

Studies in the Life of Joseph

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The touching and exquisite story which we are about to consider has been through all ages a choice pleasure ground for young and old for the simple and the sage. It is a story told with admirable simplicity and directness and full of a pathos such as the sacred pen alone can record, which affects every human heart in which feeling dwells. But the supreme value of the narrative does not lie in the simple style, the tender pathos or the amazing sequence of events, issuing ultimately in the rightful exaltation of Joseph. It lies in the spiritual lessons which may be gathered from the history of this man, in many respects the most remarkable in Old Testament history, and one of the two merely human characters presented to us in the Bible without a flaw.

Of the early life of Joseph nothing is recorded. He was, we know, the elder son of Rachel and the child of Jacob's old age, and could not have been more than five or six years of age when his father left Mesopotamia. His mother died when he was yet young and a double care of him consequently devolved upon the father, a care which made for good, for Jacob had meantime been the subject of that wonderful transformation from "supplanter" to "a prince with God." There can be little doubt that the duplicity of the parents, the jealousy, bickering and scheming in Haran at the home of Laban, had made permanent and injurious impressions on the elder sons of Jacob, who had grown up to be utterly unfit companions for their younger brother. Nor are such impressions and influences to be found in the pages of Scripture alone, but we are all familiar with the havoc that has been played in many a professing Christian household by the inconsistencies of the parents in the home circle. It is just here that what a man or woman is finds most scope for expression, and we may be very sure that if our private life belies our public utterances and conduct we have placed a formidable stumbling stone in the path of our little ones. Our own influence will be reflected in theirs, and few influences can be more detrimental than that of an older brother of bad character over a younger.

The evil conduct of his half brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, had come as "a painful surprise to the pure and tender-hearted Joseph," "and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report." Mere tale-bearing is always despicable, but there are times when it is a duty to speak; when only a mistaken idea of honour, or cowardice, can account for silence. Regard for the good name of his father extracted this evil report which was made without exaggeration and without malice, so that far from being blameworthy his action was necessary and wholly praiseworthy: the outcome of his ingenuous simplicity and an indication of the integrity of his character. The rebuke which his life administered to them but added fuel to the hatred and jealousy which was the result of the ill-concealed partiality of his father. One may be

inclined to judge the special favour shown by Jacob as imprudent, but it is easily understood. Here was the child of his beloved Rachel, the son of his old age, one who early showed an appreciation for the truth of God and with whom alone of all his sons Jacob could discourse concerning the promises made to the fathers. Reuben by His gross sin had forfeited the birthright, and the coat of many colours was the indication that what was Reuben's by natural right had passed to Joseph, the beloved of the father.

“Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel,” (for he was the firstborn, but forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel; and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright. For Judah prevailed above his brethren and of him came the chief ruler, but the birthright was Joseph's) (1 Chr. 5:1-2). The coat was a long sleeved coat such as was worn in Eastern countries by those of rank and designated the wearer as one who did not require to do ordinary work. A mere stripling of 17 years had become heir to property, possessions and privileges and had been set over his brethren! No wonder that, being what they were, they “hated him and could not speak peaceably unto him.”

And yet another factor contributed to their hatred. This younger brother had been vouchsafed dreams by God—dreams of coming greatness, doubtless given him now to sustain him in days of trial and sorrows to come, and these be narrated to his brethren. The import was most clearly that they should bow down to serve him. In the second dream given to confirm the first, not only did his eleven brethren but his father and mother (Leah) also did obeisance. And although his father deemed it right to rebuke him, he “observed the saying” but “his brethren envied him.”

The story of the betrayal of Joseph while portraying so graphically the abysmal depravity of the unregenerate human heart, is from another viewpoint a glorious demonstration of the overruling by God of the wrath and malice of men for the accomplishment of His purposes of mercy and of grace. In the performance of their duties as shepherds the sons of Jacob had moved to Shechem for pasturage. It is one of those valuable undesigned coincidences of Scripture that their stay there should have caused anxiety to Israel. When we remember how the name of Jacob had been made to stink there as the result of the cruelty of Simeon and Levi (see chap. 34), it is not surprising that the old man feared reprisals and sent Joseph to see whether it was well with his brethren and their flocks and to bring word again. The promptness of the son's response to the father's plan was characteristic of his filial obedience, as he said, “Here am I”; while his wholehearted earnestness to bring the mission to a successful issue was demonstrated in the fact that although they were not to be found at Shechem he pressed on to Dothan in his search for them. His brethren espied him while he was yet a long way off. His dress was remarkable and the practised eye of the

shepherd—keen as that of the mariner—soon picked up across the Eastern plain the familiar figure of the ‘dreamer.’ “And they said one to another, Behold the dreamer cometh, come now therefore and let us slay him.”

It is well to note the comparative magnanimity of Reuben. He it was who, as we have seen, was most intimately affected by the place given to Joseph, yet he rescued him from an immediate death by having him consigned to an empty pit, the relic of a fruitless search for water. His intention it would seem was to rescue Joseph from his brethren and to deliver him to his father again, but it was marked by that fatal weakness and instability which marred his character. While the proposal was so far good it was in fact merely a modification of the crime, and his action remains a beacon against the folly of temporising with evil instead of stoutly resisting it. The chance to effect the proposed deliverance never came to Reuben: the deferred good intention became a lost opportunity over which he was left to mourn; and “they stripped Joseph of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him: and they took him and cast him into a pit and they sat down to eat bread.” That an affecting scene was witnessed as they bound him to put him into the pit as to which Scripture is here silent, is revealed on the occasion of their first visit to Egypt. The conviction of their guilt forcing itself upon them they said one to another, “We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us and we would not hear.” And as Joseph then took Simeon and bound him before their eyes, it seems not improbable that that “instrument of cruelty” played a leading part in the binding of his young brother. But as they partook of their meal an incident occurred which entirely altered their plans. “They lifted up their eyes and looked and behold a company of Ishmaelites came from Gilead with their camels, bearing spicery and myrrh going to carry it down to Egypt.”

