

Preparation for Famine

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[0 : 00] Well, as we continue then through this portion of chapter 41 and on through this section of Genesis, some of you may recollect that we looked last Lord's Day evening at Pharaoh's dream and Joseph's interpreting of it and how he was brought hastily in toward Pharaoh.

And there was this great haste on Pharaoh's part almost as soon as Joseph appears, verse 15 of chapter 41, he goes straight into it, I have dreamed a dream and there is none that can interpret it.

And Joseph does interpret the dream and follows it up also with advice, unsolicited advice, but advice nonetheless to Pharaoh as to what should be done.

What should be done in the plenteous years that were to come that God had shown to him? And we see at verse 34, let Pharaoh do this and let him appoint officers over the land and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years and let them gather all the food of those good years that come.

And lay up corn under the hand of Pharaoh and let them keep food in the cities. And they said that they have appointed a man discreet and wise and set in over the land of Egypt.

[1 : 15] Because in order to control the supply and the storage of the food, whoever was given this task was going to have to have an authority over and above all the petty jealousies of the civil service or the cities and their jurisdictions and the local councils and so on.

They would have to be able to come in with Pharaoh's authority and say, you're doing this whether you like it or not. We're going to take up the fifth part, 100%. We're going to store it.

We're going to open great big barns or whatever. We're going to start piling up all the food here. You may not like it, but we have the authority of Pharaoh to do it and you're going to do it. There would have to be that kind of, you know, hot knife through butter cutting through all the red tape.

Otherwise, it wouldn't happen. Otherwise, there'd be all manner of obfuscation and obstacles put in the way and people's petty jealousies obstructing the work. So this would be a necessity if the plan was to be carried through.

And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, verse 37, where we took up this evening, and in the eyes of all his servants. Good idea to appoint someone over the food supply.

[2 : 28] Good idea in bumper years to have one person in control. And you could almost imagine all of Pharaoh's courtiers thinking, oh, yes, that would be a good thing if I could get that post.

If I could get that position. I would control the flow of food. I could siphon off what I wanted for myself. I could become a very rich man by doing this. This is just ideal.

If only I could get that particular post. This would be a desirable power to have, to be under only Pharaoh. And you can just imagine everybody mentally thinking, yes, I could do that.

The one person they would not have considered would be Joseph. Joseph, who would be no better than a slave. Lately, that very hour brought up from the dungeon. And now, why should he be in any particular position to rule over Egypt?

They wouldn't even consider him. For that, they would be thinking, yes, one of us is going to get this post. What a great idea for you. Yes, that's brilliant what this young man has said.

[3 : 29] You definitely should appoint someone to this post. What they hadn't reckoned on was Joseph himself being appointed. And I think we have reason to suggest that. Because at verse 37, the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and the eyes of all his servants.

But then Pharaoh said to all his servants, can we find such a one as this? A man in whom the spirit of God is. And then they rolled on the back foot. Because they can't say, well, actually, Pharaoh, yes, I would do the job just as well.

Because as if the Lord had revealed the secret to you. Or he can't exactly say, well, I can't be myself for it. But if I nominate somebody else and he gets it, then he'll have the power instead of me.

So they'd be crammed up, terrified to suggest anyone else for fear they would get it. But they couldn't exactly put themselves forward. Nor could they, now that Pharaoh has spoken, say, well, actually, Pharaoh, I think you've made a mistake.

It's not this guy that you should appoint. It's me. Or my best friend. Or my son. Or my brother-in-law. Or somebody that I can control. The reason we would say this is that Pharaoh himself is now speaking.

[4 : 39] Pharaoh himself is sort of almost, shall we say, almost overdoing the extent to which he said, I have sent you over the land of Egypt. I am Pharaoh.

And without you, nobody will lift up his hand or his foot in the land of Egypt. There's nobody greater than you. God has shown you all this. You'll be over all my house.

Only in the throne will I be greater than thou. He gives him all this investiture. He makes a public investiture of the authority that he's giving him. I am Pharaoh without thee. Verse 44.

