

MENU SELECTION BY FORKLIFT

A Devotional Meditation on Miketz (At the End Of)

Genesis 41:1-44:17; 1 Kings 3:15-4:1, 7:40-50; Philippians 4:10-19

Albert J. McCarn
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Tech. Sgt. Harvey Gilchrist pulls Meals Ready to Eat from a cargo truck at Kadena Air Base, Japan. U.S. Air Force Photo by Tech. Sgt. Richard Freeland, December 28, 2004, [via Wikimedia Commons](#).

Our daily routines give us a sense of stability. Even if we suffer unpleasant circumstances, the continuity of our daily routines is better than chaos. At least we know the source of our misery, whether it's an abusive spouse, a chronic illness, or a toilsome job. That kind of stability is familiar and, ironically, can be nearly as comforting as an easy, pleasant life. That's because we would rather stick with the familiar than venture into the unknown. We don't like change, even if we know change is necessary. Things are settled and stable in the old routine, and things will be settled and stable in the new at some point, or so we

hope. It's the uncertain place in between that's scary, when we don't know the landscape, and don't know what stands between us and our next meal.

I learned something about this in 1990, when my division deployed to Saudi Arabia for what would become Operation Desert Storm. Back home at Fort Stewart, Georgia, we had our familiar routine, but suddenly, we were transplanted halfway around the world to an unfamiliar and hostile place. The priority was building up forces and the supplies to sustain them in the coming fight to liberate Kuwait from the Iraqi invaders. We could expect our basic needs to be met, but we knew, at least in our minds, that we shouldn't expect to be comfortable or have a familiar routine until we completed the transition of establishing our forces in Arabia. Even then, that was but the precursor to the greater transition of going to war, which was also a transition we had to navigate before we could be settled again at home.

The uncertainty of transition was the reason we had barbecued beef for dinner for several weeks. For the first month, we ate a lot of MREs, the Army's individual field rations. As the supply system matured, we received unit rations in modules that contained everything our cooks needed to prepare a meal for 36 soldiers. For some reason, the modules we got for dinner were almost always barbecued beef, and before long we began to wonder if that was the only menu in the food distribution system. Answering that question became a priority for our commander. As our division's chief logistician, he needed to know why we were getting the same meal night after night. If we were having a problem, then other units farther from the supply depots were having a worse time of it.

After looking into the matter, he realized we were victims of menu selection by forklift operator. The modules for the unit rations arrived on pallets. Each pallet contained 12 modules of the same menu. When our unit submitted a requisition, a forklift operator

would be sent to collect the right number of rations. The operator would go to the nearest stack of pallets and return with the required number, but since the stacks were also sorted by menu, the requisitions were filled with only one menu selection – barbecued beef in our case. Our commander’s solution was simple: send an officer with each requisition to make sure the forklift operator chose pallets from different stacks in the warehouse. That ensured the requisition was filled not only with the right number of rations, but with a variety of meals.

This solution very quickly improved our soldiers’ morale, and helped the overall supply distribution system by teaching the forklift operators something they had never considered. It also helped me understand something about our Creator’s logistics – especially His provision during the transition periods of our lives.

We remember the promises of God’s provision, such as Paul’s affirmation that, “My God will fulfill every need of yours according to the riches of His glory in Messiah *Yeshua*.” (Philippians 4:19 TLV) That sounds good in theory, but it’s hard to grasp when we are desperate. I remember when, after years of doing everything we knew to do to get out of debt, we were still living paycheck to paycheck. We were concerned not only about what would happen in an emergency, but how we would pay for our children’s education and plan for our future. When I asked God about that, He reminded me of a few things: we had never gone hungry, we lived in a well-built house in a nice neighborhood, we had clothing for every season, and we could still find ways to do special things for our children. We could not do all we wanted, but there was enough for these necessities. Moreover, our Provider had given us good health, loving relationships, and hope for the future, both in this life and in eternity. He had come through on His promises, even though it would be years before we retired our last debt.

This is why testimonies are important. We can see much more of our Creator’s provision in hindsight. That’s why He included testimonies of our ancestors in His word. In the story of Jacob’s family, for example, we see the provision the Almighty much better than they saw it at the time. It was a horrendous tragedy that Joseph was ripped from the family and sold into Egypt as a slave. All Jacob knew was that his beloved son was gone forever, and that his remaining sons were somehow not only at fault, but at odds with each other. All Joseph knew was that his brothers had turned on him, and that his father never came searching for him. All Judah and his brothers knew was that their annoying younger brother was removed from their midst, but at the cost of estrangement from their father and nagging guilt in their hearts.

Jacob, Joseph, Judah, and the rest of the family probably realized that God provided their basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter, and probably thanked Him from time to time. However, they most likely didn’t realize that God was working through their transitional circumstances. Joseph was learning the ways of Egypt and gaining the trust and confidence of his overseers so that he was ready when the time came to explain to Pharaoh about the famine soon to come and how God would provide. In those same years, Judah was learning how to be a true patriarch, and why it was important not just to be the leader of the family, but why the family required a righteous, humble, wise, and discerning leader.

It's no coincidence that Joseph and Judah both fathered twin sons at about the same time. The names of Judah's sons, Perez and Zerah, indicated that God had broken through the bitterness and strife encrusting Judah's heart, and His divine light was rising on the one anointed to establish Messiah's ancestral lineage. The names of Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, indicated he was ready to forget the injustices of the past and embrace God's anointing to manage the provision of life for the whole world.

It was years before these brothers understood the reasons for the trials they endured. Those trials gave them the testimonies they needed to save both the Covenant family of Jacob and the land where that family would grow into the Covenant nation of Israel. They learned far more from their baffling hardships than they would have in a life of ease and comfort. That's why their testimonies contain the same principles that inform Paul's testimony:

[Whatever] circumstance I am in, I have learned to be content. I know what it is to live with humble means, and I know what it is to live in prosperity. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of contentment—both to be filled and to go hungry, to have abundance and to suffer need. I can do all things through Messiah who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:11-13 TLV

That's the testimony of one who knows that God's provision is not a random menu selection by forklift operator, but a carefully crafted process to refine his treasured ones into vessels worthy to carry His Presence to a broken and hurting world.