

Biblical Study of Responsibility

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the ramifications of "Reasonability" as it occurs in the first Book of Moses called Genesis. It starts with God's blessing of the seventh day wherein He rested from his labours. It concludes with Joseph's responsibility for the burial of his father and hence the human beneficial burden of carrying out our earthly responsibilities so as to make Heaven.

STUDY

Responsibility is defined in Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary¹ as a word which arose in 1787 to mean "1: the quality or state of being responsible as a: Moral, legal, or mental accountability b: Reliability, Trustworthiness 2: Something for which one is responsible: Burden."

Burden is what I have accepted to bear lightly by way of biblical examples. Thus, I will be word guided by The First Book of Moses called Genesis, using The New King James Version² of 1983. This is because I am more than satisfied that it contains good guidelines on my chosen subject, i.e., responsibility.

Responsibility, be it noted, appears in the Holy Bible in all its parameters in the above definition: to wit, morality, law, mind, accountability, reliability, trustworthiness, and burden. I intend to pick and choose from that weighty work because stirring stories are in it aptly available.

Available to God for creation were seven whole days. Consequently, consider what happened:

Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.³

Made to till the ground was Cain, the first son of the first man, Adam, while Abel was made a keeper of sheep. When things fell apart between them, murder arose. Thereafter, God asked the

first question concerning that responsibility which should hold sway among family members:

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"⁴

Keeper of all that God created was man. Unfortunately, man's responsibility went amiss before the face of God. On that account, God made a U-turn but with a proviso thus:

And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

So the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.⁵

Lord Almighty also bestowed goodies galore on Abram, later named Abraham, as follows:

As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations.

"No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations."⁶

Nations, incidentally, were even God's promise although his wife was then barren.⁷ Note that the then old Abraham fostered that promised future by welcoming strangers responsibly. First, "he

¹ Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary. Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 1985, p. 1005.

² Holy Bible the New King James Version 1983.

³ Genesis 2:3.

⁴ Genesis 4:9.

⁵ Genesis 6:6-8.

⁶ Genesis 17:4-5.

⁷ Genesis 17:15

Biblical Study of Responsibility

ran from the tent door to meet them.”⁸ Next, there was speedy action repeatedly as follows:

So Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah and said, “Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes.”

And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it.⁹

It was the opposite scenery of inhospitable irresponsibility at the house of his relation, Lot. There, the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, knowing about the visitors, attempted “to know them carnally.”¹⁰ Of course, the story ended with their wholesale destruction, including Lot’s wife.¹¹

Wife hunting was the responsibility that Abraham thrust on his oldest servant in respect of his son Isaac thus:

Please, put your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; but you shall go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac.¹²

Isaac duly got from the father’s reliable servant the wife he deserved. This occurred through a predestined sequence of responsibilities, viz, the future wife feeding the servant himself and watering his camels, each event being hastened during both stages of such very thoughtful actions:

So she said, “Drink, my lord.” Then she hastened and let her pitcher down to her hand, and gave him a drink.

And when she had finished giving him a drink, she said, “I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking.”

Then she hastened and emptied her pitcher into the trough, ran back to the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels.¹³

⁸ Genesis 18:2.

⁹ Genesis 18:6-7.

¹⁰ Genesis 19:5.

¹¹ Genesis 19:26.

¹² Genesis 24:2-4.

¹³ Genesis 24:18-20

Camels continued to feature thereafter, and the expected girl continued to behave responsibly thus:

Then Rebekah lifted her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from her camel; for she had said to the servant, “Who is this man walking in the field to meet us?” And the servant said, “It is my master.” So she took a veil and covered herself.

And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done.

Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.¹⁴

Death knocked and Abraham was no more. Meanwhile, God blessed his son Isaac.¹⁵ Was married Rebekah also blessed? Alas! Bareness first reared its ugly head. However, pregnancy later materialized but with untoward complications:

But the children struggled together within her, and she said, “If all is well, why am I this way?” So she went to inquire of the Lord.

