

Dependent on the Lord – Genesis 47:13-27

45-60 days. 45-60 days, according to studies done by the British Medical Journal, is how long a person can survive without food. The body needs the nutrients in food to survive. Without food, the body starts to use its own tissue as fuel, but it can only do this for so long. Eventually, body systems begin to shut down, then organ failure starts, and death soon follows. Of course, the days of survival without water are much shorter. The body needs a continual supply of water to repair and maintain cells and carry out essential processes.

Thirst and hunger are some of the most basic human needs. And they reveal our dependance on God. We are ultimately dependent on God for all our needs. The food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe, our very lives all depend upon the sovereign and gracious hand of God. Even though that is the case, we do not naturally depend on God. We naturally act like we are the lord of our lives and can sufficiently meet all our own needs. However, all the circumstances we experience, whether famine or abundance, reveal we ultimately depend on the Lord to meet all our needs.

Throughout the course of redemptive history, God has revealed man's inability to sufficiently supply his own needs and that he is ultimately dependent on the Lord to meet those needs. That is one of the results of God sending Christ. In Genesis 47, we see God's kindness and mercy toward the Egyptians and toward the Israelites as he provided Joseph to deliver them from the famine. God's provision for both groups through Joseph demonstrates that God is the sovereign Lord and we are ultimately dependent on Him for all our needs. The gracious giving of a Savior confirms God is trustworthy and we can fully depend on Him. So because God has given Christ, we can depend on Him in all circumstances.

But what does that mean for when we can depend on Him? When do we depend on the Lord? We see two things about our dependance on the Lord in verses 13-27 of chapter 47. You can see them printed for you there on page six of the WG. Because God has given Christ who can provide for all our needs, we can depend on the Lord during famine, and we can depend on the Lord during abundance.

Look with me at verse 13. The famine that has gripped the land becomes very severe. It has been going for a little while now. We saw the famine begin back in chapter 41. Now it is so oppressive that both Egypt and Canaan are "languishing". The verb used there for languishing means *to be wearisome or tiresome*. In other words, the land is exhausted and is producing no food. This is a serious famine. The land is full of hungry, desperate people. The people quickly realize that when the land suffers famine, there is nothing in their power they can do to produce the food they need to survive. Without the ability to grow crops, everything begins to shut down. Such is the dependency of the people on the land.

Their only hope is to turn to the one who can provide food in their kingdom – Joseph. Because of God's favor toward Joseph, he had prepared for the famine by storing grain during the seven years of plenty. So, the people come to Joseph, and he sells them grain which apparently he had been doing since the beginning of the famine. The lack of food is severe; the people must spend all their money on grain to feed themselves.

It is worth noting that the famine was not something that affected just the poor or downtrodden. It affected both poor and rich. Though many in the cities of Egypt may have had riches, they could not eat gold and silver. They needed grain. So, everyone gathered up all the money they had for food. The Hebrew for “gathered up” in 47:14 is the same word used for the process of gleaning the very last bit of corn or wheat left over after the harvest. Egypt’s citizens must scrape together the last of their means to sustain their families since there are no crops to fill their pantries.

There are circumstances that arise in life, which show us that we are dependent creatures. Dependent on the Creator. When we are deprived of food, or water, or proper medicine even, we quickly see that we cannot within our own means sufficiently sustain our lives. Now we may be able to provide for ourselves in terms of nourishment – money, food, clothing, shelter, relationships, etc., and sustain ourselves temporarily. But think for a moment how even all those provisions can be traced to the providence of God. Can you think of one that is not? There isn’t anything that we possess that cannot be traced to provision from the hand of God. We are dependent on the Lord.

This is what Moses wanted the Israelites of the Exodus, to whom he was writing these words, to realize. They were dependent on the Lord. They were dependent on Him to rescue them from slavery, and they were dependent on Him to lead them through the wilderness. They were hungry and thirsty as they wandered. And who provided for them? The Lord provided for those basic needs through Moses. That is what God wants us to realize as well. Like the Israelites of the Exodus and the Egyptians under the care of Joseph, we must realize that they we are dependent on the Lord. And in terms of the famine the Lord was graciously providing through Joseph.

