithful and the story continues to show God’s faithfulness so that we might take heart in our circumstances.

After the brothers have their moment with Pharaoh, Jacob gets his. This important section is **Gen 47:7-10**. Here we get to see a very different man from the one we have seen throughout so much of Genesis. It is majestic and tragic at the same time. The last great Patriarch of the Jewish people is brought before Pharaoh and “stood” by his son in the palace throne room (7). Yes, **Jacob is that feeble**. A conversation ensues.

“**Pharaoh said to Jacob, ‘How many are the days of the years of your life?’**” (8). Jacob now tells us about his age and his life. “**The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years**” (9). There is no officially recorded person in Guinness that has ever lived that long.⁸ Jacob is old. Jacob has always been a wanderer. He has

⁸ **Going Deeper (But having some fun)**. Guinness has the oldest person ever at 122 years. Her name was Jeanne Calment. There are, of course, stories of people living longer in modern times. The 126 year old Brazillian man (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2014/07/16/cigarette-smoking-brazilian-man-may-be-worlds-oldest-person-at-126-years-old/>). The perhaps 160 year old Ethiopian farmer (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/10/dhaqabo-ebba_n_3902192.html). A couple of weeks ago I was

truly never had a place to call home, as it says in Hebrews, “By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (Heb 11:9-10). I fear that most of us are far, far away from this kind of faith, especially in our nation. Would you give up everything you had to follow Christ?

Jacob continues, “Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning” (Gen 47:9). Chrysostom reflects, “For [Jacob] spent all his time in servitude and working as a hireling, and [amid] dangers, and plots, and deceits, and fears; and when he was asked by Pharaoh, he says, ‘Few and evil have my days been’; while the other lived in independence and great security, and afterwards was an object of terror to [Jacob]. Where then did the blessings come to their accomplishment, save in the [world] to come?”⁹

So Jacob is reflecting in his old age upon all his years of hardship, beginning perhaps in the womb, when he strove with Esau, to his difficulties with his brother later, to the treachery of Laban, to the fighting of his wives, to the rape of his daughter, to the death of Joseph, and more. If you ever need a pick-me-up in your life, just go read about Jacob’s again, and yours won’t possibly seem so bad. He also notices how his own life is much shorter than even his fathers and certainly his grandfathers. As time goes along after the Flood, men live shorter and shorter lives so that David will eventually say, “The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Ps 90:10 KJV). The ravages of sin are taking their toll on the post-Flood world. Life is a but a breath and then you are gone. Why then do we not put our faith in God alone as we should? Truly, even the best of us are conflicted people. And Jacob grew weary of such conflict, as to all of God’s saints.

Curiously, Jacob ends his time in Pharaoh’s presence by blessing the king. One might think that Pharaoh would bless Jacob. But Jacob does not need the blessing. Pharaoh does. This is in fulfillment of the promise to Abram, “In you all

talking to some Kenyan friends who say that stories abound in their own country of people that are aged as this man. The most incredible story is the Chinese monk Li Ching-Yuen (d. 1933) who was thought to be 256 years old. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li_Ching-Yuen. But the point is, none of these could be confirmed. Jacob is older than anyone official known today, and he will live another 17 years.

⁹ John Chrysostom, “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of St. John and Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. T. Keble and Frederic Gardiner, vol. 14, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 482.

the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:3). But it was also because the Pharaoh had acknowledged Jacob special status by receiving him graciously and honoring his sons as it was told, “I will bless those who bless you” (12:3). And God continues to be faithful even after 200 years.

The scene concludes, “Then Joseph settled his father and his brothers 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” (11). He did only what the king himself commanded. “And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father’s household with food, according to the number of their dependents” (12). In the midst of the famine, God’s people lacked for nothing. Providence through Joseph saw to it. What a wonderful way to end the story of Jacob coming to Egypt. God is good to those whom he calls to himself.

Egypt in Slavery

It was a different story, however, for the rest of Egypt. Even back then, God was pleased to separate the fortunes of Jacob from those of the Egyptians. Gen 47:1-12 is the backdrop for a very different story that will unfold in the rest of the chapter (vv. 13-26). The key word that ties the two sections together is “famine.” The brothers said, “The famine is severe in the land of Canaan” (4). Now we read, “Now there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished by reason of the famine” (13). Perhaps even the Nile itself was mostly dry. Few could live, many could live less.

Beginning in vs. 14, we have a **series of three events** that simultaneously help but also progressively harm the Egyptian people. “The **primary purpose of this account of Joseph’s measures is to show the severity of the famine and the desperate plight of the Egyptians that he alleviated.**”¹⁰

First, Joseph **gathers up all the money** of Egypt (14). As the famine raged on, the people had to use every last dime to buy grain. The effect this had was to make Pharaoh incredibly rich, and the people very poor. This marked a turning point in the history of ancient Egypt. Up until now, at least in Genesis, Egypt has felt manageable, relatively small, not the political juggernaut that we find in Exodus. But suddenly, all the money of all the people is being stored up in the government coffers of the State. Though perhaps for different reasons, it reminds me of our own nation, once to young and innocent that suddenly found itself the greatest power in the world. And increasingly, where does all the money go? To the government. Curiously, it is disasters such as the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl, hurricanes,

¹⁰ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 447.

and earthquakes that begin the government's collectivization of private money. There is nothing new under the sun.¹¹

Second, after their money was gone, the people of Egypt cried out to Joseph, "Give us food. Why should we die before your eyes?" (15). This reminds me of the people of Israel after they leave Egypt when they begin to grumble to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? ... We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic" (Ex 14:11; Num 11:5). As the people of Egypt will soon find out, this will not be the only parallel with the later Israelites.