Let us not overlook the fact that the details of this incident—a perfectly natural one and yet a stroke of genius were these Old Testament stories mere fabrications of the human mind—ring true to life. There was no need for the writer to specify the lading of the camels, but what we know of Egypt and Egyptian customs at that time confirms that these were just such commodities as would find an ample market there. When the apparent trivialities of a story bear the hall-mark of truth and show the writer to be conversant with the facts, we can depend upon it that the larger issues of the history have been accurately reported by him. The eagerness of the merchants to obtain Syrian slaves for the Egyptian market was well known to Joseph’s brethren, and Judah’s suggestion that they should sell him was promptly adopted and acted upon. Opportunity may favour the deeds of evil men just as plainly as those of good, so that favourable circumstances in themselves are not an indication of what is according to the divine will. “And they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver; and they brought Joseph to Egypt.” The crowded programme of their sinful acts sprang from envy as James says, “Where

envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.”

What thoughts must have crowded upon the mind of Joseph as he found himself a fettered slave bound for exile in a foreign land. Was God indeed true to the promises afforded to him in dreams? Little did he imagine that in days to come surveying the past he would realize most clearly that “God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform” and that the dastardly deeds of his brothers were but links in the chain of loving providence. True it is that God “makes the wrath of man to praise Him; and the remainder of wrath will He restrain.” The day was coming when in the light of God’s will accomplished, he would be able to say, “As for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive.” As for Joseph, “The Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh’s and Captain of the Guard”; as for Jacob, his affection for his son made him quick to believe the suggestion conveyed by the garment dipped in blood, “And he knew it and said, it is my son’s coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces.” Utterly disconsolate, smitten with grief, he refused to be comforted. The shock of bereavement, it would appear, had for the time deprived him of the consolation of resource to God for in this sore trial there is no mention of Jehovah. Nor is the sorrowing one referred to as Israel. How like him we are! So overwhelmed by our bitter experiences, and perhaps inwardly so aggrieved that they should have been permitted to come upon us that we lose the succour and sustenance that can only be had by recourse to God.

It will be well as we proceed to view Joseph as a type of Christ. Although it is nowhere asserted in Scripture that he was a type of Him Who was to come, the reverent student of Scripture can hardly fail to draw comparisons and see analogies. Joseph was Jacob’s well beloved son, for we read “Israel loved Joseph, more than all his children.” Jesus was the “beloved Son” of God. By Jordan’s waters the heavens were opened upon Him and the voice of the Father from heaven declared, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” The coat of many colours marked Joseph out as heir, and declared that to him was given the place of headship and lordship. And is not Christ declared to be “Heir of all things,” while God hath decreed that He will yet be universally owned as Lord. The kernel of all prophecy is the declaration that Christ Jesus shall yet rule and reign over His brethren according to the flesh. But the Jews have acted precisely as the brethren of Joseph did; they have declared emphatically “we will not have this Man to reign over us.” The counsel taken by his brethren to slay him was characteristic of the guilty conduct of the Jews in the days of our Lord. In Matthew 27:1 we read “When the morning was come the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death.”

The ready response of Joseph to the call of the father is but a faint prediction of the willingness of the Eternal Son of God to do the Father’s will. “Then said I, Lo I come (in

the volume of the book it is written of Me) to do Thy will, O God.” Joseph was sent to seek his brethren and He who was the Antitype came first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Joseph was mocked and set at naught by his brethren. “They conspired against him to slay him, and they said Behold the dreamer cometh.” And Herod with his men of war set Christ at naught and mocked Him. Joseph was sold for 20 pieces of silver—and the brethren of Christ covenanted with Judas for thirty pieces. The anguish of Joseph’s comparatively pure soul reminds us of the strong crying and tears wrung from the Saviour, as the Spotless One—“holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners” anticipated all that lay before Him at the cross. But Joseph’s sufferings stopped short of death although doubtless the pit wherein was no water, typifies Hades; Christ tasted death. We have seen in anticipation that the betrayal of Joseph accomplished the purposes of God, the wicked hands of the crucifiers of Christ but fulfilled the determinate counsel of God’s grace for a sinful world.

It is just when we see Christ set forth typically that we appreciate the opening of this chapter of Genesis. We read in verse 2, “These are the generations of Jacob,” and curiously there immediately follows the story of Joseph. This section is the last one in the book but is it not fitting that the book which opens with the promise of Christ—the seed of the woman—should conclude with a prophetic intimation of Him and His coming and of what that coming will mean for Israel and the world?

“The story of the generations of Jacob”—the ultimate outcome of his existence, is the revelation of him who sets forth the well beloved Son of God. Happy they who have bowed the knee to Him and drawn from the fullness of His supplies!

The abrupt change from Chapter 27 to that which succeeds it arouses profound curiosity and demands an explanation if that be possible.

We have been following with keen interest the simple but powerful story of the rejection of Joseph and having witnessed him carried down to Egypt expect to have unfolded to us the account of his fortunes in that land of antiquity and mystery. But no! instead, we have an interpolation; an unsavoury record of the sins of Judah and his offspring, forming an unwarranted and unpleasant interruption in the narrative if this compilation be no more than human.