Shall no man lift up his hand or foot in the land of Egypt. We do not find in these verses. All of Pharaoh's servants say, oh yes, brilliant idea. Joseph, what a great guy.

What a super choice, Pharaoh. We think this is just brilliant. And again, one reason for saying is that whenever anybody, particularly one who fears the Lord, is promoted to a position of power or influence, especially in a pagan empire, then there will be jealousy.

[5 : 42] There will be jealousies in any country or any system of government because there's always going to be people who want somebody else's job, who want the power that somebody else holds.

And particularly so if that person is perceived to be a foreigner or an upstart or somebody who worships a different God from themselves. We've got a similar situation in Daniel where, you know, just as God has revealed these dreams to Joseph, and so he knows the truth of them.

We see in Daniel, chapter 2, verse 47, the king answered and said unto Daniel, Oh, the truth it is, that your God is a God of God and a Lord of kings and a revealer of secrets.

Seeing thou couldst reveal this secret. In other words, interpret, men you can never dream. Then the king made Daniel a great man and gave him many great gifts and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.

Then Daniel requested the king and he set Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel sat in the gate of the king. Nobody bothered with Daniel or Shadrach or Meshach and Abednego while they were nobodies.

[6 : 55] But once they are promoted, all these petty jealousies come into play. And so in the next chapter in Daniel, when you look at chapter 3, the king setting up his golden image.

And then you've got verse 8, Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came here and accused the Jews. And at verse 12 they said, There are certain Jews whom now have settled with the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

These men who came have not regarded thee. They serve not thy gods nor worship the golden image which thou has set up. And as we know, they were then thrown into the fiery furnace from which they emerged unscathed.

Daniel, chapter 6 himself, It pleased their eyes to set over the kingdom 120 princes. That's one over each of the provinces that the king of Persia ruled over from India to Ethiopia.

120 princes which should be over the whole kingdom. And over these three presidents of whom Daniel was first. That the princes might give accounts unto them. And the king should have no damage.

[7 : 59] Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes. Because an excellent spirit was in them. And the king thought to set them over the whole realm. Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom.

But they could find none occasion nor fault. Because as much as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. Just as there hadn't been in Joseph.

No error or fault found in him. Save that Potiphar's wife had wanted to sleep with him. And he had refused her. So he ended up falsely accused and thrown into the dungeon.

But the Lord has revealed his secret again to his chosen servant here. Chosen. And this will certainly have provoked jealousies amongst the other Egyptians.

We don't read it very explicitly. But whilst they're all very happy for Pharaoh to appoint somebody over the control of all the food in Egypt.

[8 : 56] We do not read them at all Pharaoh's servants. Yes, they thought this was a great idea when he promoted Joseph. This is all Pharaoh's doing. And you might think, okay, absolute monarchy.

You can get away with that. When you are the law and the land, you open your mouth and everybody jumps. You can only do that as long as it works. Because in one sense, Pharaoh is sticking his neck out, supporting Jacob.

We shouldn't lose sight of that. Pharaoh is sticking his neck out and supporting Jacob in the teeth of all his other court favorites. He is promoting this absolute nobody on the basis that he knows something the rest of them don't.

And that if he doesn't act on this advice, if he hasn't got the wisdom to act of what God has revealed to his dream, then within seven, eight years, he's going to have food riots on the streets of his city.

And nothing destroys a regime like shortage of food. Because that's when people begin to start demonstrating, to start rioting, to start looting, because they have nothing to lose.

[10 : 03] If there is no longer food to feed the people, that is when everything else breaks down. That is when armies begin to mutiny.

That is when you get civil disobedience and destruction on the streets. That is what brings countries down. And Pharaoh is going on the basis that he can either act on this and preserve and strengthen his own position, his own monarchy, his own country.

Or he can ignore it. And if he ignores it, then yes, there will be a few years of blessing. But after that, everything is going to fall apart. But that's only assuming that this little Hebrew and the God whom he worships have got it right.

For six, seven years, it's going to be something of a gamble. Everybody's happy while the food keeps rolling in, while there's abundance, while there's riches, while there's blessing. Nobody's going to complain.