Joseph does not want the people to die, but he will not just give government handouts either. You want to eat, you have to pay for it. It has to cost you something. That is his economic policy. "Give your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone" (17). So they brought their livestock to Joseph as trade for food (17). Who do you suppose got the livestock? Pharaoh. The government. This was essentially a monarchy, not a capitalistic free enterprise. The Pharaoh was thought to be descended from the gods themselves. And what do you suppose would be the long term effect of so much wealth upon that nation? This scene is setting up ... (no, not America but) the book of Exodus.

Third, and most devastatingly, at the end of the year, there was no relief in sight. The monsoons did not come. The famine raged on. The people grumbled yet again (18). You have our money. You have our animals. "There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our land" (18). "Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land?" (19).

Then they make the Faustian Bargain, the Deal with the Devil. Notice, *this is their idea*, and I think that is important to the story. "But us and our land for food, and we with our land will be servants to Pharaoh. And give us seed that we may live and not die, and that the land may not be desolate" (19). They are all going to have to move away and Egypt will itself become a heap of ruins. So they offer themselves as slaves.

Before we discuss this, look at Joseph's response. "So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for all the Egyptians sold their fields, because the famine was severe on them. The land became Pharaoh's. As for the people, he made servants (slaves) of them from one end of Egypt to the other. Only the land of the

¹¹ A fascinating story is told of Davy Crockett, then Congressman for the State of Tennessee, on the power of government to make charitable donations, as enumerated in the Constitution of the United States. <http://www.constitution.org/cons/crockett.htm>. If you haven't read it, I highly suggest it here as a footnote.

priests he did not buy, for the priests had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh and lived on the allowance that Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their land” (20-22).

Then Joseph announced the deal was final. “I have bought you and your land for Pharaoh. Here is your seed” (23). Part of that bargain was that they would have to give 20% to Pharaoh of all their harvests (24, 26). This was not true prior, but it continued on into at least the day that whoever edited this material in the form we have it now (“and it stands to this day”), be that Moses or Ezra, we don’t know. The people were not angry by this (again, it was their idea). In fact, they were grateful, “You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be servants/slaves to Pharaoh” (25). This is where I want to end our study this morning. Now we want to think about it more specifically.

Egypt vs. Israel

There are several things to talk about here. Some might want me to discuss whether Joseph was right in his policy or should he have just given the entire nation handouts of food? It would be very easy to turn this into a political conversation relevant to our own culture and issues. My own opinions are one thing, and I may have acted like Joseph did were I in his shoes. There are principles of economics and ethics that come into play in making such decisions. But ultimately, this is not a “how-to” lesson on social economics or politics. There is nothing in here that even remotely tells us to apply or not apply Joseph’s actions to our own situation.

Rather, this is a redemptive-historical story. It is telling what “what is” rather than “what ought to be.” It is setting something up for us. It is explaining how Egypt moved from one type of government to a very different type, from localized power to federal power, from private ownership to public lands. While you can certainly draw your own conclusions as to whether you think this was a good or bad idea, the purpose in this is not to say that one is right or the other is wrong. Otherwise, it would have done that and not left it up to our own guess work.

No, the purpose is to get you thinking theologically about the end condition that the Egyptians put themselves. This is actually about them and what happened to them more than it is about Joseph. They willingly became slaves. That is the issue. Now, since America has a very different idea of slavery than what is going on here, we need to talk about this for a moment.

American slavery, and the kind of slavery that still exists in many regions of Africa today, was about stealing a person and forcing that person to become your property. It is a grotesquely dehumanizing act. And don’t kid yourself. All people groups throughout history and many to this day engage in such activities, selling those not of their color and those of their own color. The (I believe manipulated)

riots taking place right now throughout our land ... it isn't just white people can be utterly cruel and tyrannical. It is the *human* condition. But it happened to be that in America, the vast majority were black people stolen (or sold by other black people) who then became the property of white people. That is how we understand the word "slavery" and this kind of slavery is a great evil and blight upon the earth.

This is not what the Bible has in mind by the word "slave," nor is it what we find the Egyptians offering themselves as here. Rather, they seem to have willingly allowed themselves to come under some form of what we might call economic theocratic socialism. They were giving up, willingly, the right to private ownership, in favor of a collective that would take care of them. The form of slavery here is much more like an indentured servant, where a person *willingly* (key word) sold themselves to work for a certain period of time in exchange for something like free travel to America. It seems to me that plenty of people do the same thing today without ever even entering into a contract. The difference is that we have no hint that Joseph only made the people servants for a temporary period of time.

