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Joseph and the Famine
47: 13-26



The famine was relentless. No food grew in **Egypt** or Canaan. The citizens paid for the grain that had been stored, but finally their **money** ran out. **Joseph** told them that if they would bring their **livestock** instead of money, **he** would exchange their **livestock** for grain. They followed that plan until **Pharaoh** owned all **the livestock**. To help the hungry people, **Yosef** proposed that they let **the king of Egypt** buy their **land** in exchange for grain. And just like before, **Pharaoh** ended up owning all **the land in Egypt**, and in this way the people of **Egypt** were reduced to **slavery**. Now that **Pharaoh** owned all of **the land** (except for **the land** of the priests), **Joseph** distributed seed to be planted as the famine finally subsided. The plan was that when a crop was reaped, the people would give one fifth of it as **tax** to **Pharaoh**. The other four-fifths they would keep for themselves. The people did not object and were grateful to **Yosef** for saving their lives.[725]

This process is something for which **Yosef** has been criticized. People say that he took advantage of poverty, closed on the mortgages and bought the land, but this is an unfair criticism of **Joseph**. To begin with, **he** was the agent of **Pharaoh**. None of

this was for **himself**. **He** was not dishonest in any sense of the word and did not personally gain because of the famine. An illustration of this is the scarcity of, and demand for, uranium during World War II in America. When some men found that they had uranium on their properties (especially in Arizona), they were paid a lot of money for their land. Were they taking advantage of their government? I don't think so. The law of supply and demand was at work. It seems to me that this same principle was at work in **the land of Egypt**. **Yosef** bought the land for **the king of Egypt**, and **he** enabled the people to live by providing grain to them. **He** couldn't just give the grain away. If **he** did that, the whole world would have been at **his** doorstep. The result would have been chaos. It is reasonable to conclude that **Joseph** stayed within the law of supply and demand.[726]

Yosef has also been criticized for favoring **his** own family by providing them grain while everyone else had to pay for it. But it should be pointed out that the Israelites were guests of **Pharaoh**, and as such, were on completely different footing than the rest of the Egyptians. Besides, there was no possibility of their purchasing food because they had left their possessions behind them. They had been told by **the** Hyksos **king** not to be anxious about what they possessed in Canaan, and **he** promised that all the good of **Egypt** should be theirs. **Pharaoh's** care of them was a matter of philanthropy, while a free gift of corn to the people would probably have resulted in chaos and anarchy.[727]

But the result of this **four stage process** was that everyone **in Egypt** became the economic slaves of **Pharaoh**. As long as the Hyksos and **Joseph** remained in power, the children of Isra'el prospered. But there would come a day when the Egyptians would overthrow the Hyksos and a new dynasty **would come to power in Egypt** (see my commentary on **Exodus, to see link click Ag – Then a New King Who Did Not Know About Joseph Came to Power**).