

All the Land in Egypt Became Pharaoh's for Grain

47: 18-22

DIG: In reality, all the land of Egypt belonged to the king of Egypt anyway (except the land allocated to the priests). Who asked that the land be taken in exchange for grain? And who suggested tenant farming as a way to obtain food to live?

REFLECT: Of the three things the people of Egypt gave up to Pharaoh, money, property and independence, which would be the easiest for you to give up? Which would be the hardest? Which one are you struggling with the most today?

When that year was over, the people came to him the following year and said: We cannot hide from our lord the fact that since our money is gone and our livestock belongs to you, there is nothing left for our lord except our bodies and our land (47:18). When the people reached this desperate state, they sent a representative to Joseph with a plan of their own.

First they asked a rhetorical question. Why should we perish before your eyes - we and our land as well? Then they came up with the answer. Buy us and our land in exchange for food, and we with our land will be in bondage to Pharaoh. Give us seed so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate (47:19). The people wanted to become tenant farmers and dedicate themselves and their land for service to Pharaoh in return for food on a regular basis. It was their proposal, not Yosef's. It is true that it created what amounted to a feudalistic economy, but giving grain away for free would have bankrupted the government, and probably culminated in social anarchy. The storehouses would have been depleted and mass starvation would have followed.

The people had learned to trust Joseph. He had always charged them a fair price and, even though they had used up all their own money and marketable possessions, they still had their dignity and self-respect.⁷³³

So in the third stage (see Kq - Joseph and the Famine), Yosef agreed to their plan and he bought all the land in Egypt for Pharaoh. The Egyptians, one and all, sold their fields, because the famine was too severe for them. The land became Pharaoh's (47:20). Joseph's economic policy simply made Egypt, in fact, what it always was in theory;

the land became **Pharaoh's** property and its inhabitants **his** tenants.⁷³⁴ In order to speed up the distribution of **the grain**, **Yosef** moved **the people** from the country into the cities, **from one end of Egypt to the other** where the storehouses were located (**47:21**). This system did limit **their** freedom, but it saved **their** lives. However, **the priests** were a noteworthy exception to those arrangements. **They** had **their** own extensive holdings and **they** didn't want to turn **them** over to **the king**. However, **he** did not buy the land of the **priests**, the very ones who would later turn **their** staffs into snakes (**Exodus 7:8-12**), because **they** received a regular allotment from **Pharaoh** and had food enough from the allotment **Pharaoh** gave them. That is why they did not sell their land (**47:22**).

Once again the sovereignty of **God** was at work behind the scenes. The net effect of **Pharaoh** owning almost all of **the land of Egypt** was that the power of the old aristocracy was broken and power was centralized into the hands of **Pharaoh**. With that being so, it was easy for the **Pharaoh** of **Joseph's** day to protect **Jacob** and his family, but it also made it easier for the **new king**, who did not know about **Joseph** (**Exodus 1:8**), to enslave the Israelites when **Yosef** and **his** work were forgotten.⁷³⁵

Why did **the Ruach HaKodesh** inspire **Moshe** to preserve this story for us today? What is the significance of **Joseph's** agrarian policy? In **15:13-14**, **ADONAI** spoke to **Abraham** and said: **Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. Yosef** was a tool of **Ha'Shem** in the fulfillment of that promise. **The Seed of the woman** (**3:15**) would be protected and allowed to thrive.⁷³⁶