

## A Biblical View of Land Reform (1)

### Rationale

South Africa is a blessed nation in terms of size. Look how big our country is, 1 219 912 square kilometres. This makes it slightly bigger than Germany, Italy, Holland, France and Belgium combined. But look at the GDP of some of these nations. SA is five times bigger than the UK. When you look at our population we are only 55 million in comparison to Germany's 88 million, UK 65 million and France 66 million. Israel is 59 times smaller than SA, yet look at what it produces and how its GDP is bigger than ours. Israel is not a naturally agricultural country with regards to what the land is like, yet it is known for producing a 40 types of fruit. It also produces the most amount of milk per cow in the world. Israel is only about 20 000 square kilometres.

### God applies to all of life

Joseph is a respected bible character. Hardly anything negative is said about him in Scripture. He was such an example of a reformer. God gave him a template that saved the region. God is raising up believers today to do the same. God has something to say about all of life. My wife recently had a vision to do with famine in the land. God shows us things and gives us blueprints for restoration. Joseph had prophetic advantage and God used this to save nations, the Israelites and the Egyptians etc.

### Gen 43:23-27

**Joseph said to the people, "Now that I have bought you and your land today for Pharaoh, here is seed for you so you can plant the ground. 24 But when the crop comes in, give a fifth of it to Pharaoh. The other four-fifths you may keep as seed for the fields and as food for yourselves and your households and your children." 25 "You have saved our lives," they said. "May we find favour in the eyes of our lord; we will be in bondage to Pharaoh." 26 So Joseph established it as a law concerning land in Egypt—still in force today—that a fifth of the produce belongs to Pharaoh. It was only the land of the priests that did not become Pharaoh's. 27 Now the Israelites settled in Egypt in the region of Goshen. They acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number.**

My goal is to give a framework for this to be discussed. This is not an implementation plan but a series of questions to help us to reflect. It is also a set of guardrails to be embedded in the discourse and strategies. I want to deal with the land question firstly because it's very topical today in SA, but also because of the significance of land in scripture. Many people don't understand this.

**Land can be polluted and defiled because of our actions. We want our land to be blessed.**

Numbers 35:33-34

*"Do not pollute the land where you are. Bloodshed pollutes the land, and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it. 34 Do not defile the land where you live and where I dwell, for I, the Lord, dwell among the Israelites."*

Have you every tried to farm in a region that is spiritually polluted?

**The state of the land is a sign of our state with God.**

2 Chron 7:13-14

*13 "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, 14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

Land can be healed. The state of the land is not static. We have the power to change the state of the land. Our prayers can affect the destiny of our agriculture. There is therefore a strong spiritual and sacred dimension to land.

This is fairly close to me because my grandfather left teaching and started farming in 1953. *Matenganyika*. Africa Purchase Land. These were strong farmers, but they had title deeds and a sense of ownership. Even today there are strong commercial farmers giving prizes and helping to strengthen the indigenous farmers. I have also seen Zimbabwe lose great farmers due to the land invasions. Some of the best farmers are now in Zambia and countries up North. A friend of ours started a process where he taught people how to farm God's way, a concept that has spread throughout the world. Despite the fact that he voluntarily started a process of giving his farm to his workers and educating them etc his farm was still taken. Many today are not farming but own farms. If someone has the power to give you a farm they can also take it away.

### **What took place generations ago can have its effects altered by "identificational" repentance.**

Leviticus 26:40-42 *"But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors—their unfaithfulness and their hostility toward me, 41 which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies—then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, 42 I will remember my covenant...."*

We should be careful of dissociating ourselves from things that our forefathers did. We can confess these things too and take ownership. So often we want the blessing that came from our heritage but we forget that we also have a role to play in drawing a line in the sand. On one hand witchcraft and ancestralism defile the land and on the other hand violently oppressing people defiles the land.

### **The consequences are clear – it's not guess work**

This is also close to my heart as I see SA about to repeat the mistakes made by my country Zimbabwe. *Those who were given land - due to lack of knowledge, resources and the desire to utilise it - have failed to produce enough food for the nation. Others, who also benefited from the chaotic land reform programme, only did so for speculative purposes and are holding on to vast tracts of idle land. The country last year produced only 65 million litres of milk against annual requirements of 120 million litres....This is the same country that used to produce about 300 million litres of milk back in the 1990s, before the dairy herd was destroyed after land reform. Crecey Kuyedzwa (5 Lessons SA can learn from Zim land grabs)*

*"We have a lot of capital resources dotted around the world, including Australia, and we are saying all of them must come back and start the agricultural business on a fresh page,".....Clearly, the formulas deployed then left a lot of bad feeling. And more importantly, the intellectual property left our borders," said Nyabadza, Chairman of the ARDA (AGRICULTURAL and Rural Development Authority)*

SAPOA (South African Property Owners Association) CEO Neil Gopal said in a statement. "SAPOA supports a land expropriation process where the rights of present and future landowners are balanced, with the need to ensure stability and economic growth,"

We need to learn from our neighbour's mistakes and also learn from those who are doing farming well eg Canada. 98% of farms in Canada are family owned and run. Canada's agriculture industry, is now centred around technological innovation. If SA gets the land issue right it will generate so many jobs. In Canada young people are now attracted to farming as they are seeing multiple careers in it; marketing and sales, supply chain, technology etc.