And the Lord said to her:

“Two nations are in your womb,

Two peoples shall be separated from your body;

One people shall be stronger than the other,

And the older shall serve the younger.”¹⁶

Younger versus older twin soon became a household problem, seeing that the mother loved the younger, while the father loved the older! Moreover, craftiness crept in, leading to the sale of the older twin’s birthright:

Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. And Esau said to Jacob, “Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary.” Therefore his name was called Edom.

But Jacob said, “Sell me your birthright as of this day.”

And Esau said, “Look, I am about to die; so what profit shall this birthright be to me?”

¹⁴ Genesis 24:64-67.

¹⁵ Genesis 25:11.

¹⁶ Genesis 25:22-23.

Biblical Study of Responsibility

Then Jacob said, “Swear to me as of this day.” So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.

And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.¹⁷

Birthright robbery naturally led to Jacob’s flight to safety. Fortunately, his dreamy sleep in the open air followed at a spot. That spot was how Bethel,¹⁸ God’s House, was named. And, in turn, Jacob promised God that “of all You give me I will surely give a tenth.”¹⁹ Thus, tithing became human responsibility.

Responsibility was introduced by God Himself in terms of even a change in name thus:

Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him.

And God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name.” So He called his name Israel.²⁰

Israel was to feature oddly again due to the fact that, on one hand, he “loved Joseph more than all his children,”²¹ while, on the other hand, his brothers hated him. They would have killed him in the field but for the intervention of their responsible eldest brother.²² Albeit, he was sold by them and this led to his sojourn in Egypt at the house of “Potipher, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard.”²³ There, in due time, God made him not only to prosper²⁴ but also to become the overseer²⁵ of the household.

Household responsibilities were subsequently complicated by the master’s wife for she became a square peg in a round hole thus:

Now it came to pass after these things that his master’s wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, “Lie with me.”

But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “Look, my master does not know what is with

me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand.”

“There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”²⁶

God had meanwhile given to Joseph an uncanny wisdom concerning dreams. His dreaming exploits even led to his becoming second to Pharaoh himself. Indeed, at one point, we gather that his accountability was such that Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do.”²⁷

“Do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there.”²⁸ This was how God empowered Israel “in the visions of the night.”²⁹ This was how 66 persons in all migrated to Egypt where they became Joseph’s responsibility.³⁰ In due time, his father ailed and died. See what responsibly followed:

Then Joseph fell on his father’s face and wept over him, and kissed him. And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel.

Forty days were required for him, for such are the days required for those who are embalmed; and the Egyptians mourned for him seventy days.³¹

Days of traditional mourning ended, and burial became the joint responsibility of Joseph and his brothers thus:

So his sons did for him just as he had commanded them. For his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite as property for a burial place.³²

Place of some honour, as I see it, should go to those whose responsibility it is to embalm the dead. Perhaps, it is fitting for me, a pathologist, to highlight the last 3 verses of Genesis, especially the very last verse which dwells on

¹⁷ Genesis 25:29-34.

¹⁸ Genesis 28:19.

¹⁹ Genesis 28:22.

²⁰ Genesis 35:9-10

²¹ Genesis 37:3.

²² Genesis 37:22.

²³ Genesis 37:36.

²⁴ Genesis 39:3.

²⁵ Genesis 39:4.

²⁶ Genesis 39:7-9.

²⁷ Genesis 41:55.

²⁸ Genesis 46:3.

²⁹ Genesis 46:2.

³⁰ Genesis 46:26

³¹ Genesis 50:1-3.

³² Genesis 50:12-13

Biblical Study of Responsibility

terminal responsibilities after death such as embalment and the coffin as follows:

And Joseph said to his brethren, “I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”

Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.”

So Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin ...³³

Coffin cannot conclude characterizations of responsibility. Rather, let us conclude with the beneficial burden of showing so much light when carrying out our earthly responsibilities that we would thereby make Heaven through the merits of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

³³ Genesis 50:24-26.