

WALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN?

A Devotional Meditation on Vayigash (And He Drew Near)

Genesis 44:18-47:27; Ezekiel 37:15-28; Deuteronomy 33:13-17; Amos 8:11-12;
Matthew 20:25-28; Philippians 2:1-11

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Why did Joseph decide to make Egypt a totalitarian slave state, and why did everyone seem to think it was a good idea? It happened during the years of extreme famine, after Joseph moved his father Jacob's family from Canaan to the fertile region of Goshen. He took care of his own family,



Walk Like An Egyptian. Photo by Niharb, February 10, 2010, via [Flickr](#).

but seemed to have little regard for the Egyptians. During the famine, they used all their money to buy food from Joseph – the same food they had worked to produce during the seven years of abundance before the famine. When they had no more money, they sold their livestock in exchange for food, and when the famine continued, they offered to sell their lands and themselves to Pharaoh. According to Genesis:

Then Joseph said to the people, “Behold, I have bought you and your land today for Pharaoh. Here is seed for you, so that you can sow the land. During the harvest you must give a fifth part to Pharaoh and four-fifths will be for you, for seed for the field and for your food, and for those in your houses, and for food for your little ones.”

“You’ve saved our lives,” they said. “We find favor in the eyes of my lord, and we’ll be Pharaoh’s slaves.” So Joseph set it as a statute until this very day concerning the land of Egypt: a fifth-part goes to Pharaoh. Only the priests’ land did not become Pharaoh’s.

Meanwhile, Israel settled in the land of Egypt in the land of Goshen, acquired property in it, and were fruitful and multiplied greatly.

Genesis 47:23-27 TLV

Why does Joseph, the man whose life is a prophetic picture of Messiah Yeshua, seem to act like a tyrannical dictator, bringing more power, prestige, wealth, and control into the hands of the state? What Joseph seems to have done in Egypt is very much what others have done throughout history for their empires. When nations expand their power and take control over other nations, are they operating in the spirit of Joseph? If so, are they actually “walking like an Egyptian” according to Joseph’s example? That’s not what’s supposed to happen, according to Yeshua’s instructions:

You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and their great ones play the tyrant over them. It shall not be this way among you. But whoever wants to be great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you

shall be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

Matthew 20:25-28 TLV

Yeshua said that after James and John made a power play for prominent roles in the Messianic Kingdom. The other disciples got angry at that – perhaps because they also wanted to be the chief rulers under King Yeshua. That’s why Messiah had to set them straight. His Kingdom is not like the kingdoms of this world. The nations rule by force and fear, but His Kingdom gains strength through humility and service. It’s a counterintuitive way of doing statecraft, and that’s why we have a problem with it. History tells us that every nation on every continent in every era, whether Christian or not, has operated in the power-hungry spirit of Egypt.

How do we reconcile this? What are God’s people to make of this seemingly contradictory passage in Genesis in an otherwise uplifting and inspiring account of Joseph’s life of devotion to the Creator? The answer comes when we turn the story on its head and see that Joseph was definitely not walking like an Egyptian.

Joseph was completely faithful to Pharaoh, his sovereign lord, and completely trustworthy. He followed protocol in settling his family in Egypt, and acted with integrity in managing the national food supply. He could have used his position to enrich himself, and no one would have blamed him since that was the common practice. Yet Joseph “brought the money into Pharaoh’s house,” not into his own house.

Did Joseph make the Egyptians slaves in their own country? Technically, no. He made them tenant farmers who worked the land for Pharaoh and received 80% of the crop as their payment. The land wasn’t theirs, but they lived on it and enjoyed its fruits because Pharaoh cared for them. It could be considered the best of a bad choice: either die of famine and let their lands go to Pharaoh by default, or sell everything and live while working for Pharaoh.

That doesn’t sound appealing to our modern ears. How can we be certain the government will continue to look after our welfare if we surrender our liberty and property? We can’t. The tendency of human government is not toward freedom, but tyranny. That’s the lesson of the American Revolution, and of history in general.

But if Joseph is a type of Christ, does that mean we’re supposed to submit to tyranny? If we ask that about human governments, the answer depends on whom we ask, and in which era. However, if we ask this of God’s government, the Messianic Kingdom of Heaven which Yeshua set in motion when He lived among us the first time, the answer is yes, submit not to tyranny, but to His government. There is no life outside of it. That’s a major lesson of Genesis 47. The Egyptians didn’t come to Joseph for help until they had spent all their money. There was nothing left, so they took the desperate step of selling their livestock to buy food. Then, after another year of famine, they had no choice but to sell their lands and their bodies.

This is where we are. We’ve had thousands of years to try every means to keep alive by our own strength, but it’s all futile. We can’t create life or extend it. We can only live by the providence of God Almighty. Like Joseph, and Joseph’s Pharaoh, God is not going to force His will on any of us, but He waits patiently until we come to our senses and realize

we are completely destitute. There's a famine in the world, just as God explained to the prophet Amos:

“Behold, days are coming”—declares my Lord *ADONAI*—“when I will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of *ADONAI*. So people will wander from sea to sea and roam from north to east, searching for the word of *ADONAI*, but they will not find it.”

Amos 8:11-12 TLV

Relief to the famine came when Messiah arrived to proclaim life in the Kingdom of God. He's been proclaiming that message ever since. It's an invitation to everyone to come in out of the cold, dark, hungry place of this world system. We enter at the price of everything we have and are. That's the price the Egyptians were willing to pay to live in the days of Joseph. They trusted him to look after them, so they willingly traded their precarious existence for the security of life under his direction.

That's a picture of the King we're invited to serve. He knows how to be a kind, loving, and merciful ruler. He also knows how to be just and righteous. That's because He has been through everything we've been through, and more. It's why He came to serve, not to be served, and to learn obedience even to death. This is the true legacy of Joseph in Egypt. He was the instrument by which Israel went into the foreign land where the nation could develop until the time when God redeemed them from bondage.

The covenant nation of God's redemptive plan is Israel, not Egypt. That's why we're called to pledge allegiance to Israel's Messiah King, and to forsake everything else to become His loyal subjects.

Joseph didn't walk like an Egyptian. Neither should we. There's a higher calling our Creator and Redeemer wants us to walk out. Instead of walking like Egypt's Pharaoh, He wants us to walk like Israel's King.