

By wisdom is a house built . . . established (Prov. 24:3)  
. . . a family re-integrated, healed, served and led  
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Blessed are those who know enough to look behind the obvious to discover all that is in the Scripture for them to feed upon. I do not mean hidden meanings, I mean plot lines that run parallel such as those between worldwide famine (seven years drought) and the familial famine of fatherly attention and affection that plague Jacob's family.

Blessed are those who find instruction through the family relations depicted in Scripture for addressing matters of urgency *hidden* in their own lives—things like the need for forgiveness and reconciliation. And who see that for this divine wisdom is available, showing us how to bring each other into the presence of God for help and healing. We pray for direction that we may align ourselves with the goodness of God in how we treat one another.

Now, in the word we find this passage:

**33 The man, the lord of the land, said to us, 'By this I will know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me and take grain for the famine of your households, and go. 34 But bring your youngest brother to me that I may know that you are not spies, but [you are] honest men. I will give your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.'"**

What is the real spiritual concern of Joseph here? Doesn't he know that his brothers are not **honest men**? Is he looking for change? For growth? For transformation of character? How is he seeking *life* for those who are **dead in their trespasses and sins**? How does he come alongside those who are helpless and hopeless in their sin condition and even oblivious to their need for God?

The great theme of Joseph's life is not food. He was accustomed to prison fare: bread and water. I can assure you his diet underwent a tremendous shift as he moved upward in Egyptian society but *he wasn't longing for the delicacies of Egyptian cuisine*. His belly was not his god. We may be certain that Joseph was concerned for his famine-struck family in Canaan, his relatives that his ten brothers came to Egypt to find food for. And we can be certain that his concern for them was *qualitatively* different from his concern for the multitudes of strangers that came to the granaries of Egypt seeking sustenance. He was a very busy governor. *He makes time for them!* He was overseeing a massive famine relief program, facing issues of national security, but he knows **that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God**. (Matt. 4:4) This New Testament citation is based on Deuteronomy 8:1-10:

**8:1 "All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to give to your forefathers. 2 You shall remember *all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness* these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to *know what was in your heart*, whether you would keep His commandments**

or not. 3 He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you [a] understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord. 4 Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. 5 Thus you are to know in your heart that the Lord your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son. 6 Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to [b] fear Him. 7 For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; 8 a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; 9 a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. 10 When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.

#### Footnotes

- a. Deuteronomy 8:3 Lit **know**
- b. Deuteronomy 8:6 Or **reverence**

Moses speaks these words centuries after Joseph has died, to God's people in the midst of the Exodus. We read of the emphasis on **living and multiplying** which derives from the mandate in Eden, spoken by God to Adam and Eve: **Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.** (Gen. 1:28) **To know what was in your heart** parallels **By this I will know if you are honest men.** (Gen. 42:33, 34) Deut. 8:2 continues **to know whether you would keep his commandments are not.** Joseph's brother's had certainly not done that—neither **Honor thy father and the mother** nor **Thou shalt not murder** (and for some, **thou shalt not commit adultery**). They were triple offenders, at least, and no honest men! In fact they were scoundrels as well as fornicators. Why does God bother with such immoral fellows? Well, thank God he does. The entire human race would be left out in the cold pretty much if moral character were the criteria for redemption!! The church is full of former scoundrels, I think. That's added for anyone who happens to be squeamish about being called depraved, or lost sinners.

Then it is written: **He humbled you and let you be hungry.** Hunger is a daily reminder of our dependency, our neediness—just like the setting forth of the Lord's Table. Communion signifies that we were created to be **honest men** and that only happens as we *come to him, as we depend on him*. Life is designed in that manner. It is purposeful and relational—God never intended for man to go off on his own. No one becomes honest by self-effort alone. **And fed you with manna that you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know/understand: man does not live by bread alone.** Or food stamps, or welfare checks, or governmental relief. **Man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.** (v.3) That's the manna! This is an affirmation of providence—all that exists came into being, and persists in this world, by what **proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.** (v. 3) God speaks and grain comes into existence; it grows and is harvested and turned into bread by the will and purposes of God. None of it just happens. And if it didn't appear, from God, we would starve literally.

