

Interactive Bible Study on Genesis 47
“The Genesis of Poverty”

Facilitators’ Outline

Frame as something you could do in your own congregation

- Creative way of reading the text
- Going to learn about this methodology by doing it

Assign Parts, Intro to Re-Enactment

Characters:

- Narrator
- Joseph
- Jacob/Israel
- Pharaoh
- Joseph’s Brothers
- Egyptians
- Egyptian Priests

Silent read through

- Think about how you’ll perform and interpret your part

Re-Enactment

- Possible re-enactment v.13-25 a second time

Initial Discussion

- What just happened?
- How did you feel as your particular character in the story?
- Did you think about your character differently after your first reading based on how you acted it out?

Some Exegetical Points:

Connect Genesis 41:34-36 to Genesis 47:24-26 – “Structural Inequality”

- In preparation for seven years of famine that will follow the seven abundant years (as predicted in Pharaoh’s dream, interpreted through Joseph), Joseph tells the people to set aside one-fifth of their harvest in storehouses
- After the Egyptians have become slaves to Pharaoh, Joseph creates a statute that says Pharaoh should have one-fifth of the harvest
- How is this a story about how poverty came to be in the Hebrew Bible?

Genesis 47:20-21 – Egyptians Dispossessed From Land

- Understanding of poverty in Hebrew Bible directly tied to land, ability for one’s family to subsist on the land

- Typical Hebrew noun for poverty means “without (sufficient) property and therefore dependent on others”
- Typical Hebrew verb for poverty can mean “to oppress, cause someone to feel dependent” (Used in Exodus 1:11)

Genesis 47:22 – Religious Leadership

- Only land Joseph didn’t buy was the priests’
- Priests live on a fixed allowance from Pharaoh
- What is the model of religious leadership here?
- How are religious leaders connected to, and even dependent on, those in power in this story?

Genesis 47:27 – Who benefits?

- While Egyptians become slaves, Joseph’s family is fruitful and multiplies exceedingly (during a famine) in Egypt
- Joseph’s family protected by Joseph

Some Exegetical Points on the Joseph Cycle:

In the context of the larger Joseph cycle (Genesis 37-48)

- Joseph sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, his brothers later bow to him, as predicted in Joseph’s dreams

Genesis 41 sets the context for Genesis 47

- After interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams, Joseph is appointed as second only to Pharaoh in ruling Egypt

Genesis 45:11

- Joseph will provide for his family in Goshen because there will be five more years of famine, so that that they will not come into **poverty**
- Hebrew verb in passive construction “to be dispossessed” “to become impoverished” appears for first time in Hebrew Bible

Connect Genesis 47 to Exodus 1

- Exodus 1:8-14 – Pharaoh that did not know Joseph comes to power that makes the Hebrews slaves
- First Egyptians, then Hebrews forced into slavery during consolidation of Pharaoh’s wealth and power