But once it starts to bite, everything will depend on the preparation he has made. Pharaoh is judging this wisely. He is judging it right.

[11 : 13] But as every political decision which ends up proving to have been the right one, there is always a risk. And Pharaoh is taking a risk when he trusts Joseph.

He is taking a risk when he promotes him in this situation, making him political ruler of all Egypt, except in the matter of the throne. Every single court favorite.

Every single civil servant. Every prince. Every city authority. Everybody will answer to Joseph. And all those who might have been after his job will still be under his power.

And again, if you just want to think of it for a wee second, a kind of bittersweet sort of outcome here. The captain of Pharaoh's guard is going to have to be bowing the knee to the guy whom he put in prison.

And he's going to have to be in prison. And he's going to have to be bowing the knee to the man she falsely accused. Not that he is probably seeking any kind of indicative retribution for them.

[12 : 17] He's got other things to do. But Pharaoh is taking a risk in this political decision. One which, of course, God ultimately vindicates. The power that is put into his hands.

I think we should take it. Not every detail of this chapter should we take as being, you know, that very day. Certainly we should take him as being invested with this power on that day.

That then, in being given him his change of raiment, his gold chain, his ring with Pharaoh's authority. This public investiture of his power. That will be the same day.

The day that he woke up in the dungeon will be the day that he laid down on a feather bed in some paratial residence given him now as the ruler of Egypt.

I don't think necessarily we have to take it that his marriage was arranged and done the same day. That would be in the weeks that followed. Because, as it was thought appropriate for somebody in his position to have an appropriately high-ranking marriage and so on.

[13 : 19] But all of this is predicated on the fact that he has got a job to do. He is not being given this power so that he can luxuriate in his palace and eat grapes and have servants and so on.

He is being given this power so that he can make the preparations, so that he can cut through the red tape, so that he can do all that has to be done to save people alive.

That is what it's all about. And every privilege of office, all the wealth, all the palaces, all the high-ranking marriage, all that will flow to him, in a sense, it's just a distraction.

Because he's got work that he went out over all the land of Egypt. Verse 45. And again, verse 46. What is he doing? He's serving the land. He's seeing where all the cities and towns and villages are.

He's seeing where storehouses can be constructed, new ones that will have to be built. He's assessing the sizes of the fields. He's seeing and calculating how much is likely to come in. If it's a bumper crop, where can they store the 20% that they need?

[14 : 27] He is making assessments throughout the land of Egypt. We don't know whether it's a full year before the first bumper harvest. He would certainly need a lot of time to make all the preparations throughout the land of Egypt.

Or whether it's just in the spring and the harvest would be in the autumn, and so he's only got a few months to do it. It's possibly more likely to be months rather than years that he has got.

But also remember that whilst communications would be slower in those days than they are now, if we think of a modern map and look at your map of Egypt nowadays, you've got this sort of square corner in the top right of Africa, where these straight lines have been drawn in the map.

Egypt in those days would not be that. It would be basically a thin, narrow country following the line of the Nile. Because, you know, once you get to either side of the Nile, where the irrigation can only go so far out from the river on either side, you just go desert.

So there's this narrow strip, long, long, all the way down into the top of what is now Sudan. And all the land of Egypt, it will be a long, narrow country in terms of its reality.

[15 : 45] But he will be assessing each city, each dwelling, each village and town, and how the people are to be fed there, and how much they're going to need. This is going to be a lot of work.

And he has been given the power so that he can do the work. Now, the Lord gives to each of us privileges, opportunities, gifts, as we were saying to some extent in the children this morning.

He gives to us such power, such abilities as we have, such gifts, as he gives us to enjoy. Not simply that we can sort of enjoy the benefit of them and leave it at that.

But we're given them to use. Just as Joseph is given his power to use it. He has a task, he has a commission ahead of him, which is to store up all the excess in the land of Egypt, and to make sure people will not starve when the bumper years are over.

That's his job. And if the burden of it is going to land on anyone, it's going to land on him. And the logistics of that would have been huge. This is work that he's got.