Now, our clothing not wearing out, and our feet not swelling from walking in the hot desert wastes are parallel provisions of God to manna—aimed at evidencing his intricate and personal care for us! Still, the condition of our hearts, our honesty, is the main concern here—honesty is our inclination to honor God and keep the commandments. *Spiritual integrity from our walk with God*, matters more than clothes, or his preventing blisters. And my point is that Joseph is tied into this concern, our heart condition: ***Are you honest men or not? Thus you are to know in your heart that the Lord your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son.*** (v.5) We are to know that God is part of the spiritual equation—that our relationship to him is paramount.

There follows in Deuteronomy, a **Therefore**, verse 6 **Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him.** Keep his commandments, walk in his ways and hold God in deepest reverence always. To keep his commandments, you must know them and choose to obey them—that is, **walk in his ways** as revealed to you—and to always **fear**, honor, and reverence God in what you think and say and do. This surely applies to us, just as it did to Joseph. It was not news to him that God expects us to walk in his ways—all the holy men of old held to that standard even before the call of Abraham!

Then, follow the promises: **for God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in the valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey, a land where you will eat food *without scarcity*, in which you will not lack anything.** . . . (vv.7-9)

Now we must hit the pause button. This doesn't sound like the famine-ravaged land out of which Joseph's brothers came seeking to buy food to survive! Why? Because it isn't. Canaan was purposed to become the Promised Land, but not yet—not in Jacob and Joseph's day! *That would come in good time, after the evil of the Canaanites had reached it's brim, to the fullest . . . not until their wickedness warranted their eradication.* **A land whose stones are made of iron** (for use in implements and utensils: for iron working!) and **out of whose hills you can dig copper.** (v. 9c and d) By which, I believe, we are given to understand that God provides, distributes, ahead of time the means of material prosperity and technological advancement.

**When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the Lord God for the good land which he has given you.** (v.10) But they didn't, they took it all for granted! So, not only is the land not ready, the people of God, the Old Testament Church, are not ready—Joseph's brothers are a case in point. Famine is the obvious level of the narrative. Joseph interprets the dreams, becomes governor, makes preparation for seven prosperous years so that when the catastrophe of seven years of no harvest hits, the world will survive. Okay, that much is true. But, additionally, the wisdom of God is also displayed in Joseph's "spiritually masterful" coping with his ten brothers' hearts, too. They are spiritually dead men walking. The lives they are leading is no life at all! And Joseph serves as their deliverer from denial, deceit, lying and real guilt. He is their kinsman redeemer, their *goel*.

Remember, they were **cursing their father** (very unwise) even as Jacob had earlier cursed and deceived Isaac—their life was one of gathering extinction, **their lamp was about to be put out in prison!** They languished under the accusation of being spies—

the very thing they held against Joseph! How apt. The prison was, assuredly, a very, very dark place. They need to a. tell the truth and b. become honest men.

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So, the brothers show up. Unexpectedly. Joseph has opportunity to even the score—the power, and authority to use it; to avenge the wrongs done to him! That's where Romans 12 comes in:

**17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. [a] Respect what is right in the sight of all men. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. 19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but [b] leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. 20 “But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

Footnotes

a. Romans 12:17 Lit **Take thought for**

b. Romans 12:19 Lit **give a place**

It seems as if Joseph had access to Romans 12, which he didn't, but because he possessed wisdom from God, we have no reason to suppose that God didn't instruct Joseph in just these matters, in just that way—***even way back then.***

Furthermore, this passage reads like a character reference for Joseph! Joseph was guided by divine wisdom in delivering his brothers from death to life. Remember, that his brothers come as a result of the famine being severe in Canaan. And Joseph uses *spiritual power to effect a transformation* of their hearts, as well as to heal Jacob's family of its crippling dysfunction—a dysfunction rooted in selfishness and carnality. These being the imprisoning sins of Jacob as well as of his ten sons!

In a real sense Joseph's rise to power is paralleled by his assumption of the place of a father “fathering” his brothers. He *disciplines* them and *corrects* them and *guides* them! Good fathers do that! He becomes the “head” they needed, and the one they heeded. *There is by divine mercy a timely transition of headship in the family of Jacob.* Joseph governs in Egypt and in the home—caring for all, forgiving sins and providing equitably. It is Joseph who, with God's help, compassionately restores wholeness to his broken family, bringing it unity and bringing all into the presence of God . . . which is a far greater, nobler and better thing than revenge! *In fact this is a better story than any revenge tale I can recall!*

Blessed are those who know enough to look behind the obvious.

Blessed are those who find instruction through the family relations depicted in Scripture.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, they shall be filled.

**Amen.**