

## God's Way Out

"For Us And For Our Little Ones"

"Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance."

Ezra 8:21.

### Lesson 6. The Prime Minister's Seat

If you have suffered through false accusation or slander, read in this chapter how God brought one of His servants victoriously through, this kind of experience. You are precious in His sight. Do not fear to trust Him.

IN that Egyptian prison Joseph was treated as a common criminal along with others who had been bound by order of the king. His feet were put into fetters which gave him much pain. "He was laid in iron," says the Hebrew historian. [1]

Probably he prayed earnestly for release: "Oh, Lord God, my Father, bring me out of this place! O God of Abraham, vindicate my character. O Most Merciful, let not my hopes of the future be crushed. O God, that hears prayer, deliver me."

But the days passed and the weeks passed. The months passed, and there seemed no reply from God. Joseph was still in the prison.

Did he rebel against God in the darkness? Did he complain that God had requited him unfairly?

"No, come life or death, I will be loyal to the God of my fathers," determined Joseph. And so, from down in the darkness came fragments of a Hebrew song. Shut in that dungeon Joseph spoke encouragingly to the other prisoners, though little did he know that his sympathy would open God's way out of the prison. Irksome tasks were done with cheerfulness and energy. Joseph was loyal to God.

"Strange prisoner this!" thought the jailer. "Gives me no trouble."

Then after a while he set Joseph over the other prisoners. A jail foreman, forsooth!

Then came a gleam of hope. One morning Joseph noticed that two of the new prisoners seemed down-hearted and sad. Two of the king's servants, his butler and his baker, they had displeased Pharaoh and had been thrown by him into prison.

"We have both had strange dreams this night," they said in answer to his sympathetic inquiry. "Are they portents of evil or omens of good?"

"I dreamed of a vine with three branches," said the butler. "As I looked it budded and blossomed and then bore grapes, and I pressed out the juice from the grapes and gave it Pharaoh to drink."

"And I," said the baker, "dreamed I had three white baskets on my head. And the top one had all kinds of cooked foods, bread, and cakes for Pharaoh, but the birds swooped down and ate them."

"Alas! Thy dream means that Pharaoh will take thy head within three days, I fear," said Joseph sorrowfully.

"But thou," he said to the butler, "within three days shall Pharaoh restore thee to thy office and thou shall serve him once again."

"But when that time comes, think of me and make mention of me to Pharaoh and bring me out of this house. For I have done nothing that they should put me into this dungeon," said Joseph. Just as Joseph had interpreted, so it came to pass. The third day was Pharaoh's birthday, and he made a feast for his servants. Both prisoners were called from the dungeon and said "good-bye" to Joseph.

New hope sprang up in Joseph's heart. Henceforth he had a friend in court. Eagerly he waited for some message. But no message came.

The weeks went by, and then months, without any word from the butler friend. He had forgotten Joseph. Many are soured by the forgetfulness of those who should remember. But Joseph went cheerfully on doing each duty as to his God. And his self-forgetting kindness was not passed unnoticed by God. These sharp trials, as we ourselves need to remember, were God's way to higher joys and greater usefulness.

Two more years passed. Joseph had learned many lessons in the prison. The results of crime were before his eyes; the results of oppression, unfairness, and arrogance--lessons that God saw Joseph would need in days to come.

### ***The Dawn of a New Day--Pharaoh Dreams***

But one day the royal messengers came hurrying to the prison. The great Pharaoh had sent for Joseph to interpret a dream. God's time had come. He would now restore to the nation a knowledge of the true God, who was planning to bring them to an Eden of heart and home again.

It was the mysterious double dream of the fat and lean cattle; of the seven plump ears of corn and the seven blasted ones. Perhaps in the ordinary way a dream like this would have had little significance. Pharaoh might have forgotten it in a few

moments. But God Himself had given the dream, and He troubled Pharaoh's spirit so much that he could not rest until he knew its meaning. A foreboding of evil was on him.

Pharaoh sent for all his magicians and his wise men, but none could interpret the vision of the night. The servants of the great king were aroused as they saw their master's anxiety. And then the butler remembered! Joseph was brought out of prison and listened to the dream of the mighty ruler on the throne.

### ***Can Thou Interpret?***

"God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace," "God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do." While the young Hebrew gave his strangely simple interpretation he turned Pharaoh's thoughts again to the true God. "The thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass." How naturally Joseph told of God!

God was ever in Joseph's thoughts. He honored God in all things. No wonder Pharaoh recognized the source of this young man's wisdom and intelligence. "Look out a man discreet and wise," Joseph had counseled, "and let him store the corn of Egypt so that the land perish not through the famine."

Famine--dread word! Seven long years of famine! The king's heart knew terror at the awful possibility. Men, women, and children without food. "In truth we need a man discreet and wise. Can we find a better man than this Hebrew--a man in whom the Spirit of God is?" demanded the king. "God hath sent us this man."

### ***The King Decides on the Man***

Calling Joseph, the king declared: "Because God hath shown thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art. Thou art the man!"

"Thou shall be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou."

Seven whole years of famine coming? Yes, but seven years of great plenty first, ordained by the merciful Most High God, who has sent this man to serve Egypt.

Pharaoh took off his royal ring; "See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt!" And on to Joseph's hand was slipped the golden symbol of authority.

"Over all the land of Egypt thou art ruler." By Pharaoh's orders were then brought fine linen clothes, a gold chain for his neck, and one of the royal chariots with its out-runners.

“Because God hath shown thee all this, thy title-name shall be ‘Revealer of Secrets, Zaphnath-Paaneah.”

Gratefully Pharaoh loaded Joseph with dignities and honors as he assumed his new task. Doubtless also he discussed with Joseph a glad ceremony which should be as befitting Egypt's new Prime Minister--a matter which the Father above had also carried in His tender care. For soon the news went out that Pharaoh had given the new Prime Minister a wife, whose name was "Asenath, the daughter of Potipherah, prince of Heliopolis!"

### ***Years of Plenty--Then Years of Famine***

The seven years of plenty passed rapidly by. Joseph's energy and wisdom filled the barns and storehouses to overflowing. These abundant harvests and the presence of Joseph, were God's way to save thousands of precious lives.

Often in those good years of plenty Joseph gazed on wide fields studded with sheaves of corn, some upright, some bowed on the ground. Often at night he watched the stars as they marched their nightly way. Watched the eleven stars of great Orion go gliding by. Watched the course of the moon as she sailed by the Pleiades; watched the sun as he bowed down in the west at the close of day. Was there a curious smile on his face then as he thought of his dreams in the tents of Hebron, those twenty years ago?

And now two years of famine had passed. Joseph, happy in his work, which was to save so many lives, happy in the society of Asenath and the children, ever had God's honor in mind. With gratitude he thought of God's way out of slavery; His way out of prison; this, His way out of famine. God, who sees the future and cares for those who trust Him, had blessed him abundantly. God had requited him for the loss of home and those he loved.

### ***Strange Visitors Arrive***

Joseph himself supervised the sale of the corn to the merchants from abroad. Possibly he inquired of them if there was food in Canaan, his homeland. Was his father in need? he wondered. For love swiftly thinks of its loved ones when danger comes.

“Some men from the land of Canaan are here to buy corn, your Excellency.” And Joseph's heart thrilled as he recognized faces he had not seen for so many years. Here were his brothers!

Yes, Reuben, Simeon, here they were!

They bowed low before him! The fulfillment of the dream of his boyhood! "We would fain buy corn, your Excellency."

Though Joseph promptly recognized them, yet he, in his Egyptian official clothes of white linen, and with twenty-two more years upon him, remained unknown to them. Should he tell them? But, stay--where was Benjamin, his younger brother? Had the elder brothers harmed him, too? Were they still the envious, jealous men he had known in the past?

A plan sprang quickly into his mind. "You are spies!" he declared. "You have come to spy out the weakness of the land!"

"No, indeed, sir! Never!" said they. "We are no spies! We are the sons of one man in the land of Canaan. There were twelve of us. One is dead. One is at home. We ten have come to buy corn."

"We shall see!" retorted Joseph. "One of you shall stay here as hostage--the rest can go home. When you come again, bring this younger brother; then I shall know you are telling the truth."

He ordered Simeon to be detained. Then he loaded the others with corn and they departed toward the desert and Canaan. The old father received their message with great misgiving. "Benjamin shall not go!" he exclaimed. But hunger is a strong pleader. When the food was gone, Jacob was forced to let Benjamin join his brothers in another journey to Egypt. The brothers maintained that it was useless to face the governor without him.