[16 : 53] It's not just idle luxury. This is hard work that he's got. But to do it, he's been given everything that he needs. Now, I don't know what in each individual person's life the Lord requires of them, or what he will ask of them, or what he will commission them to do.

I don't know what the Lord may call you as an individual to, or your children, or relatives, or whatever it is that you may be required to do in the years that remain to us.

What I can rest assured in is that if the Lord requires it of you, the Lord will give you what you need to do it. You know, Jesus said even to his disciples, you know, when I sent you out to spread the, you know, the gospel, the good news of the kingdom, I sent you out without any script, that's without any sort of traveler's bag, without staff, without shoes, without money.

Did you lack anything? And they said, no, we didn't lack anything. Now, that doesn't mean how you can live on thin air. It means that the Lord ensured that they would have everything they needed.

If they needed food, they would have food for that day. If they needed money to buy something, they would have some means of obtaining what they needed. If they needed somewhere to stay, the Lord would put it in the heart of somebody to give them a place to stay.

[18 : 05] He would open the ways before them. He would give them everything they need, and the Lord will do that for you. The Lord will do that for whoever he is calling and requiring to do a particular thing, or a particular task, but he will give them the means they need.

Big job? He'll give you the big resources. Big requirement? He'll give you what you need for a smaller job. You'll have what you need to do that job. You might not have what you need to do the bigger job that he's given to somebody else.

And we should never allow our pride or vanity to look at somebody else and say, oh, you gave him a big job. You gave him ten talents. You only gave me one. But if the Lord has given us a particular task to fulfill, he will give us what we need for it.

And if he has only given us one or two talents, then we can understand from that, well, all I can do with this is X much. I can't do what the other guy's doing. I can't do what somebody else is called to do.

But I can do this which is before me. And the Lord will give you what you need. He will provide what you require. If you need a certain power or a building or strength to do something, he will give you that.

[19 : 15] If you need influence with somebody or a door to be unlocked, he will do that. But he will find a way through. If you need resources to purchase something to get something, he will provide it.

He may not put it in your pocket first. He may give it to somebody else who will do it for you. However he opens the way, that is up to him. But he will do it. He will never, ever ask of you something which he is not going to equip you to do.

And the same is true of Joseph either. Joseph is given this huge amount of almost absolute power. But it is for a particular reason.

It is to do the task with which he has been entrusted. The bumper years last. Just as long as he said he would. He is given this high-ranking wife.

And we read a little further down that he is given two children from her during the course of that seven years. And to Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, which Asenad, the daughter of Potiphar, a priest of Ron, bear unto him.

[20 : 20] Now that little detail is just in there. And it says, okay, well that was who his wife was. So of course, that's who would have given him these sons. Most people probably in Egypt in those days, certainly later on in Israel, the days of Solomon and all the pagan kingdoms round about.

If they produced children, it wouldn't necessarily follow that those children were from their lawfully wedded wife. Joseph, who has himself already fled from adultery and pollution, he himself has identified.

He has, yes, he's got these two sons. And just in case you're wondering, they're from his lawfully wedded wife. He doesn't keep concubines. He isn't indulging all the pleasures that he could easily lay himself to as a prince of Egypt now.

It is from the wife that the Lord has given to him that these sons are born. He is a man keeping himself in purity and in dedication to the Lord. Manasseh, which means forgetting.

God said he hath made me forget all my toil and all my father's house. Ephraim, which means literally fruitful. O God, hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.

[21 : 31] Now, Pharaoh, of course, gives him an Egyptian name, as we read there, verse 45. Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnaf Pania. He gave him to wife Asenath, the daughter of Potiphar, a priest of the Lord.

What does Zaphnaf Pania mean? Zaphnaf Pania has been translated in variously. Some people take it to mean savior of the land, which is one way of translating it, perhaps.

Others, taking it from hieroglyphics and ancient Egyptian inscriptions, understand it to mean wise man who flees from pollution, as in the sense of him fleeing from the adultery.

That's what it was like. Both of these suggest, shall we say, sort of retrospective interpretation. They would suggest that might be what Joseph was styled as or titled that he was given after the seven years of famine when his foresight and his preparations had saved the land of Egypt.