I said that this is here to help us think about redemptive history. You know your Bibles. What does this language of slavery remind you of? **First and foremost**, it reminds us of the Exodus story. **"During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God"** (Ex 2:23). Since our story is at the end of Genesis, and this is at the beginning of Exodus, it presents a question. How did things change so dramatically? In Genesis, the Egyptians were the slaves and Jacob was the freeman. In Exodus, the Israelites have become the slaves.

That is the big question awaiting an answer from our story. It is what our story is driving us to ask. Let's look at the last part of the chapter, though we will introduce **our next study** with this section too. It tells us that Israel settled in the land of Egypt, gained possessions, and were fruitful and multiplied (**Gen 47:28**). This will become a major reason for the slavery in Exodus. They had become too numerous (**Ex 1:7**). They were multiplying like rabbits. God was blessing, allowing them to carry out the creation mandate like no one's business. But it eventually became a problem for Egypt. When you get to many immigrants such that they threaten your way of life, something must be done.

But this was also in God's plan. After telling us that Jacob would live 17 more years (to 147; **Gen 47:29**), it introduces us to the final death scene of Jacob with these words, **"... promise to deal kindly and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers. Carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place"** (29-30), and Joseph swore to do it. The point is, God was not going to let Israel leave Egypt for a good, long time.

They had come down out of the Promised Land to the foreign land of Egypt. God was faithful to his promises in the days of Jacob. But eventually, the Israelites would find themselves slaves to a much harder task master than Joseph ever was. And this would be the cause for the great impetus of the Exodus. God brought them down here so that he might deliver them. He brought them down to Egypt through a natural disaster and a vision from the Angel. He kept them down here in their prosperity and ease. But because of his promises, he would deliver them in his timing and in his way, so that he might be glorified in all the earth, and so that all the earth might see and wonder that Jehovah—he is God.

He also would give Israel laws that were meant to ensure that nothing like this could ever happen to them (of course, they refused to obey those laws most of the time). Like Egypt, Israel's priestly class would not have to sell themselves. Nevertheless, the priests were not exempt from the tithe (Num 18:26). However, the tithe was half of the 20% forced by Pharaoh. God's law was actually much looser on its binding restrictions than Egypt. Furthermore, while Israel's law allowed for voluntary slavery,¹² it also had a year of jubilee, which set the prisoner free and reset all debts and obligations like mortgages, thereby ensuring that permanent slavery would never be tolerated in Israel. People do not often stop to think about God's law as being something that, when followed, would be a delight. Yet, there it is, both fair, just, and gracious. Why? Because God cares for his people and gives them laws that are meant to help them if approached properly.

As you reflect on this story, what thoughts come to your mind? For me, a few things do. First, [to approach God's law properly, you must become a slave](#)—to Christ. The NT isn't about absolute freedom, but moving from servitude from a ruthless demonic master to a Master whose yoke is easy and burden is light. Nevertheless, it is servitude all the same. Christ is King and we must all bow the knee to him, giving him our lives, and all that we have. For we cannot serve two masters. Is Christ your King willingly, or will you only bow the knee on Judgment Day when you are forced to acknowledge his Sovereignty? Do so now by the Spirit in grace rather than later by the King in justice.

Second, situations are constantly changing, but God is always the same—yesterday, today, and tomorrow. He does not go back on his word, but he keeps his promises. This does not always come about the way we hope or wish. Nevertheless, God is faithful. You cannot stop forces of nature (like a famine), forces of politics

¹² Debt led first to dependents of the debtor being taken into slavery (Exod 21:2–11; Deut 15:1–18; cf. Gen 47:13–14), further debt to a man mortgaging his land (Lev 25:25–34; cf. Gen 47:20) and ultimately to the slavery of the debtor himself (Lev 25:35–54; cf. Gen 47:21). In Israel, as in Egypt, there were exemptions for priestly (Levitical) land (Lev 25:32–34; cf. Gen 47:22). Wenham, 448.

(like a ruler who consolidates power), or even the forces of your own stupid decisions (like “we will become your servants”). But **God is in control** in the midst of all these things, working them out for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose. Do you love God, the God of the Bible I mean? Are you trusting in Christ? Have you admitted your sins and do you repent of them day to day? Then those promises are true for you.

Finally, because God is faithful and carries out all of his promises: saving, sanctifying, watching over, and calling many people to be sons and daughters of the Great King, you therefore are to be separate. “**God out from their midst, and be separate from them**” as Jacob and Israel were in Egypt. “**Touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you,**” he says.

The Apostle’s discussion of Belial which the Jews put into an apocalyptic End Times scenario was taken by him and read in the light of the cross. The promises and salvation come first. Christ has defeated Egypt and the hordes of hell which is represents later in the Bible. The commands and laws come second. When you come to see this, then you may obey without fear of judgment, but rather out of thankful gratitude of the one who has done all this for you through Christ Jesus.