Look at verses 16 and 17. Now the Egyptians face another problem. After several years of buying grain, the people have exhausted all their money so that they have no funds left to buy grain. Now broke and penniless, the Egyptians plead for help and Joseph has them mortgage their animals, in other words their herds and livestock. The people exchange their livestock for grain.

The following year, another problem arises. Verse 18 tells us the people’s grain is exhausted again and now they have no money or livestock to trade. But they are very desperate and hungry still. So what do they do? Verse 19 tells us they ask Joseph to buy their land and themselves. They finally must sell themselves to Pharaoh to survive. The people become tenant farmers and servants of the king. We see in verses 20-24 that essentially all the property became Pharaoh’s and on top of that, the people had to pay a tax on the crops they produced each year. This seems harsh to us. It is hard for us to see how this benefits the people since they lose their private property, but in ancient times the destitute commonly ensured their survival in this manner.

They realized they needed to be rescued. If they had not received rescue, they would have died. They know rescue came from Joseph. Though they must finally sell themselves, they are grateful that they will survive. Look at how they respond to Joseph in verse 25. *“You have saved our lives.”*

We know that though their rescue came through Joseph, it was ultimately from the Lord. In the case of provision for the famine in Egypt, Moses wants us to see this is a specific fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 to bless those who bless Him. The pharaoh had shown favor to Joseph and blessed him. Therefore, God was providing for the Egyptians through Joseph. This would have been a powerful testimony to the Israelites traveling with Moses by again reinforcing God's faithfulness to his promises and that they depend on Him for all their needs. It would also show them how gracious the Lord was toward their enemies, the ones from whom they just escaped, the Egyptians. And how they should be gracious toward others as they are also the recipients of the grace of the Lord.

The idea that we are dependent on God for all our needs is like how a newborn baby is dependent on its parents for all its needs. The baby requires food and water, those things that provide nourishment, and if it does not receive them, it will not survive. But a newborn baby can really do nothing to provide those essential needs for itself. A newborn simply receives them with delight.

As this example demonstrates, the child is dependent on the one God has given to care for his or her needs. Even as we grow into adults, we are still ultimately dependent on something outside ourselves, namely our Creator. Verses 13 - 26 show us how we depend on God's providence to provide for us.

Something else we see here is a demonstration of what theologians refer to as God's common grace to all people. In general, grace can refer to anything the Lord does for His creatures that they do not deserve. We often speak of grace in a salvific sense, what we may call special grace. However, our Creator also shows grace in a non-salvific sense. We call this common grace.

Whether we have been reconciled to our Creator or not, meaning whether or not we are Christians, as creatures we are owed nothing from our Creator. We take the sustaining and continuing of nature for granted, the sun and the rain that make it possible to grow crops that allow us to feed, clothe, and shelter ourselves. But the sun and the rain are gifts from God's hand. And He is so exceedingly gracious that He gives these gifts to people regardless of whether He has adopted them as His children in Christ. These gifts come from God's common grace.

Matthew 5:45 says, "For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." God's common grace is evident in that we are dependent on him for our needs, and he continues to supply those needs and sustain all mankind. Just as we see Him doing in Genesis 47. Through His common grace, God provides a savior to rescue the people. Joseph, who was once sold into slavery in Egypt, now is the savior of the Egyptians. The people are fully dependent on Joseph to save their lives. We see God's common grace at work for the Egyptians during the famine.

Of course, Joseph is meant to foreshadow the real savior, Jesus Christ. Scripture tells us that Christ was the one through whom the world was created. He was there at creation, and we are ultimately dependent on him for all our needs. We are certainly dependent on him to meet our

physical needs. And we are dependent on him to meet our greatest need, our need of salvation from sin.