After he had fed everybody through all the famine, after he had made Pharaoh the most powerful monarch in the entire ancient world, because all the countries round about were paying into Pharaoh's coffers for food that he had that nobody else had, thanks to Joseph.

[22 : 47] That all the people of Egypt now were effectively Pharaoh's slaves and owned by them, that his control over the land of Egypt was absolute in a way that it may only have been partial before.

Therefore, he who has enhanced the glory of Egypt and the power of Pharaoh might indeed retrospectively be styled savior of the land or wise man who flees pollution.

Because after he is famous and after he seems to be the ultimate celebrity in the land of Egypt, no doubt his life will be looked back at.

People say, this is what this wise man did in his youth. This is how he came into Egypt. These are the temptations he was afflicted with. Look, here's the wise man fleeing from pollution. But it all implies retrospective knowledge.

What is more likely, which is the one taken by most commentators, means aph-na-ph-pan-ia, meaning is revealer of secrets. And that is what, of course, Joseph, by his interpretation of the dreams, has done.

[23 : 53] He has revealed secrets. Again, if you think back to what we read in Daniel a few minutes ago, where the king answered and said unto Daniel, of a truth it is that your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets.

Seeing thou couldst reveal this secret, what the king had dreamed. So I would suggest to you that of the possible interpretations, and the others are not wrong, but probably the one that Pharaoh actually gave him at the time means revealer of secrets.

Because God had revealed Pharaoh's secret to him. God had identified Pharaoh as the father of the land and revealed the secret to him. And the seven plenteous years the earth brought forth by handflakes.

And he gathered up all the fruit of the land. Well, obviously not all. He had suggested 20%, a fifth, as you see there, verse 24. And later on, of course, when the people have to then spend all their money, and then all their crops and herds, and then all their land for food, we read in chapter 47, verse 24.

It shall come to pass, and the increase ye shall give the fifth part unto Pharaoh. Once they were put back onto their land, but held it for Pharaoh, that they would give him 20%.

[25 : 12] And likewise, again, verse 26, Joseph made it a law of chapter 47, verse 26. Over the land of Egypt, under this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth part, except the land of the priests only, which became not Pharaoh's.

Pharaoh takes 20%. You'll notice that the God of Israel, when he requires offering from his people, requires only half of that, 10%. The tithe is what God requires.

Pharaoh takes 20%. But leave that aside for now. 20%, if that's all he took up. To begin with, he took up 20% in the land of Egypt.

That, think of that. If it stayed at 20%, 20% of the land of Egypt's bumper crop, such was the abundance of the crop that that 20% was able to feed 100% of the land of Egypt, plus all the other nations round about that came to buy corn in Egypt.

I would suggest, again, that perhaps, looking at it realistically, 20% might have been what it started at. But as people got used to the abundance, they probably had more and more excess.

[26 : 25] That, you know, they had to offload somewhere. And Joseph, yep, buy that all up off of them. Yep, take it off your hands. Stick it in the great big barns and storehouses and silos or whatever they had.

And store it all up. He knew you couldn't waste any of it. But nothing causes people to diminish the value they place upon something other than the fact of its abundance.

You know, if you want to diminish, say, the peerage now, there's been lots of political discussion over the years, you know, as to whether or not we should have a second chamber in Westminster. Should we have a House of Lords at all?

You know, would it not be better just to do away with it and so on? And probably the opponents of the House of Lords, those who don't approve of its existence, have been the wisest of all.

Because they have known that it would be way too complicated, legislatively, to undo the fact of having this second chamber.

[27 : 26] How laws do you put in place? How do you abolish it on the one hand? How do you put in a second chamber that isn't meant to be superior to the House of Commons, but at the same time there's meant to be a check and balance on it?

You know, it's just way too complicated. So if you don't like something like the House of Lords, how do you render it effectively and present? You flood it.

You make it so common to have a peerage, which is what is the case nowadays, almost everybody who's anybody gets made, you know, a lord of this, lord of that, lord of the next thing, and it floods the House of Lords with all these so-called peers.