Phumlani M. Majozi states *"My view has always been that whatever land reform policy we pursue – and we must pursue one – it must guarantee that private property rights are protected – and that it only, and only, addresses the needs of those previously negatively affected by land policies of the apartheid era. Regardless of their colour. And trust me, the majority of those beneficiaries will automatically be black – because the majority*

*of South Africans are black – and the majority of those who were dispossessed of land before 1994 are likely to be black... The notion that black poor people will prosper from expropriation of land without compensation is so deceptive that I wonder why people believe it. The policy is about politicians and their hunger for political power .... If the government is serious about helping the landless poor, then its first step must be to handover the land it owns to the poor. While in the process, it is educating and upskilling citizens so they earn higher income to afford to buy land for themselves with their money.”*

In Zimbabwe it became about the politicians and the poor remained poor. When land reform is based on race we will have problems. In SA the land claims process should continue for those who were previously disposed. This will transform the rural society which was largely affected. Sadly, there are educated people that think that they have a right to free land just because of their skin colour. This is not great because those who should be the true beneficiaries end up losing out. In all of this, the biggest losers are the poor. Political parties are promising land to everyone. Where will it come from. They are creating the impression that if you are black you have the right to get free land. In January Cyril Ramaphosa said he didn't think that "anyone should be overly concerned or nervous" with regards to the land issue.

There is a case for land reform - 'Land is the most basic need for rural dwellers. Apartheid policies pushed millions of black South Africans into overcrowded and impoverished reserves, homelands and townships. In addition, capital intensive agricultural policies led to the large-scale eviction of farm dwellers from their land and homes... Only a tiny minority of black people can afford land on the free market.' Commissioned report on land redistribution (Kepe and Hall, 2016).

Max DuPreez stated that the burning land question is actually not a land question. It is more about symbolism, history and inequality than about land to live and farm on. As a result this makes it a more complex issue.

**As we build our nation and reform and redress the status quo, there are some key questions to answer:**

### **1. Is your heart attitude RIGHT?**

**What's the heart attitude of the believer?** Are you willing to forgive or are you going to play God? Often when we don't forgive it means we don't trust that God is ultimately our source. You can take matters into your own hands but still not prosper.

#### **Genesis 50:15-21**

**When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" 16 So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 17 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept. 18 His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. 19 But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? 20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. 21 So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.**

The question of land redistribution needs to be seen in the broader context of our attempt to right the wrongs of the past. What is the biblical attitude we are called to have when it comes to this. There are many permutations with regards to the policy and behavioural ramifications but the foundation must always be the right heart. Many times a policy might be created but when the beneficiaries are full of greed then the implementation becomes problematic.

Sometimes when we are discriminated against we feel that we are in the worst possible situation. Always remember that there is someone that has had it worse than you. As we embark on this journey, let's examine Ruby Bridges, particularly paying attention to her reaction toward the discrimination that she experienced. This heart foundation is

key to any kind of redressing of the status quo. Ruby Bridges. Ruby Nell Bridges Hall (born September 8, 1954) is an American civil rights activist. She was the first African-American child to desegregate the all-white William Frantz Elementary School in Louisiana during the New Orleans school desegregation crisis in 1960.

(Insert Ruby Bridges Clip)

## **2. Are you creating the culture you want?**

If we want a specific culture in this nation, there is a way to create culture. Perhaps we want a culture of diversity, what should we do?

Culture is created by:

What you teach; What you model; What you reward; What you measure; what you celebrate; how leaders respond to crises; our rituals; etc

If we truly want a culture of diversity then it can't be diversity whilst leaving certain groups out.

## **3. Do you have a stewardship mindset?**

*Psalms 24:1 The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains, The world, and those who dwell in it.*

*1 Corinthians 10:26 The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains,*

*Gen 2:15 Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.*

When you own land you have an obligation to be a faithful steward of it.

*Gen 12:6-7 Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite was then in the land. The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land " So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him*

God can give you land that was once inhabited by others.