



Feast or Famine: The Genesis of Poverty

Genesis 47 (NRSV)

Joseph: (go and tell 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. (Chose five of your brothers and present them to Pharaoh).

Pharaoh: (to the brothers) 'What is your occupation?'

Brothers: 'Your servants are shepherds, as our ancestors were. We have come to reside as aliens in the land; for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks because the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now, we ask you, let your servants settle in the land of Goshen.'

Pharaoh: (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 part of the land; let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know that there are capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock.'

Joseph: (brings and presents his father Jacob to Pharaoh)

Jacob: (blesses Pharaoh)

Pharaoh: 'How many are the years of your life?'

Jacob: 'The years of my earthly sojourn are one hundred and thirty; few and hard have been the years of my life. They do not compare with the years of the life of my ancestors during their long sojourn.' (blesses Pharaoh and leaves)

Joseph: (settles his father and his brothers, and grants them part of the best land of Egypt. Provides his family with food).

Narrator: Now there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe. The land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine.

Joseph: (collects all the money to be found in Egypt and Canaan from those who bought grain. Brings the money into Pharaoh's house)

Egyptians: (have spent all of their money, and come to Joseph) 'Give us food! Why should we die before your eyes? For our money is gone.

Joseph: 'Give me your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone.

Egyptians: (bring your livestock to Joseph)

Joseph: (gives them food in exchange for the livestock).

Narrator: That year Joseph supplied them with food in exchange for all their livestock. Fast Forward one year and the people came back to Joseph.

Egyptians: 'We cannot hide from our lord that our money is all spent; and the herds of cattle are our lord's. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our lands. Shall we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land in exchange for food. We with our land will become slaves to

Pharaoh; just give us seed, so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate.'

Joseph: (buys all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh and makes slaves of all of them)

Narrator: All the Egyptians sold their fields, because the famine was severe upon them; and the land became Pharaoh's. As for the people, he made slaves of them from one end of Egypt to the other. 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.

Priests: (enter and receive fixed allowance from Joseph, leave happy)

Joseph: (gives fixed allowance to priests)

Joseph: (to the people) 'Now that I have this day bought you and your land for Pharaoh, here is seed for you; sow the land. And at the harvests you shall give one-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.'

Egyptians: You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be slaves to Pharaoh.

Joseph: I make it a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day, that Pharaoh shall have the fifth. Only the land of the priests will not become Pharaoh's.

Narrator: Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the region of Goshen; and they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly.