

Message #14  
Joseph

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## JOSEPH, JACOB, AND GOD'S WISDOM GENESIS 47

### INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

In scholarly circles Carl Henry (PROJECTOR ON--- CARL HENRY) has the reputation for being the greatest evangelical theologian in the last century. A number of years ago he completed a six volume work entitled *God, Revelation and Authority*. (GOD, REVELATION AND AUTHORITY) It is perhaps the best scholarly defense and explanation of evangelical Christianity produced in the last century. In it Carl Henry says this about wisdom: **“Despite its pursuit of knowledge, our generation, snared in relativities, is stranger to wisdom. Wisdom, which Augustine viewed as ‘the [one necessity],’ is no longer considered as the mind’s indispensable acquisition, even by most intellectuals.”**

Young people today rarely pursue higher education to gain wisdom, which the ancient Hebrews in Biblical days understood to mean “skill in daily living.” Young people go to college today to get a job, to prepare for a career, to find a mate, to have a good time, or sometimes even to gain knowledge. Rarely do they go to college to gain wisdom. (PROJECTOR OFF)

That is perhaps understandable given the fact that our culture does not value wisdom very much. We value power and money and fame and success and educational degrees. At the same time most of the greatest problems facing our nation cry out for wisdom. How are we to deal with crime, drugs, the deterioration of the family, social media, the flood of illegal immigrants, and breakdowns in our educational system? How are we to deal with international problems like the Middle East and Ukraine and the threat from China? How are we to raise children today, and how are we to relate to our mates? Knowledge in each of these areas is important. But most of all we need wisdom. We need skill in daily living and skill in the correct application of knowledge.

In a culture where wisdom, even common sense, seems often to be in short supply, those who have some of it can be a tremendous blessing, not only to themselves but also to others. (PROJECTOR ON--- PROVERBS 3:13-14) In the third chapter of Proverbs we are told, **“Blessed is the one who finds wisdom,/ and the one who gets understanding,/ 14 for the gain from her is better than gain from silver/ and her profit better than gold.”**

From our study of Joseph we have seen that this young man was a blessing wherever he went. He was a blessing when he found himself a slave in the household of the captain of the bodyguard in Egypt. He was a blessing when he was a prisoner in a lousy Egyptian jail. He was a blessing to the pharaoh and to all of the Egyptians when he became prime minister in Egypt. He was a blessing to his brothers who came to Egypt

seeking grain. And we saw two weeks ago that he was a blessing to his father in his old age.

We learned also that one of the reasons that Joseph was a blessing was that he trusted in the promises of God. Today we are going to see that Joseph was a blessing also because he sought, acquired, and displayed godly wisdom. If indeed this skill in daily living is so urgently required today, we need to find out how we can acquire it and exercise it.

I.

So let's look first at vv. 1-12 of Genesis #47 and the subject of GODLY WISDOM IN HANDLING POWER--- THE BLESSING TO FAMILY. (I. GODLY WISDOM IN HANDLING...) Last time we saw that after 22 years Joseph had been reunited with his father Jacob in Egypt. When Pharaoh had earlier learned that Joseph's brothers had come to him in Egypt, he had given orders to his prime minister Joseph. According to #45 vv. 17 & 18 he had said, **"And Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load your beasts and go back to the land of Canaan, 18 and take your father and your households, and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you shall eat the fat of the land.'"**

In the last clause of #46 we were reminded of a potential problem. The text says, **"...for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians."** Joseph's family members were shepherds. We don't know quite why this occupation was offensive to the Egyptians. But clearly it was. Furthermore it may well be that Pharaoh was not aware of the occupation of Joseph's family members when he commanded Joseph to bring his family to Egypt.