And by multiplying something, you make it less precious. You know, if, say, it's a special thing to have a night food, and then you multiply the night food, so it's called what is marked to have a night food.

If gold was found in huge amounts in different parts of the country, then gold would fall in price. It would fall in value because there's so much in it.

[28 : 31] It's not precious anymore. It's become common. So if something is very, very rare and desired, it will be highly expensive. Even if it is abundant and there's loads of it and you can't get rid of it, it will be cheap.

And we've got this perfect example of that in 2 Kings with the famine in the city of Samaria, where we read in chapter 6 of 2 Kings, verse 25, there was a great famine in Samaria. Behold, they besieged it until an ass's head was sold for four score, that's 80 pieces of silver, and the fourth part, a quarter of a cam of dove's dung, for five pieces of silver.

Now, you don't need to know exactly what these quantities amount to or exactly how much each piece of silver is worth. But then when you compare it with chapter 7, verse 1, where Amusha says, Hear the word of the Lord, thus said the Lord, Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour, the very finest of the wheat, be sold for a shekel.

One shekel. Not four, not five, not eighty. One shekel. And two measures of barley for a shekel in the gate of Samaria. In other words, it will become so common, it will be this cheap.

Well, how can that possibly be the case? And the Lord unlocked away whereby that happened. If something is common, it will be valueless. And after the first bumper year, when everybody will be filling their barns and saying, Oh, isn't this great?

[29 : 57] We've had a bumper harvest. So was the guy next door. And so was the person in the next village. And so was everybody throughout the land of Egypt. And the only problem with that is they can't sell my corn because everybody's got so much of it.

Everybody's got loads. Nobody wants to buy my corn because they've got abundance too. Their barns are bursting. They're overflowing. We've had such a bumper year. Oh, here comes this government official.

He's buying it all my corn. Oh, thank goodness for that. Right. He's taking it off my hands. He's giving me a reasonable price. That's good. The next year, it's a bumper crop again. And even if all you got was 20% taken off your hands the first year, now you've still got all the leftover from last year.

You've got so much here. You can't offload it. You can't sell it because it's such a common commodity that places a wash with corn because everybody's had bumper harvests.

But here comes the government official again. This time, oh, you want to get rid of more than 20%? That's fine. Okay. Give us half. Give us three quarters. Whatever you like because you've still got last years to eat your way through and stoned it up.

[30 : 59] So probably the 20% would only be for the first year, maybe the second. By the time you get to seven years of bumper crop, people will be trying to get rid of this stuff.

You know, there's always so much you can feed your animals to and only so much that the ordinary common farmer, he's not able to sell abroad. And besides, abroad doesn't have a famine anyway.

They don't have bumper years like in Egypt, but they've got their ordinary harvest year by year. So what are you going to do with all this excess? And here's this government prince buying it all up, storing it all up, putting it in these massive barns, massive silos, massive storage cities and so on, gathering it all up.

Why does he want it? Everybody's got plenty. The rest of the country doesn't know what is coming. They probably think this is how it's going to be from now on.

And this perhaps is the foolish failure that men make when the tide is in. And perhaps in spiritual terms, we ourselves, whether in this country or in these islands, may have made the mistake in the past of thinking, ah, we have a revival every few years.

[32 : 15] There's always going to be spiritual blessings here. Maybe not every year, but it comes every few years. And, oh, there's been blessing in this part of the island or that part of the island and so on. And so many people converted there.

And it happened on a regular basis. And we may perhaps have fallen into the trap of thinking the tide would always begin. But the tide goes out eventually.

And this instrument of God's hands, Joseph here, this revealer of secrets, points us, obviously, onwards to Christ.

Christ, too, is the ultimate revealer of secrets, of mysteries. John chapter 1 tells us at verse 18, No man hath seen God at any time.

The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. He has revealed him. Jesus said, He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father.

[33 : 13] And all through these bumper years, as the Lord is providing, he is providing what is going to be needed. What is going to be needed when the tide goes out?

What is going to be needed when the supply dries up? Who knows how many souls may have been gathered into glory in the bumper spiritual years of revivals in these islands or in our country as a whole in the past before the times of spiritual famine came.