But do we act like we are dependent? No. We act like we are independent of the Lord. However, we must realize that we ultimately depend on God. That is why we need Christ. Because Christ was perfectly dependent on God, that as we look to Him in faith, we see that we are dependent on the Lord as well and can entrust ourselves to His care.

So we see we are certainly are dependent on the Lord during famine. Now look at verse 27. We see that while the Egyptians were languishing from the famine, the family of Jacob and Joseph was flourishing in the land during the famine. There was still a famine, but through Joseph, God was fulfilling the promise given to Jacob in Genesis 35:11-12 and to Abram in Genesis 12 and 15. The promise that He would give them many descendants, that they would be a great nation, and that they would be fruitful, multiply, and gain possessions in a foreign land. Joseph is a tool of God in the fulfillment of this promise.

So many of the promises of God were converging and beginning to be fulfilled through Joseph. Because of Joseph's wisdom, the offspring of Abraham becomes fruitful, increases greatly in number, and lives safely while prospering in the region. The Lord showed kindness and mercy to the Egyptians, but He showed abundant kindness and mercy to his covenant people. We see the power and dependability of the Lord, particularly toward His people as He is able to prosper them even as the land in which they live experiences famine.

The special grace of God is on display here. Special grace refers to God's gift of salvation to undeserving sinners. We saw the common grace of God toward the Egyptians. But what man cannot know through common grace is what is required for salvation. The grace of God for salvation is called special or saving grace. Saving grace is only given to those who are God's people, the elect. We see particular favor given to those who are part of the covenant family of God as Christ was given as a sacrifice on their behalf. Joseph provided rescue for the covenant family, and God used him to bless and prosper the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Lord used Joseph to carry on the covenant promises.

Joseph's family depends on God to meet all its needs and they recognize that God is the one who provides for their needs. They were dependent on Joseph to rescue them from famine to position them to prosper. Years later, the descendants of those people, the Israelites of the Exodus, were dependent on Moses to rescue them from slavery, and deliver them to the promised land. Just like the family of Jacob is dependent on the Lord for its blessings and abundance, we are dependent upon the Lord for our blessings and abundance. They, like us, look to the one God has provided, the Savior, to rescue them and provide for them. Joseph points to the Savior who provides the final and full salvation for God's covenant people. He points to Christ. All the promises of God that were fulfilled in part through Joseph are completely fulfilled in Christ. Therefore, we depend on the Lord even during abundance.

According to John Calvin and Matthew Henry, the famine and relief described in today's passage remind us that we live and die at God's mercy. It is easy to forget that we live, move,

and have our being in the Lord and that we must be grateful to Him for every blessing in our lives.

The account of the famine demonstrates that we ultimately are dependent on God to meet our needs. However, God is only as dependable as His Word and His promises are true. The point of Genesis 47: 13-27, and really one of the main points of the story of Joseph is to prove that the Word of God and the promises of God are true. We see the promises fulfilled in part in Joseph's provision for Egypt through God's common grace and particularly in Joseph's provision for Israel through God's special grace. But that provision, the complete fulfillment of God's promises and therefore the reason we can depend on God, is because of Christ. Joseph and Moses were simply types of the true Lord and Savior who was to come. And the greatest blessing is Christ himself. Christ is the greatest blessing because it is only through him that the people of God receive all that God has promised – a promised land where they will experience rest, peace, and most importantly fellowship with God. All of that is made possible by and through Christ. As the perfect Savior, we can trust God through Christ to meet all our needs.

God calls us to acknowledge our dependency on Christ for salvation, and to cry out for Christ to save us. Christ lived a life of perfect dependency on God. When we place our faith and trust in Christ, we are able to depend on God to meet all our needs. Christ died on the cross to rescue us from spiritual death. The proper response to Christ is the response of the Egyptians to Joseph – may it please our Lord, we will become servants of the one true God.

Let's pray.