When Joseph was first given his position of prime minister of the land of Egypt, great power came along with it. In #41 Pharaoh told Joseph, **"See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt... Though I am Pharaoh, yet without your permission no one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."**

So it would seem that Joseph had authority in himself to move his family into Egypt. He did not need to get Pharaoh's permission. And Pharaoh had already told him to bring his family into the country to the best of the land. But Pharaoh may not have realized the whole story. He may not have yet realized that Joseph's family was comprised of shepherds.

So Joseph brought some of his family along to see the Egyptian king. Joseph went in to see Pharaoh first. He reported that his family and their flocks and herds had been brought in to the land of Egypt. Then Joseph brought in five of his brothers. There was probably a longer conversation than what is recorded here. But among the questions asked of the brothers was "What is your occupation?"

Joseph had briefed his brothers ahead of time, and he had told them to be honest about their status as shepherds. They were not to try to hide that fact, despite the attitude of Egyptians toward shepherds.

There is always a temptation when we hold positions of power to fudge the truth in order to please others or to make ourselves look better than we actually are. But Joseph understood the foundational importance of honesty in any position of power. He had seen what dishonesty and deceit had done to his own family.

(GOSHEN MAP) So although they knew what the Egyptian attitude toward shepherds was, the brothers told the truth, and they proceeded to make their request that they be allowed to reside in Goshen, which was apparently in the east side of the fertile Nile River Delta.

In vv. 5 & 6 the pharaoh responds positively. This ruler was apparently a man of integrity. He kept the promise that he had made earlier. No doubt he was also motivated by his appreciation for Joseph and the tremendous contribution that he had made to him as pharaoh and to his people. (PROJECTOR OFF)

But notice the additional stipulation which Pharaoh made. He said, “**...if you know any able men among them, put them in charge of my livestock.**” This was a great blessing to Joseph’s family. In a little while we are going to find out that the famine necessitates the Egyptians to sell all of their cattle to Pharaoh. Who is going to end up taking care of Pharaoh’s new cattle? The implication is that Jacob’s family will have a significant role in that task. Certainly there was going to be some economic benefit that would come to them because of this opportunity.

Notice, then, how Joseph was wise in his use of power. He probably had the authority in himself to settle his family in the land of Egypt, perhaps even in Goshen. But he realized that there could be negative consequences because of that. The Egyptians might hold resentment toward Joseph and his family because of what he did. The pharaoh might not have acted against Joseph, but he might have had a little less confidence in his prime minister because he was not consulted and because he found out that Joseph’s family members were shepherds.

So Joseph gave up his rights and entrusted the situation to his benefactor, Pharaoh. The result was blessing upon his family. He got his request and even more. The Egyptians were going to give up their cattle, and Joseph’s family was going to benefit materially because of it. While the rest of the Egyptians were going to become indebted and bound to Pharaoh, the Hebrews would not--- at least not for a long time. They would prosper and grow to become a nation. Part of the reason could be traceable to Joseph’s wise use of power.

Herein lies the difference between a great husband and an average husband, a great parent and an average parent, a great supervisor and an average supervisor. The great husband and parent and supervisor will not always claim the power that belongs to him

or her. The average, or less than average, husband or parent or supervisor will often be claiming his power: "I am the head of this house. I am your parent, buster. I am the boss of this department. I am the teacher of this class."

The great husband and parent and supervisor and teacher at times needs to claim that right, but often times he or she will let that other person have his or her way. The prodigal son's father did not have to give his son his share of the inheritance, but the wisest use of dad's power seemed to be to let his kid go. Or, like Joseph did, the wise leader will defer to those above him for their view of the situation.

Jesus Christ was God. He had unlimited power. The Son of God did not have to become a man, in one sense. But He did. As He entered Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, He could have claimed the throne as Israel's Messiah. But He did not. Instead He allowed the Jews and the Romans to crucify Him. As He lay dying upon the cross, He could have claimed His power and wiped out His tormentors with a blink of his eye,. At the very least He could have called upon the angels of God to take Him down from the cross. But He wisely and graciously gave up that power. The result was that tremendous blessing came to us.

