

# Come to Understanding

**They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding,  
and they that murmured shall learn doctrine. — Isaiah 29:24**

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## I Have Heard That There Is Corn in Egypt

As a famine came “over all the face of the earth” (see Genesis 41:56), Jacob, who was also named “Israel,” told his sons to go to Egypt and buy “corn:”

2 And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down there, and buy for us from there; that we may live, and not die. -Genesis 42

Many of us have preconceived notions about what “corn” actually is because we think of it only as “maize.” However, the word “corn” actually refers to any of several small hard-seed plants, which vary in meaning by the region in which they are grown. A dictionary definition of “corn” explains that it refers to “...the seeds of a cereal grass and esp. of the important cereal crop of a particular region (as wheat in Britain, oats in Scotland and Ireland, and Indian corn [maize] in the New World and Australia)” (see *Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Encyclopædia Britannica Multimedia Edition*. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2011.) Therefore, Jacob told his sons that he had heard that Egypt had the seeds of cereal grass that were grown in the region for food.

Reliance upon Egypt for survival during famines was a familiar option for Jacob. After all, his grandfather, Abraham, had fled into Egypt during a famine. While there, however, he used deception to acquire great wealth. As he pretended that his wife, Sarah, was only his sister, the Pharaoh was deceived into bringing her into his house. Because of her, he bestowed great wealth upon Abraham. Once the Pharaoh was beset with plagues, he realized that he had been deceived (see Genesis 12:10-18). Therefore, he sent Abraham and Sarah, along with their nephew, Lot, out of Egypt. Nevertheless, they took with them the great wealth they had amassed while they were in Egypt:

1 And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south.

2 And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. -Genesis 13

During another famine, however, Yahweh clearly told Jacob’s father, Isaac, that he must not go into Egypt!

2 And Yahweh appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell you of: -Genesis 26

Instead, He told Isaac to stay in the land of the Philistines and be blessed (see Genesis 26:1, 3-5).

Now, in yet another famine, it was Jacob’s turn to consider whether to go to Egypt for survival. He had no word from Yahweh on whether he should go into Egypt or not. However, as Jacob and his sons, “the children of Israel,” would later learn, one of his other sons, Joseph, was already in Egypt. Years earlier, his brothers had sold him into bondage:

4 And Joseph said to his brothers, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I *am* Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. -Genesis 45

While in Egypt, Yahweh revealed to Joseph the interpretation of the Pharaoh’s dream, which told of a coming famine. Subsequently, the Pharaoh placed him in a very powerful position. He was thereby enabled to provide economic shelter for “the children of Israel.” The Pharaoh told Joseph to give them “the best of the land” and put them in charge of his cattle:

6 The land of Egypt is before you; in the best of the land make your father and brothers to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell: and if you know any men of ability among them, then make them rulers over my cattle. -Genesis 47

Therefore, Joseph gave his family the possession of the “best of the land” of Egypt:

11 And Joseph placed his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded.

12 And Joseph nourished his father, and his brothers, and all his father’s household, with bread, according to *their* families. -Genesis 47

While Joseph was providing for the needs of the “children of Israel” in Egypt, he took all of the money from the other people in Egypt and Canaan in exchange for food:

13 And *there was* no bread in all the land; for the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and *all* the land of Canaan fainted by reason of the famine.

14 And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, for the corn which they bought: and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh’s house. -Genesis 47

**So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense,  
and caused them to understand the reading. — Nehemiah 8:8**

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Then, when they had no more money, Joseph took all of their livestock in exchange for food:

- 15 And when money failed in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph, and said, Give us bread: for why should we die in your presence? for the money fails.
- 16 And Joseph said, Give your cattle; and I will give you for your cattle, if money fails.
- 17 And they brought their cattle to Joseph: and Joseph gave them bread *in exchange* for horses, and for the flocks, and for the cattle of the herds, and for the donkeys: and he fed them with bread for all their cattle for that year. -Genesis 47

With the Pharaoh's permission, all of this livestock (cattle) was now apparently in the possession of Joseph's family.

After the Egyptians had lost all of their money and livestock, they had nothing left, except their land and their bodies. Pleading for food, they offered them both. Joseph took their land and gave it to Pharaoh:

- 18 When that year had ended, they came to him the second year, and said to him, We will not hide *it* from my lord, how that our money is spent; my lord also has our herds of cattle; there is not anything left in the sight of my lord, but our bodies, and our lands:
- 19 Why shall we die before your eyes, both we and our land? buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants to Pharaoh: and give *us* seed, that we may live, and not die, that the land be not desolate.
- 20 And Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for the Egyptians sold every man his field, because the famine prevailed over them: so the land became Pharaoh's. -Genesis 47

Thus, after Joseph took all of the money and all of the livestock from Egypt and Canaan, he also took all of the land of Egypt. Joseph gave everything to Pharaoh, the head of the Egyptian government.

Since the Egyptians had lost their land, Joseph forced them off of it and moved them into the cities:

- 21 And as for the people, he removed them to cities from *one* end of the borders of Egypt even to the *other* end thereof. -Genesis 47

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Meanwhile, Joseph had married the daughter of the priest of On, which was the sun god:

- 45 And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnathpaa-neah; and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On. And Joseph went out over *all* the land of Egypt. -Genesis 41

Consequently, Joseph spared the land of the Egyptian priests, which included that of his wife's family:

- 22 Only the land of the priests bought he not; for the priests had a portion *assigned them* by Pharaoh, and did eat their portion which Pharaoh gave them: therefore they sold not their lands. -Genesis 47

Finally, after the people of Egypt had given everything they owned, including their money, livestock, and land, to the Pharaoh, Joseph made it clear what he had done. When he bought their land, he had actually bought *them*! Now, he would let work the land that belongs to the Pharaoh, on one condition. They must pay a twenty percent tax!

- 23 Then Joseph said to the people, Behold, I have bought you this day and your land for Pharaoh: behold, *here is* seed for you, and you shall sow the land.
- 24 And it shall come to pass in the increase, that you shall give the fifth *part* to Pharaoh, and four parts shall be your own, for seed of the field, and for your food, and for them of your households, and for food for your little ones. -Genesis 47

The people gladly became Pharaoh's servants (slaves):

- 25 And they said, You have saved our lives: let us find grace in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants. -Genesis 47

The Egyptian priests were tax-exempt:

- 26 And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt unto this day, *that* Pharaoh should have the fifth *part*; except the land of the priests only, *which* became not Pharaoh's. -Genesis 47

While the Egyptians were enduring severe economic hardship, "the children of Israel" greatly prospered in Egypt:

- 27 And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions therein, and grew, and multiplied exceedingly. -Genesis 47

Even after Joseph and all of his other relatives that had immigrated into Egypt died, "the children of Israel" continued to prosper (see Exodus 1:6-7).

Then, all of that changed! A new Egyptian king rose to power that did not know Joseph. Fearing that "the children of Israel" would totally dominate Egypt, and even side with the enemy to overthrow the kingdom, the new Pharaoh took their land and committed them to slavery:

- 10 Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it comes to pass, that, when there falls out any war, they join also with our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land.
- 11 Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. -Exodus 1

How much will we give for the "corn in Egypt?"