The very candour of this chapter, however, in recording the depravity of Judah, the human ancestor of the Messiah, bears testimony that the Book is of God. And if we marvel at the corruption so graphically exposed, let us be astounded at the grace of God that permitted the descent of our blessed Redeemer, not merely from Judah but also from Tamar. Certain it is that man would never have used such sorry instruments for the fulfilment of his designs even if he could. Divine grace and power alone can take up the children of men sunk in the mire of degradation and through them

accomplish purposes of blessing for the world. This chapter brings vividly before our notice the force of corruption to which the family chosen of God, for the blessing of mankind, was exposed in Canaan. It was with a view to the segregation of the chosen people that God permitted Joseph to be led into Egypt. It was necessary that Israel should “come out and be separate” and their separation was secured by their transfer to that land where they dwelt amongst a people notorious for their “rigid exclusiveness.” Moreover, after the fall of the Northern Kingdom and the captivity of the ten tribes, Judah became identified with the Israelitish people as a whole, so that they were spoken of everywhere as “the people of the Jews.” Judah seems to be specially selected here as the representative of the rejecters of Joseph—type of Christ. He it was, as we found recorded in the previous chapter, who proposed and effected the sale of God’s chosen saviour; this is the sin which specifically characterised his descendants in the day of the anti-type, when the Jews of Jerusalem rejected the Christ of God.

Chapter 39 takes up the story of Joseph in Egypt. So far as he is concerned, the story has already been the revelation of a character unique in patience and in power. Apart from the intimation of injustice made to the butler and the allusion twenty years later to the “anguish of his soul,” not a word suggestive of reproach escaped his youthful lips. The sudden transfer from the attentions of an over indulgent father, to the hardships of the lot of slavery in the house of Potiphar, only served to reveal his virility, industry, and talent. These were rewarded by promotion in the house of Potiphar until all that his Master most treasured was committed to his care. Two things explain his success. Firstly, God was with him, “And the Lord was with Joseph and he was a prosperous man,” Here is how John Wycliffe rendered the words in 1738, “he was a luckie fellowe.” A complete stranger in a foreign land, snatched from home and friends, with nothing to call his own, sold into slavery, being thus deprived of freedom, we would scarcely describe him as dogged by good fortune. Yet was he truly prosperous, since the Lord was with him. Prosperity is not due to mere outward circumstances but to inward character, and this depends upon our fidelity to God. Instead of complaining that God had been unmindful of him, and had given him an intolerable burden to bear in life, he performed the duties assigned to him with all his might and herein lies the second secret of his success. It is not, however, unrelated to the first, for his ambitions and energies were not exercised for personal promotion but whatever he was given to do, he did as to the Lord. His personal relationship with God was to him the most important thing in life, and just because that was so, God was with him, His presence cheering him in his loneliness, His power prospering him in all his labours, so that even Potiphar could not help recognising it “and Joseph found grace in his sight,” and to him was given the oversight of all that Potiphar had. But days of prosperity are days of peril, and Joseph was soon to pass through a time of peculiar temptation. He was a young man of good appearance, physically attractive, for we read, “Joseph was a goodly person and well favoured,” and this was the

occasion of the fierce temptation which assailed him. But thank God, this young man of God, chose the better part, and through the record of the temptation there has been preserved to all ages the words which all who are struggling against the powers of Satan and of the flesh may wield as the sword of the Spirit, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" "He refused," and behind this refusal there was the integrity which considered what was due to the trust and confidence reposed in him by his Master, but beyond this there was the supreme sense of what was due to God. Thus was Joseph victorious. Her rank did not flatter him, her repeated temptations did not seduce him, for his sense of the reality of God made him willing rather to endure a woman's hate and all its consequences, than the judgment of God. Well may we for whom Christ died say, "How can I do this great wickedness?" It may seem in the eyes of others to affect men only, but we know that in reality it is sin against the holy God. "Discretion," it is said, "is the better part of valour," and Joseph is to be commended in escaping as he did. Better to lose his coat than to lose his good conscience.

The silence of Joseph is again remarkable. The falsehood of this wicked woman is effective just because Joseph's lips were sealed against exposing her infamy and so overwhelming his Master with shame and sorrow. But his silence and quiet endurance of a great wrong shut him in with God and permitted Him to have His perfect work. Again Joseph is thrown into circumstances which were calculated to make the iron enter his soul. From the heights of prosperity, through the surges of peril, he emerged the victim of slander in an Egyptian prison. His absence of self-defence gave scope to the world to believe the worst; the absence of divine intervention gave opportunity for faithlessness to disbelieve the divine intentions declared in dreams to him. But Joseph was no cynic, and in prison, as in prosperity, he cast himself on God. He was there "in prison,"—numbered with malefactors, a sufferer for righteousness' sake, "But the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy." There was repeated in prison the experience of service in Potiphar's household for "the Keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in prison and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to anything that was under his hand; because the Lord was with him and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper." How evident in Joseph's case that God honours those who honour Him. If God tests us it is that we might be attested, and under the yoke of slavery, suspicion, slander, imprisonment, Joseph displays faithfulness, integrity, and true nobility of character. Nor had God forgotten him as we have seen. Yea, the very events suggestive of forgetfulness were but rungs in the ladder of exaltation. And so in our pathway if we but remain true to Him, the troubles that assail and affright, though they appear like overwhelming us, will ultimately prove to be blessings in disguise.

Now there were cast into prison with Joseph two notable prisoners, the chief butler and baker of Pharaoh's household. It would appear that an attempt to poison the King had been made and doubt remaining in the mind of Pharaoh as to whether it had been

administered in the food or wines, both these servants were suspected and put in ward. Attendance upon them was the lot of Joseph, and this special duty seems to have been entrusted to him by none other than Potiphar himself. An instructive lesson for us in this phase of Joseph's experience is not merely his devotion to duty, but his watchfulness. "And Joseph came in unto them in the morning, and looked upon them, and behold they were sad." How many there are in this sad world today who are bowed under a load of sorrow and care and are peculiarly susceptible, on that account, to a word of encouragement which will bear testimony to the ways and goodness of God. Let such as have grace and fitness from God to do it, in the spirit of the compassion of the Master, ever be on the alert to ask like Joseph, "Wherefore look ye so sadly today?" "And they said unto him, we have dreamed a dream and there is no interpreter of it." Again there is brought prominently to notice the simple but unbounded confidence of Joseph in his God. He too, had had dreams, and had he been soured by the experiences of life he could in the cynical spirit to which we are all prone have poured scathing ridicule upon the value of dreams. But God is to him the great reality in life and he bears testimony to the ability of his God to interpret, and invites them to tell their dreams. To the butler there is announced restoration to the king's favour within three days, and before him Joseph now breaks the silence and exposes the lot of injustice that has fallen to him, showing as the Psalmist reveals that "the iron entered into his soul." To him Joseph makes a calm, sober appeal to use his influence to secure his release. How free from venom and passion are the memorable words, "But think of me when it shall be well with thee, and show kindness unto me, I pray thee, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh and bring me out of this house. For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon." How remarkable the entire absence of recrimination—"stolen away"—there is no mention of the guilt of his brothers—"nothing that they should put me into the dungeon," there is no rehearsal of the evil conduct and vile plot of the wicked woman whose lie had encompassed his imprisonment. Note too, that no desire for benefits can move Joseph from the path of faithfulness and courage, and to the baker he makes known without the slightest deviation from strictest truth what is to be his sad fate. According to the interpretations, so it came to pass, and although there is no mention of promises made by the butler in the Scriptural narrative, it is no great strain on the imagination to believe that when the prison doors were opened and he was liberated to return to his responsible duties, he would bid farewell to the interpreter of his dream with an encouraging look and the assurance that he would not be forgotten. "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph but forgot him." Two years pass without the slightest token of gratitude on the part of the butler, and during this time there was opportunity for hope to give place to utter despair, for "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." Joseph had learned that to do the will of God is far more satisfying than the recognition of man, and we do not learn that there was during this period any expression of bitterness or of discontentment. Doubtless the experience was unpleasant as we have

already remarked. How could it be otherwise? No chastening seemeth pleasant but grievous, yet in the retrospect of life we realize if we let patience have her perfect work that the discipline has been for our good and that God's ways and God's time are best, and that in all the circumstances of life God's grace is sufficient in prosperity and in adversity, in slavery and in prison Jehovah was with Joseph and in that blessed fellowship he was able to triumph over circumstances.

After the lapse of two years Pharaoh himself dreamed a dream, and in spite of the fact that the colouring of the dream was peculiarly Egyptian, none of his magicians or wise men could declare the interpretation thereof. Suddenly there sprang into the mind of the butler the recollection of his prison experience, and thereupon he confessed the fault of his forgetfulness and recounted to Pharaoh the story concerning the young Hebrew. How simple and natural the association of ideas which God uses here for the fulfilment of His purposes. Pharaoh immediately sent for him, and as he stood before that earthly monarch, unmindful of none of the claims of propriety and deference, shaved and changed in raiment, he did not make use of the opportunity to magnify himself but boldly proclaimed his dependence upon God. In answer to Pharaoh's statement that it has come to his knowledge that Joseph can understand a dream to interpret it, he replied, "It is not in me; God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." Having heard the dreams, Joseph fearlessly declared the meaning of them, adding to his interpretation that the King should appoint officers to conserve the abundance of the seven years of plenty to supply the need of the seven years of famine. Pharaoh recognised that he had spoken under the power of God, "And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such an one as this, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?" This recognition was immediately followed by the appointment of Joseph to the first place of power in the Kingdom and to him were given the insignia of office, the signet ring placed upon the hand of Joseph, the vestures of fine linen given to him, the golden chain put around his neck, the second chariot made his, while the courtiers caused the people to bow the knee to Joseph. "Only on the throne," said Pharaoh, "Shall I be greater than thou"; that is, Pharaoh would only take precedence over this heaven-sent dictator on state occasions. Thus when thirty years of age Joseph was the man of supreme power in Egypt—prime minister—engaged in a masterly administration of affairs which resulted not only in benefits to Egypt alone but in succouring a needy world. Pharaoh conferred upon him the name Zaphnath-paaneah which means ether "Revealer of secrets" or "Supporter of life," and gave him to wife Asenath daughter of an Egyptian priest in On.

In the typical teaching we see Christ not merely rejected by the Jews and cast into the pit of death but rejected in resurrection. In his exaltation to the throne we see the rejected one, on the throne of Power. Today our Lord Jesus Christ shares the throne of the Father, as Joseph shared the throne of Pharaoh. While on that throne Joseph got a Gentile wife, and surely here we find an indication of the great truth declared by

Simeon in Acts 15, "God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name." He is calling out this body of Gentiles to bring them into living union with himself, as the mystical bride, His wife. This is the meaning of Christ's rejection by His brethren according to the flesh even to this hour, and meantime He is the distributor of the bounty of God to a needy world. Joseph could open all the storehouses of Egypt to meet human need in limited measure, but God in grace administers through Christ the inexhaustible fullness of heaven. Of this thank God we have received, and know our association with Him, the risen Head in whom all the fullness of the Godhead resides.

It has been said that the true statesman is the man who foresees the direction in which God is moving and becomes a co-operator with Him in the realization of the divine intentions. So clearly had Joseph divined the purpose of God that Pharaoh immediately recognised him as "A man in whom the Spirit of God is" and declared, "For as much as God hath showed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art. Thou shalt be over my house and according unto thy word shall my people be ruled: only on the throne will I be greater than thou. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt." This confidence was completely justified. His discreet administration of affairs during the seven years of plenty, when he appointed officers to take up one fifth part of the land of Egypt, the food of the fields which was around a city being laid up in the same, showed his capacity for delegating work. The answer of the King to those who cried for bread when all the land was famished "Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you do" showed how completely he had personal control of the situation. Again let it be emphasized that the secret of Joseph's success was something much deeper than a forceful character or a magnetic personality. How often do we see men of a blustering, bullying, driving, unloveable disposition becoming organisers in the affairs of the world. But behind Joseph's greatness there was that character which found its explanation in his relationship to God, so that in circumstances that would have gone to the head of most men like strong wine, he maintained a spirit of humility, amiability and tender affection as the sequel shows. May we covet such greatness and in all that our hands find to do may there be the stamp of consecrated ability!

Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph. The firstborn was named Manasseh "For God," said he, "hath made me forget all my toil and all my father's house." The second, he named Ephraim, "For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction."

The reason for the choice of name of his firstborn has been a difficulty to some. Joseph, we have asserted, was the embodiment of filial piety, and that he should rejoice in banishing all thought of his father's house seems at utter variance with his disposition. But clearly, the name of his firstborn reveals that his thoughts had in the

past ever gravitated to the old home. The conjuring up of the family circle had however been inevitably accompanied by the pain of severance and absence, and now in his new found joy the sense of loss is swallowed up, and in his new activities administrative and domestic, he rejoices that the sore of past years will find healing. More there is a predictive aspect which is illuminating and comforting for those who love their Lord. The birth of the Church may be taken as typically set forth in the birth of Manasseh, and in the joy of this, the sorrows of rejection by His brethren, degradation and deepest suffering endured at the hands of those He came to save, have been forgotten. There will, however, be a second birth when the Lord will bring to pass the words of Jeremiah the prophet, "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him. I will surely have mercy upon him saith the Lord." Then will be fulfilled the prophecy contained in the name Ephraim "double fruit," and the Lord will rejoice over His earthly heritage and with His whole heart will He bring upon them all the good that He has promised them.

God's time for fulfilling the promises given to Joseph by dreams was fast drawing near; for in saving Egypt his predicted greatness among his brethren was to be achieved. The famine was affecting other lands, indeed it "was over all the face of the earth" and "waxed sore" in the land of Canaan. Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said unto his sons, "why do ye look one upon another?" and here we enter upon one of the most interesting and affecting scenes in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Joseph's brethren came down at the first visit and when they entered the presence of the Governor seeking bread "they bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth." How vividly must his early dreams have come to Joseph's mind at that moment. Some may wonder how it was that Joseph should immediately recognise his brethren and yet he should be unknown to them. Two explanations suffice. They were of such an age at the time of separation from Joseph as not to be greatly altered in appearance by the intervening lapse of years: he had been a mere stripling of 17, and we know what a change can take place between 17 years and 37. Moreover, they were appearing in the character in which he had always known them, that of shepherds. On his part the shepherd boy had become Prime Minister of Egypt. The feelings of Joseph at this time are not revealed upon the surface of the narrative. Careful reading will show however, that an inquiry preceded his apparently harsh treatment of his brethren in which he elicited that their father was still alive and during which they made mention of their younger brother. His subsequent conduct is to test their attitude to Benjamin, and unless this is seen Joseph will be completely misunderstood. He charges them with being spies come to spy the nakedness of the land. Egypt was always exposed to invasion from the East, and during the prevailing famine the comparative immunity of Egypt from its dire effects made it more than ever a desirable object of attack. By way of substantiating the purity of their intentions they declare that they

are twelve brethren, “One is not, and one is this day with our father,” and Joseph immediately proposes a test of their honesty. They must bring down their younger brother. In reality he is anxious to assure himself that Benjamin has not been the victim of foul play and to ensure the success of his scheme he arranges that one shall be bound and cast into prison to await their return. This harsh and apparently unjustifiable treatment had the effect of reaching their consciences, for it brought to mind their own guilty past. “And they said one to another, we are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us and we would not hear: therefore is this distress come upon us.” As Joseph had spoken to them through an interpreter, they assumed that he did not understand them. The true attitude of Joseph towards them is revealed in the verse, “And he turned himself about from them, and wept.” But turning to them again, he took Simeon, who, as we have already suggested, in all probability bound Joseph when he was put into the pit, and bound him before their eyes. And so the nine departed with their sacks full and their money restored in their sacks, while Simeon was held in ward to ensure their return with Benjamin. “And it came to pass, as they emptied their sacks, that behold every man’s bundle of money was in his sack; and when both they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid.” “And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children. Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away; all these things are against me.” There seems to be the strong suspicion on Jacob’s part that his sons had accomplished Joseph’s death in spite of all they had told him. Here again we have an exhibition of the faithlessness of Jacob. “All these things are against me.” God’s providence was at work for his greatest good—Joseph was not dead, Simeon was safe, Benjamin would be preserved and he himself would yet see God’s goodness and praise Him for it.

When Jacob proposes that they should go again to Egypt he is reminded that no good purpose can be served by such a visit unless the conditions laid down by the Governor be observed, “Ye shall not see my face except your brother be with you,” had been his emphatic declaration. Like a flash there beams forth the old Jacob in his character of deceiver, “Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother?” Driven by necessity, however, Jacob is at last compelled to let them go a second time to Egypt. He pays little heed to the offers of Judah to stand surety for Benjamin, but again, true to his nature as revealed throughout his whole life-story, he relies upon his own devices and advises them to take double money in their hand in addition to the money restored in their sacks, and gifts of fruit, balm, honey, spices, myrrh, nuts and almonds to placate the Governor. “And the men took that present, and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph. And when Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the ruler of his house. Bring these men home and slay and make ready; for these men shall dine with me at noon.” Again they did obeisance, presenting to him the gifts which they had brought, and they bowed themselves to the earth. Joseph’s intense personal interest is disguised by his kindly solicitude in their

affairs as he enquires, "Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive? His emotion as he looked upon his younger brother was too strong to suppress, "His bowels did yearn upon his brother, and he sought where to weep, and entered into his chamber and wept there." Coming before them again, master of himself, he orders bread to be set before them. The Egyptians present dine by themselves, Joseph by himself and his brethren, every man according to his age, "the eldest according to his birthright," "the youngest according to his youths" so that the men marvelled. As a mark of special favour Benjamin was given five times as much as the others, and as the others, doubtless receive liberal portions, Benjamin's ration appears not merely disconcerting but positively alarming. The prodigality of food bestowed upon the individual thus signally honoured was with a view to the distribution to his friends, and the motive behind it; in this case was not merely special love for Benjamin, but it provided a test as to how the ten were disposed to their youngest brother to whom the preference had been shown. It would appear that they passed this test but Joseph had a more severe one awaiting them. As soon as morning light broke they departed for home, their asses being laden with corn. But before they had proceeded far from the city a steward pursued them, and having overtaken them accused them of having stolen the divining cup with which his master divined. Justly repudiating such a charge and indignant that such base ingratitude for the kindnesses received could have been believed of them, they agree that whoever is guilty—if guilt be substantiated—should die, and that justly. To their horror the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. They could not doubt their eyes and apparently they believed that Benjamin was guilty, for Judah said to Joseph, "What shall we say unto my lord? What shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants." The offer is made to them to return in peace. Benjamin will not be killed but retained as a servant. If they do not acquiesce in this proposal they are changed indeed. How changed they are is seen by Judah's noble offer to remain a bondsman instead of Benjamin. In pleading for his young brother Judah unwittingly touches the tenderest string in Joseph's heart, "My lord asked his servants, saying, Have ye a father or a brother? And we said unto my lord, we have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age . . . and his father loveth him." "We said unto my lord, The lad cannot leave his father, for if he should his father would die."

At the oft repeated mention of his father in such affectionate terms Joseph could no longer refrain himself. Every other having gone out of their presence Joseph made himself known unto his brethren, and wept aloud so that the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. Again he enquires after his father, "Doth my father yet live?" Now for the first time their crime is mentioned, but it is to themselves alone and in the hearing of none others. "Now therefore, be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me thither, for God did send me before you to preserve life." Not one word had he said to others. This is made clear by the glad reception that was given to his brethren by the Egyptians when they said, "Joseph's brethren are come." He had so

completely overcome all feeling of hatred or desire for revenge that he manifested only pure good towards them and saw in all that had transpired the working of a mighty God, not merely for his own good but also for theirs.

Typically this section shows us Christ upon the throne, the Giver of bread to a needy world. The despised and rejected One is the passport to favour and He who was set at nought by His brethren is the only Saviour for a starving world. The narrative discloses a universal misery with one and only one competent to remove the affliction. There is bread enough and to spare, and there is heavenly manna for the soul, but Jesus alone is the dispenser thereof. The granaries of Egypt might be exhausted of their supplies, but in Christ the resources are inexhaustible. The Egyptians had to buy; we receive all without money and without price. Those who perish, starve because they will not take.

Notice too that it is after the Gentile bride becomes associated with Joseph on the throne of power that Joseph's brethren begin to experience their trials. The tribulation for Israel will come in after the Church has been exalted on high.

When our Lord comes the second time His ancient people will know and own Him. "And they shall look upon Him whom they pierced." We have seen how tender was the interview when Joseph revealed himself to them upon the occasion of their second visit, and we know that repentant Judah shall bow with tears upon the cheeks before Him who was crucified. Then shall they bemoan the crime and folly of the Cross; then shall He comfort them and assure them of His love.

Accompanied by wagons and laden with gifts the brethren of Joseph returned to Canaan, commissioned to bear glad tidings to their aged father. How glorious the message (1) Joseph lives, (2) He is the exalted one, (3) He bids Jacob and all of them welcome to himself. If any should have a lurking suspicion that to leave Canaan is to renounce all, then Joseph's reassuring word is "Regard not the stuff, for the good of all the land of Egypt is yours." Ours is the privilege to proclaim like tidings of great joy. Christ lives! True He died, but He rose and lives the exalted One, a Prince and a Saviour who is willing to receive all who come to Him.

The words of Joseph addressed to his brethren as they set out may seem strange at first sight, but they are instructive, "See that ye fall not out by the way," said he. He knew them well, and the power of evil, the sluice gates of which are often opened by a word of foolish recrimination spoken at the very moment of newly realized joy and blessing. The words should come as a wholesome admonition to us today. At the very moment when more than ever before we should be recognising the essential unity of those who are brethren in Christ, and when commissioned to be the bearers of a gracious invitation to others, let us not be so occupied with past delinquencies in others that in the emphasis of these we shall fall out with each other in the way and

our testimony to the world be marred and nullified. The secret of preserving the unity that becomes those who are brethren, clearly lies in rejoicing in the gracious manifestation of Him who once rejected by us is now our exalted and acknowledged Lord, and in obedience to His precepts.

Their safe arrival must have gladdened the heart of Jacob. All that he had hoped for was clearly achieved. Simeon was there again and his beloved Benjamin had returned. Provisions were plentiful and he had looked for nothing more. What then must have been his surprise when he was assured "Joseph is yet alive, and is Governor over all the land of Egypt." The message itself however, in spite of its jubilant delivery, did not suffice for the aged sceptic, who had deceived and had been deceived too often in life to be marked by childlike receptivity, but who was greatly influenced by material and tangible evidences. For him, seeing was believing. And when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived, and Israel said, "It is enough. Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die." The change in name is significant. Jacob again becomes Israel; doubt gives place to confident trust.

It demanded a virile faith to leave Canaan and to go into Egypt. This was without doubt the land which God had promised to him and to his fathers. He was now an old man, and Canaan had for him intimate and tender associations. Down to Egypt had been for Abraham and for Isaac the path of mere human resource, and had spelt disaster. On his way Jacob had halted at Beersheba and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. God revealed Himself as the Mighty One, the God of his father, and gave him a fourfold promise. (1) "I will there make of thee a great nation," (2) "I will go down with thee," (3) "I will surely bring thee up again," and (4) "Joseph shall put his hand on thine eyes." Thus did God affirm that the things which Jacob had declared were all against him were under the government of God really for him. In spite of our doubts, dismay, dejection, God moves on in infinite love fulfilling His purposes, but how much anxious and devitalising care we would be spared if we learned from what has been written for our admonition the lesson of repose in God. The promise, "I will surely bring thee up again," might seem to have miscarried, but was literally fulfilled in his body being carried up and buried in the cave of the field of Machpelah. Doubtless it was actually to be interpreted more widely in the promise fulfilled in his seed.

In Egypt under Joseph's care they were guaranteed peace, protection, and plenty, and in the seclusion of Goshen, segregated from the baneful influences of Canaan, which threat cited not merely the morality but the very existence of a people so few in number, God was providing the right environment for the fulfilment of His promise, "I will there make thee a great nation." Joseph's determination to emphasize that his brethren were shepherds and his insistence that they should declare themselves to have been keepers of cattle from their youth up in spite of the fact that "Every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians," was doubtless in God's plan for the

imposition of a severe line of demarcation between His people and the Egyptians, so that genuine separation might be secured. In spite of the fact that “every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians,” the Pharaoh of that day welcomed the father and brethren of Joseph. This fits in well with the generally accepted chronology which places Joseph in the reign of one of the last Shepherd-Kings of Hyksos. These kings originally entered as conquerors from Asia. They were responsible for the introduction of the horse and chariot into Egypt, and it is interesting to note that there is no mention of the horse or chariot in Biblical history until we reach the story of Joseph. Here again we have a trivial detail, the accuracy of which affords strong evidence that the record was not written up centuries later as modern critics would have us believe.

The sixty-six souls which came out of his loins accompanied Jacob into Egypt. Joseph and his two sons and Jacob himself made seventy—“the house of Jacob.” Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph, although born in Egypt, are reckoned as coming into Egypt in the loins of their father, even as Levi is said to have paid tithes to Melchisedek (Heb. 7:9). The seventy-five mentioned in Acts 7:14, as going down to Egypt, must be understood to include the wives of Jacob’s sons who went with them. Now Judah’s wife was dead (Gen. 38:12) and we may infer that Simeon’s was dead also (Gen. 46:10). At any rate nine others remained, which added to the 66 would give a total of 75—“all his kindred.” There is no discrepancy when the distinctions implied in the Scriptural language used are observed.

Joseph’s observance of the sanctity of family relationship is peculiarly charming. We can well understand that his ingenuous simplicity in introducing his bucolic brethren and his unsophisticated father to Pharaoh, was affording an opportunity to Egyptian courtiers to turn the lip of contempt at his humble origin, and to express indignant surprise that one with such unpretentious antecedents should be exercising such power in Egypt. But Joseph’s love for his father and his brethren did not falter, and it is good for us all to remember that “in the maintenance and the furtherance of family life and love will be found one of the channels of blessing to the world.”

The venerable Jacob standing before Pharaoh presents a picture of rare dignity. Throughout his long pilgrimage he vacillated between faith and fear, but before this great ruler he stands in the conscious sense of the exalted position he holds in the divine economy. Although receiving a great favour from this earthly monarch, he pronounced a blessing upon him, and truly the less is blessed of the greater. Yet while there is elevated dignity, there is no assumption of superiority nor arrogation of secular authority; no distasteful condescension which but genders resentment. There is that simplicity of grace however, which enabled him to function as a channel of blessing, and to accept a God-given opportunity for conferring a benediction. And such is ever the role of a godly people amongst an ungodly. Not the assertion of temporal authority but the bestowal of blessing in the spirit of meekness and of godly fear.

“And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt until this day that Pharaoh should have the fifth part.” This was, as we know from an earlier chapter, the precise fraction “taken up” in the years of plenty before the famine began. It was then an arrangement entered into with the proprietors to ensure the existence of the people, and having worked, such a contribution was now made obligatory so that an accidental failure of harvest might be provided against. It consolidated in a most notable way the powers of the king, and if to any in our day the arrangement seems harsh and overbearingly autocratic, let him remember that to the Egyptians themselves it appeared eminently reasonable. They said, “Thou hast saved our lives; let us find grace in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh’s servants.” Settled in Goshen the children of Israel entered upon a period of prosperity and of phenomenal numerical expansion; they “grew and multiplied exceedingly.” Jacob lived in the land seventeen years before dying. In anticipating his death both the faith and fear which manifested themselves so often in life are evident again; faith inasmuch as he chose to be buried in Canaan, having the assurance in his heart that God would give the land to his seed; fear in that he made Joseph swear to observe his dying requests. “And he swear unto him. And Israel bowed himself upon the bed’s head” or, as the Hebrew suggests, he turned himself in bed and knelt in the attitude of prayer. The Septuagint version followed in the Epistle to the Hebrews reads, “Israel worshipped leaning on the top of his staff.” Whichever reading be adopted, the attitude is suggestive of prayerful worship, a calm and beautiful sunset to a life often overcast by dark clouds and ruffled by many a storm.