When we wisely use our power, there will also be blessing that comes upon our family and the family of workers in our job and the family of God at church. People tend to be more motivated. Some will have a greater desire to know our God.

Notice something else about Joseph's wise use of power. Shepherds were loathsome to the Egyptians. Joseph's father was a shepherd. He was old. He was probably not versed in the manners that were appropriate in the presence of royalty. He may not have had a tuxedo or even a suit. He may have smelled like sheep. Yet Joseph brought his father Jacob in to see the most powerful ruler in the world. Joseph was not afraid to identify with his father before Pharaoh. His reputation before Pharaoh was not more important than identification with his father. He wanted the king to see the one who was the recipient of the unique promises of God.

By the way, does your position at work or at school or in the neighborhood ever keep you from identifying yourself with your Heavenly Father? Does concern about your reputation keep you from being known before others as a born again Christian?

The text tells us that Pharaoh and Jacob had a conversation. Jacob indicated that his age of 130 was short in comparison to the longer lives of his ancestors. He also described his years as unpleasant. This lower quality of life was largely due to Jacob's failure to seek and to display wisdom for much of his life. Life would have been better for Jacob if he had exercised wisdom and chosen to trust and obey God.

Jacob concludes his audience with the king by blessing him. This old shepherd blesses the most powerful man in the world. Actually this is also a wise use of power. It is a partial fulfillment of the promise of God made to Abraham years earlier. (PROJECTOR

ON--- GENESIS 12:2-3) In Genesis #12 God told Abraham, “...**you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you....**”

Egypt was being a blessing to Abraham’s descendants, and Jacob was responding by blessing Egypt and its king. That blessing from Abraham’s descendant and the blessing that Egypt had been to God’s Chosen People were factors in Egypt’s ability to withstand the famine and to prosper later.

Thus Joseph and now his father became models of godly wisdom in the exercise of power. Because of this wise exercise of power they became a blessing to their family. The clan of Jacob was now going to prosper. In the same way, when we use our position at work, at school, and in the family wisely, we will be a blessing to our family.

II.

In vv. 13-26 we come to GODLY WISDOM IN SERVING PEOPLE--- THE BLESSING TO COUNTRY AND TO OTHERS. (II. GODLY WISDOM IN SERVING PEOPLE...) The famine continued in Egypt. Because of Joseph’s correct interpretation of the pharaoh’s dream and because of wise planning during the seven years of abundance that preceded the famine, there was much grain stored away. Joseph sold grain from this stockpile. But the Egyptian people eventually ran out of money.

They then brought their cattle to Joseph, who gave them food in exchange for their animals. It would have been a relief to the people in this situation not to have to feed animals as well as their family members. Perhaps Joseph’s clan became involved in caring for much of Pharaoh’s expanded herd.

The famine continued into the next year. Now the people offered their land and themselves in exchange for food and seed. The request for seed may suggest that the famine was drawing near to an end. There must have been some hope for crops, if they were asking for seeds for planting.

Notice that in all of this the government did not offer free handouts, and the people did not expect them. The understanding on both sides was that the government should not be involved in providing a free ride to people. In exchange for help from the government people were expected to give something, or do something, in return, even if this meant binding oneself to Pharaoh.

The term “slavery” is used to describe this arrangement. The picture that this term might create in our minds, however, is different from what actually happened in Egypt. It was a kind of feudal arrangement that was put into effect. The people served as tenants on Pharaoh’s land. The government gave the seed for planting. At the time of the harvest they had to give back 20% to the government. In comparison to the tax structure in our country what was called slavery there probably wasn’t such a horrible deal.

Some commentators have still regarded this arrangement in Egypt imposed by the pharaoh as cruel. It is perhaps similar to the reaction that many in the Arab world and

some in our own country have to American support of Israel and Israel's attacks on Gaza and Lebanon. From the perspective of many of us this is all just a reasonable response to terrorists who call for the destruction of Israel and who kill and take hostage innocent civilians.