It is certainly a matter of historical record that, for example, when Cambodia was about to fall to the Khmer Rouge, to Pol Pot, and in Phnom Penh, the capital there, where the people were besieged and the forces were gathering all around them, that the church, the Christian church in that city and in the land of Cambodia, before it fell under the regime of Pol Pot, there was a huge explosion of conversions, of evangelism, of outreach, of people coming to the Lord, people who became Christians in those critical months, many of whom, thousands of whom, were martyred very soon afterwards.

Because when the regime took charge, Christians were amongst those who were slaughtered in the first rank. So the Lord always has a reason for these times of blessing.

He always has a reason for these times of abundance because they will be preparing us, giving us what we need for when the harder times come. Jesus said himself, and we have referenced to this this morning, chapter 9 of John, verse 4, I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day.

[34 : 59] The night cometh when no man can work. As sure as God sends the day, as sure as he sends the high noon and the times of daylight and sunlight and blessing, the night will come.

Isaiah, prophet of course, put this way, a burden of doom, and he calleth to me out of sea. Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, the morning comes and also the night.

If you will inquire, inquire ye, return, come. First is the morning. God sends the morning first. He sends the daylight first. He gives the blessing, the sufficiency first.

But the reason we get it is because we're going to need it. And who knows whether, whilst we all pray for times of revival and blessing and ingathering and that is something that's right to pray for and something that we ought to look forward to and to long for if and as and when God gives it.

It will not be just so that we can warm ourselves in the little hothouse of spiritual blessing. It will be because a day is going to come when all that spiritual blessing is going to be needed and is going to be put to the test.

[36 : 11] Because as far as I can understand, I think there can only be, if there's going to be one big more ingathering, there's probably only going to be one before the Lord comes back. We don't know exactly when that's going to be, but we do see history moving towards a conclusion.

We do see more and more people groups throughout the world being reached with the gospel through media or internet or social media or scripture being downloaded through the internet as opposed to simply taking in books.

We see the Bible being translated into more and more of the languages of the peoples of the world. Not all of them by any means. Still a lot of work to do, but we could never have foreseen how the number of believers was going to skyrocket in countries which, even a few years ago, were totally closed to the gospel.

Even in the last quarter of the 20th century. Countries which had virtually no believers in it have now huge numbers of Christians. history is racing toward its conclusion.

And if we are to pray for and seek years of bumper harvest once more in this land, which we should and we ought to, then we must also be mindful that if the Lord grants it, it will be because tribulation and days of testing will follow upon.

[37 : 33] The morning coming, yes. And also the night. Watchmen, what of the night. The seven years of plenteousness that was in the land of Egypt were ended.

And the seven years of dearth began to come, according as Joseph had said. And the dearth was in all lands. But in all the land of Egypt there was bread.

Now notice this verse 54. Before you get to 55, when it says, well, the land of Egypt was famished. It almost implies, this verse 54, that people had had such abundance that although, yes, they might have become careless or swandered it a bit when they had such abundance, it would imply that to begin with, when everybody else running about was beginning to starve, in Egypt there was still so much left over from the abundance in people's barns and in their storehouses and so on, just the individual farmers and peoples and cities themselves.

Before you open the government storehouses that when it says in all the land of Egypt there was bread, this is stated before Joseph opens the storehouses.

So to begin with, the sufficiency, the leftover bulk still feeds the people. But of course, in the truest of time, that runs out. When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread.

[38 : 59] And Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go to Joseph. And he says to you, The famine was over all the face of the earth. Now, we don't know whether that means just in the countries round about the Middle East or if it literally means the entire earth and whether everybody in all the countries of the world, including places that, you know, we would say hadn't been discovered even yet, whether they had famines too, maybe they did.

If we're going to take it absolutely literally, then we have to say, yes, there was the whole earth that had famine. Not everybody died, but an awful lot of people would have died if they couldn't access bread.

The famine was over all the face of the earth. Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold unto the Egyptians. And the famine waxed sore in the land of Egypt. Now notice what he doesn't do.