"God Almighty give you mercy before the man!" he prayed, as they departed. "If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

"I will be surety for Benjamin," declared Reuben, reassuringly. The caravan turned toward Egypt. Would some cruel fate tear these eleven stars from their father's firmament forever? Anxiety and foreboding filled the old man's heart. Little did he know what joy God had in store for him. God's way to reunion was hidden from his eyes as it is often hidden from ours.

Strange feelings came over Joseph as the brothers were announced again. There they were--Reuben, Levi--(he thought to himself) Judah, Dan, ah, there was the youngest! Oh, Benjamin! Benjamin! my Benjamin! He forced back the words of love with difficulty.

He recovered himself. "Is your father well?" he asked aloud, "the old man of whom you spoke? Is he yet alive?"

"Thy servant our father is in good health, he is yet alive," they responded.

"And this," indicating Benjamin, "is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke?"

"God be gracious unto thee, my son!" he said chokingly and suddenly left them all.

"And Joseph made haste; for his bowels did yearn upon his brother: and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there." "Oh, Benjamin! Oh, my father, my father!" A strange mingling of homesickness, love, and joy, which most of us have experienced.

After a while he calmed himself, washed his face, and went out to them. A feast had been spread for the party of Hebrews, and Joseph dined with them (although at a separate table). He asked them questions and set various tests for them. He proved for himself their love for Benjamin and their thoughtfulness for their old father. They were changed men.

He could keep his secret no longer. Over his mind came again the memories of happy days with Benjamin in the Hebron valleys. Memories of his kind old father who had lavished the wealth of his love upon him. He must reveal himself!

"I am Joseph; Joseph! does my father yet live?" he cried to his brothers, tears of joy flowing down his cheeks. "Come near to me, I pray you."

### ***Can It Be Possible?***

"I am Joseph your brother, whom You sold into Egypt," he said, as he saw their troubled, frightened faces. "God did send me before you to preserve life, to save your lives by a great deliverance from this famine. Blame not yourselves!" he urged.

His brothers looked at him, almost terrified by the revelation. Joseph--alive? Governor of Egypt? He could put them in prison or kill them in revenge. But here he was generously excusing their wicked crime! What God-like forgiveness!

Around Dothan's ancient well these ten brothers had turned away from the path of kindness and right-doing. But Joseph's dreams--probably now remembered vividly--showed that God knew all this in advance. Yet God, instead of planning through the intervening years to visit judgments upon them, was planning to save their lives and the lives of their little ones in the great famine.

“Here we are, as those strange dreams showed, bowing low before Joseph! And Joseph, after all the evil we did to him, has nothing but kindness and help for us!” They could not help but marvel.

What a picture of God's love for a world which had turned away from Him!

### ***Pharaoh Hears***

The news that Joseph's brothers had come, quickly reached the royal palace and gave great pleasure there. Pharaoh, with his heart full of gratitude to Joseph, insisted that all his father's family should come to live in Egypt so that they should suffer no want through the famine. “I will give you the good of the land,” he promised the brothers.

For Joseph's sake he gave them the best of the country to dwell in, the grasslands of Goshen, watered by the Nile. Here their flocks and herds would have pasture even in those dry years of famine. Amid these pleasant surroundings the old father Jacob had the joy of living near his loved son for seventeen happy years before he passed away.

“I had not thought to see thy face again, my Joseph,” he said. “But here God hath shown me thy seed.” And before he died he laid his hands tenderly on the two boys' heads and blessed them. Blessed Ephraim and Manasseh, whose mother was Asenath, daughter of Potipherah, the prince of Heliopolis.

### ***Think of This When in London Town***

Modern Heliopolis is on the railway from Cairo to Suez. The ancient town with its temples and obelisks is now a heap of ruins nearly four miles away. But one of its tall stone obelisks is on the Thames Embankment, Cleopatra's Needle, the Londoners call it.

So Cleopatra's Needle is a reminder of Asenath, wife of Joseph, mother of the Tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. Reminder of Joseph and God's great plan. A rugged stone, a silent but eloquent speaker, declaring to London's crowds that God's omniscient eye sees the future and makes a way out of every difficulty for those who put their trust in Him

### **REFERENCE**

1. Psalm 105:18.