Look at how the people responded in v. 25 to Joseph: **“You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be servants to Pharaoh.”** They didn't regard this arrangement as being so terrible. They realized that this was a great crisis that was facing their country. They had some awareness that preparations had been made for it, and they had some awareness that Joseph had a part in wise planning. Joseph and Pharaoh were not cruel leaders. The people called Joseph a savior. They saw what he had done for them as genuine service.

Joseph exhibited godly wisdom in focusing on the needs of the Egyptian people. He had genuine care and concern for the people entrusted to his charge. Because he had that concern, his actions were wise, and he became a blessing to the entire country. Everyone benefited--- Pharaoh, Joseph's extended family, the priests, and the common people. Those common people regarded Joseph as a savior of sorts.

Godly wisdom displays itself in serving others. When we seek to serve others, we will be a blessing to others. Jason Brown (JASON BROWN) was a football player for what is now the Los Angeles Rams. He was an offensive lineman whose last contract was worth \$37.5 million. He was released from the Rams in 2012 at age 29. He had offers from other teams, but he decided to walk away from football. Instead he chose to pursue his real dream of becoming a farmer. His agent told him that he was “making the biggest mistake of his life.”

The fascinating thing is that Jason Brown had no experience in farming. But he bought a thousand acre farm and proceeded to learn by watching YouTube videos. He was interviewed by the Raleigh *News and Observer* several years ago just before Thanksgiving. He had just harvested his first crop, which consisted of fifty tons of sweet potatoes. He promptly gave them all away.

Jason Brown's farm is called First Fruits. He told the interviewer, **“...it was time to start giving back... God has blessed us with this place, and I am to be a steward, to use all these good things to help other people.”** He also said that **“when I think about a life of greatness, I think about a life of service.”** The reporter observed, **“He is thankful for what he has been given and thankful for what he hopes to do.”**  
(Breakpoint, 11/27/2014)

Since that first Thanksgiving Jason Brown has given away 500,000 pounds of sweet potatoes and 50,000 pounds of cucumbers. He has a structure on his property called “Amazing Grace Barn,” which is used to host weddings and corporate and community events. He is also raising eight children. It seems to me that Jason Brown is a great example of godly wisdom used in serving people.

III.

In vv. 27-31 we encounter **GODLY WISDOM IN PREPARING FOR DEATH--- THE BLESSING TO GOD.** (III. GODLY WISDOM IN PREPARING...) Verse 27 marks a transition to a later time period. The significant observation is made that **“Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen. And they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied greatly.”** This is clear evidence of the blessing of God. Part of the reason for this blessing was the godly wisdom that Joseph had displayed in his position of leadership.

We are then brought to the time of Jacob’s impending death. The setting is seventeen years after Jacob’s introduction to the Egyptian pharaoh. Jacob is now 147 years old. In the last days of Jacob the Book of Genesis records three instances where his son comes to see him about important matters. Abraham and Isaac and Joseph were all key individuals who were given much space in the record of Genesis. Just brief references are made to the circumstances of their deaths. But the death of Jacob gets a lot of attention.

There is a reason for that. The author of Genesis saw significance in the manner of Jacob’s death. A key reason is that Jacob made preparation for it. In terms of the demonstration of wisdom Joseph has received the bulk of attention in this section of the book for the character he displayed. But now at the end of his life Jacob also displays godly wisdom.

Look carefully at vv. 29 & 30: **“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.’”**

Jacob’s father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham had both been buried in the Cave of Machpelah back in Hebron in Canaan. That was the land which God had promised to give to the descendants of Abraham. His people were now residing in Egypt. But, you see, Jacob was a true believer. Despite all of his waywardness and frequent lack of faith he believed the promise of God that the land of Canaan would one day belong to his people.

