

Passover, Service, and Racial Justice



Text 1: Seven Years of Famine

Before becoming enslaved in the land of Egypt, Joseph famously interprets Pharaoh's dreams that there will be seven years of agricultural plenty, followed by seven years of famine. Because of this, he is appointed as a senior advisor and is put in charge of building up the grain stores during the years of plenty so that they would last through the years of famine. Once the famine started, each year when the people ran out of grain, they turned to Joseph, who asked them to pay for the grain.

Genesis 47:18-20

One year ended and in the next year, the people came and said, "We cannot hide from my lord that, with all the money and animal stocks that we have given to you, nothing is left at my to save our persons and our farmland.

Let us not die before your eyes, both us and our land. Take us and our land in exchange for bread, and we with our land will be serfs to Pharaoh; provide the seed, that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become a waste."

So Joseph gained possession of all the farmland of Egypt for Pharaoh, every Egyptian having sold their field because the famine was too much for them; thus the land passed over to Pharaoh.

בְּרֵאשִׁית 47:18-20

וַיִּתְּם הַשָּׁנָה הַהוּא וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵלָיו בַּשָּׁנָה הַשֵּׁנִית וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ
לֹא־נִכְחַד מֵאֲדֹנָי כִּי אִם־תָּם הַכֶּסֶף וּמִקְנֵה הַבְּהֵמָה אֶל־אֲדֹנָי
לֹא נִשְׂאָר לְפָנָי אֲדֹנָי בְּלֹתִי אִם־גּוֹיֵתָנוּ וְאֲדַמְתָּנוּ:

לָמָּה נָמוֹת לְעֵינֶיךָ גַּם־אֲנַחְנוּ גַּם אֲדַמְתָּנוּ קְנֵה־אֶתָנוּ
וְאֶת־אֲדַמְתָּנוּ בְּלַחֵם וְנַחֲיָה אֲנַחְנוּ וְאֲדַמְתָּנוּ עֲבָדִים לְפָרְעָה
וְתִן־זֶרַע וְנַחֲיָה וְלֹא נָמוֹת וְהֵאֲדַמָּה לֹא תִשֶׂם:

וַיִּקַּן יוֹסֵף אֶת־כָּל־אֲדַמַּת מִצְרַיִם לְפָרְעָה כִּי־מָכְרוּ מִצְרַיִם אִישׁ
שָׂדֵהוּ כִי־חִזַּק עֲלֵהֶם הָרָעַב וַתְּהִי הָאָרֶץ לְפָרְעָה:

Discussion Questions:

1. How does this fit into the larger Passover narrative of the Israelites in Egypt?
2. How did Joseph and Pharaoh treat the hungry in their country? How is this similar or different to the way that we treat/feed the hungry in our country?
3. Was this an efficient system for the ancient Egyptians? Who did the system benefit and who did the system oppress?
4. This passage describes a program that was run by the ancient Egyptian government. How does your volunteering intersect or fill in the gaps in our government's actions or responsibilities?