He doesn't say, Yes, open the storehouses, give it away, free everybody. Yes, come, take what you like, help yourselves. No, he is very careful. He is rationing it out.

And the reason we say he is rationing it is because when he's selling it to the Egyptians, if it was simply a case of, yep, if you've got money, you can have as much as you like.

[40 : 07] The more money you've got, the more I'll sell to you. All that would happen there would be the rich and the noble families and the landowners would say, oh, right, famine's coming. We'll buy up all your grain, Joseph.

We'll buy it off me because we've got money to do that and then we'll control the bread supply. Then we'll control who is able to eat and who isn't to them. We can bump up the prices ourselves.

So in the meantime, come on, we'll buy it off. Joseph is not simply selling to whoever's got money. The implication here is that he is giving due portion to people as their need arises.

They are paying for it, yes, but it's not just a case of, well, whoever can bid the most, that's who I'll sell it to. The Proverbs tells us, chapter 11, verse 26, he that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him, but blessing shall be upon the head of him that sells it.

He's not trying to rip the people off, selling them corn as opposed to giving it to them. He bought it from them in the first place, so he's selling it to them. That's only reasonable, it's only fair. But everybody who needs is getting, so clearly what he is not doing is he is not just selling to the highest bidder.

[41 : 18] He's not auctioning it. He's not just giving the rich an unfair advantage. He is giving to everybody according to their need. But yes, they're paying for it. They're paying something towards it. Now, this would be the point of which all Pharaoh's courtiers would be gnashing their teeth and saying, ah, wish we were in that position.

If we were in that position, we could withhold it. We could bump up the price. We could enhance our own position. We could sell to our cronies. We could enhance our own power in the land. We'd make it so that Pharaoh couldn't do a thing without us.

We would have the real power then. This is another reason why somebody of Joseph's absolute, incorruptible integrity had to be the person of God's choosing, who is not interested in the power politics of Egypt.

He's only interested in serving God. He's only interested in being faithful in that which the Lord has given him to do. Yes, he's serving his earthly master Pharaoh. Yes, he's saving the lives of the Egyptians.

Yes, he's helping the nations round about. But ultimately, he is serving God. And the point that we have to see here is, not only will those who have the fear of the Lord have uncorruptibleness and integrity in what they do in the discharge of their earthly duties or they ought to have, that if there is the fear of the Lord, then there will be the right and faithful discharge of those duties.

[42 : 46] But also, when that is done, everybody benefits. Everybody has enough. Everybody receives blessing, benefit, sufficiency.

Corruption does not help anyone other than in the short term the person who is corrupt. But they never end up gaining as much as they think they will. eliminate the corruption, restore the integrity, and everybody benefits.

And the fact that Joseph is uniquely placed to do this in the land of Egypt, again, points to the fact this is not so much a work of Pharaoh.

No, Pharaoh's authorities, that we just put in there. This is a work of God. And God's work is not merely to pay Joseph back for all the years of his suffering, though that is happening.

God's work here is to bless the nations round and about and especially to preserve and retain his own covenant life.

[43 : 52] To make sure they do not starve to death and vanish off the face of the earth. To make sure they are upheld and in order to do so, he has sent his man ahead of them to prepare a way and to make sure there is abundance of all that they need and that the man who controls it is God's man himself.

What clear picture could we have of such a saviour as Jesus is? The one who will be the saviour of God's covenant people.

the one who holds all power which is given unto me, he says, in heaven and in earth who has gone before them not merely to prepare a place for them but to control the supply of all that he needs.

But one little thing we should notice in closing that Joseph's family who subsequently come down to receive, to buy food from them where there is abundance, they would get nothing despite being Joseph's own family, they would get nothing if they didn't come and ask.

There is abundance for all the needs of all humanity. There is salvation for the Lord's people if they will receive that which he has laid up for them.

[45 : 15] But there is nothing to be had if we will not first come and ask. And we must come to our saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must ask for the abundance that he alone has the control of. We must ask for the supply of our needs. And Jesus has said, all that the Father giveth me shall come unto me and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast that.

Let us pray.