Jacob’s request was a statement of faith. It was a display of godly wisdom in making his wishes about the disposition of his body known. It was a testimony to the Lord of his faith in the promises of God, and thus it was a blessing to God. Because of that godly wisdom and faith Jacob is included in the list of heroes of the faith recorded in Hebrews #11.

According to v. 31 of our passage Joseph promised to carry out his father’s wishes. In response we are told that Israel bowed in worship.

John Kenneth Galbraith (JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH) was an economist, a prolific writer, a Harvard professor, and ambassador to India. He died at age 97. Several years ago I came across these two statements that he made in *Boston* magazine: **“Making a decision about the existence of God is outside my area of normal reflection.”** In other words, “I don’t think about it very much.” Then he said, **“I’m going to have my afterlife in the form of a good reputation in this world, and not put too much confidence in the next.”**

In the eyes of the world this man was a success. He was a learned scholar. But well into his nineties he said that he had not thought much about God and about what happens after death. In terms of Biblical wisdom--- of skill in daily living--- he was a fool. The lack of wisdom is seen nowhere more clearly than in his failure to prepare for death.

Malcolm Forbes (MALCOLM FORBES) was a multimillionaire, the publisher of his own magazine, a business tycoon, a motorcyclist, a balloonist, and a companion of Liz Taylor. On his seventieth birthday he chartered a jet (MALCOLM FORBES BIRTHDAY) and flew a planeload of his friends to Morocco for a big party.

When he died suddenly a couple of years later, these words were imprinted on his tombstone: **“While living he lived.”** Any great piece of wisdom there? Commenting on his father’s death his son Steve Forbes, said, **“Death is inevitable for everyone.... But I guess we never thought he would really die. He always defied all the odds.”** In the eyes of the world father and son may be winners. But in the categories of the Book of Proverbs, the Biblical book of wisdom, they are fools. They made no preparation for death.

Godly wisdom makes preparation for death. It is concerned about making a statement of faith which will be a blessing to God. Let me suggest a couple of ways in which this preparation can be made.

The first and most important thing that we can do is to make sure that we know where we are going after we die. In 1 John #5 vv. 11-13 (1 JOHN 5:11-12) the author writes, **“And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 JOHN 5:13) I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.”**

The Bible says that we can know that we have eternal life now if we have believed in Jesus. If we have acknowledged our status as sinners and believed that Jesus was God who became man and believed that He died and rose again for our sins, then we are assured that we will go to heaven some day.

We can also make that commitment known. The primary way to do that, according to the New Testament, is by water baptism. This is what we have seen done today. Baptism is an outward act that publicly declares our identification with Jesus as our Savior. (PROJECTOR OFF)



There is a second thing that you could consider doing. You might write down somewhere something about your Christian faith. Some have done that in the fly leaf of their Bible. I have had others do that by leaving me instructions concerning the funeral which they one day anticipate having. It could be a neat thing to read to your family and friends a statement in your own words about your confidence in the life to come!

Then thirdly most of us need to have a will. If we have young children, we need to make our wishes known about whom we wish to take charge of them if both parents should somehow tragically die. Then we also need to make our wishes known about the disposition of our material resources. Sometimes family members get into ugly fights because the wishes of the deceased in this regard were not made clear on paper. If money is a problem in doing up a will, I have generic forms for a Nevada will which I would be happy to give to you.

What we do with our material resources makes a statement about what and who is important to us. It is also an opportunity to be a blessing to God. That may mean designating some of our resources to the work of God, whether that be the church or a missionary organization or a Christian relief outfit or some combination thereof.

The examples of Joseph and Jacob teach us that blessing comes to others not only by trusting in God's promises but also by seeking and displaying God's wisdom. Both men in the end came to possess godly wisdom. One got it only after a lot of pain and failures. The other got it as the result of a consistent life of trust and dependence upon God. But it is never too late to obtain. What our story teaches us is that godly wisdom is evident when we handle power carefully, when we focus on serving others, and when we prepare well for death.