The interchange of names—Jacob and Israel—at the end of chapter 48 is again arresting. “One told Jacob and said. Behold thy son Joseph cometh unto thee, and Israel strengthened himself and sat upon the bed, and Jacob said unto Joseph. . .” Again we find him foreseeing difficulties and making plans for the retention of Joseph and his seed within the embrace of covenant blessing. There was quite clearly a danger that Joseph having married an Egyptian, and having attained such eminence and earned genuine well-merited gratitude from the highest in the land, his sons might be brought up as Egyptians. To frustrate such a calamity Jacob reminded his son of the promise of Almighty God, who appeared to him at Bethel, that he and his seed should have Canaan as an everlasting possession and claimed that the two sons of Joseph born before his arrival in Egypt were his, “As Reuben and Simeon they shall be mine.” Their incorporation among the twelve tribes is a most remarkable event, which gives us Israel’s estimate by faith of the glories of Egypt. The greatest blessing which he can confer upon the sons of Egypt’s Viceroy is a portion with the people of God. “By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph.” The lads would at this time be at least twenty years of age. Their prospects were glorious, their future success assured, and the decision to identify them with the shepherds of Israel was a test to their faith and to the faith of their father Joseph.

The presence of his beloved son brought vividly before the patriarch's mind the death of his greatly loved Rachel. The touching reference to her death is not merely the recollection of a chief sorrow in his life, but is in this connection the determination that her memory shall be honoured by the inclusion of Benjamin, Ephraim and Manasseh among the tribes of Israel. In blessing the two lads Jacob clearly acted under divine guidance, just as in predicting the future of the tribes he spoke with prophetic prevision. And be it noted that while transferring the principal blessing to the younger as actuated by God, the subsequent history of the tribes shows that with God there was no caprice, but that He acted in the full light of the foreknown character of the two men. The last words to his son Joseph disclose that the pre-eminent facts in life for Israel are the reality of God's presence and of His promise. How different would life have been for him had he but apprehended this in living as he appreciated them now in dying. Blessed are the people who can say, "I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me."

Before departing this life Jacob gathered his sons about him and foretold their future. In some cases the allusions are difficult to follow, but in others the teaching is unmistakable and instructive. Passion uncontrolled by righteous principle leads to disaster and the forfeiture of privilege and position. Zeal for right cannot manifest itself in deeds of cruelty without evil resulting. In the midst of the survey of their future he appears to be so oppressed by their appalling weakness that he gives vent to his desire for a coming deliverer as he sighs, "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord!" Immediately preceding this verse he had said, "Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path," and this reminder of the havoc which the serpent had brought in initially would seem to have roused in his prophetic soul an appeal for the fulfilment of the primeval promise of the great Deliverer, who would bruise the serpent's head. Our chief interest lies in the blessing of Joseph, a blessing which can be summed up in the word "fruitfulness." The explanation of the fruitful nature lies in the fact that he is described as a "fruitful bough by a fountain," and the evidence of realization is contained in the phrase "whose branches run over the wall." He had been pre-eminently the object of hatred and persecution by his brethren; "The archers have sorely grieved him and shot at him and hated him," yet had his resource and confidence been in God, the mighty God of Jacob. Upon the head of him "that was separate from his brethren" fullness of blessing is invoked and divine blessing assured. Those who, like Joseph are ever true to God, will be fruitful Godward in their lives, abounding in the "fruits of righteousness."

"And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered his feet into the bed and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people." And Joseph fell upon his father's face and wept upon him and kissed him." The identity of Joseph's character is preserved to the very end. He is still marked by his devoted love for his father. He had passed through the trials of cruelty, hardship, misrepresentation,

disappointment without giving way to tears, and if tears now coursed down his cheeks, these were the evidence of true filial affection and were worthy of a real man. The request of Jacob was fully observed. His body was embalmed, and after seven days of mourning the cortege, consisting of the house of Jacob and many Egyptians, proceeded to the threshing floor of Atad where they again mourned with a great and very sore lamentation, and after seven days Jacob was buried in the cave of the field of Machpelah. After the sepulchre Joseph and his brethren returned to Egypt. Now that their father had departed this life, his brethren feared that Joseph would seek vengeance upon them for their sin. It is characteristic of weak natures to doubt the nobility of character in those who are stronger. It must have grieved him to think that they still thought him capable of seeking revenge after the lapse of many years since their reunion, yet with splendid magnanimity Joseph bade them "Fear not" and affirmed the fact that it is God who is the supreme Governor of the universe, and who moulds the events of history to accomplish His designs. "As for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore, fear ye not; I will nourish you and your little ones, and he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them." If living close to the Lord, we can always afford to be magnanimous to those who, while seeking to do us harm, are only carrying out God's plans for our blessing.

Joseph lived in the land of Egypt long enough to see Ephraim's children to the third generation. Conscious of his approaching end he declared to his brethren that God would surely visit them and bring them into the land which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. He then charged them that when they did return to Canaan they were to carry his bones up hence. Thus did he associate himself with the faith of his fathers, and disassociate himself from abiding links with Egypt

It has often been pointed out that the book that opens with life ends with death. "In the beginning God created"—"and they embalmed him and he was put in a coffin in Egypt." Between the first and the last chapter sin had come in, sin which brings forth death. Yet were the bones in Egypt a symbol of hope, "God will surely visit you." The greatest of earth must go, but God remains, and this confidence in the unchanging God and in the abiding character of His promises keeps our hearts in blissful repose amidst all the changes around and the removal of those on whom we have most depended. May God grant to us unswerving dependence upon Himself and His Word until our redemption complete we share in the triumph of the exodus which our Lord averred He would accomplish. Thank God all that men of faith have looked for will be accomplished! Some 200 years passed ere Moses carried up that coffin. For forty years it was carried about in the wilderness journeyings, but in the days of Joshua "the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem." The name Joseph signifies increase, and surely increase is the characteristic of the coming glory of the infinite Joseph. "Of the increase of His

government and peace, there shall be no end upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom to order it, and establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”cal