

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 5. The Way to the Prime Minister's Seat

If you have lost sight of someone you specially care for, read in this chapter and the next how marvelously God devised means of re-uniting loved ones. If you are anxious about a husband or son in danger across the seas--this chapter may give you fresh hope.

IF those Syrian corn-buyers had halted their camels long enough at the noisy market in Egypt they could perhaps have heard the full romantic story of Prime Minister Joseph's early life--a story which might have increased their astonishment. For--wheels within wheels--God was working for Joseph at the same time that He was planning a way out from idolatry for the nations. God's plans for us also are often like that in these strange days, too.

Prime Minister Joseph was not an Egyptian. He was born in Syria, and his boyhood had been spent amid the sound of tinkling camel bells, the bleating of sheep, the lowing of oxen, and the braying of donkeys. His father, Jacob, was a Hebrew stock-breeder, a grandson of the great chief Abraham. His mother, Rachel the lovable, was a beautiful Syrian woman. [1]

Alas for Joseph! His mother died at the birth of his brother Benjamin, when Joseph was little more than a baby himself died while the family were travelling from Syria to the south of Palestine, or Canaan as it was then called. Besides Benjamin, Joseph had ten older brothers. Reuben the eldest, vacillating and uncertain, was almost a grown man when Joseph was born. Simeon and Levi, the two next in age, grew to be bold, fierce-tempered men who dared even to attack a whole tribe of Hivites when they were aroused. [2] The other sons were little better. Quarrelsome and envious they often brought sadness to their father's heart and trouble to Joseph their young brother.

Joseph, on the contrary, grew up helpful, cheerful, kind, and modest. He inherited his mother's beauty of form and feature, and was a constant source of comfort and pleasure to his father. Sometimes it seemed that the Spirit of the living God was moving on the heart of this boy, with his quick, active brain, and gentle, endearing ways. And so it was. God was preparing His great "Fourteen-Year Plan"

to bless the world, and this boy, unknown to himself, was the one He had chosen to carry out the great plan.

If God has a definite and sure plan for this present twentieth century it will be interesting to ask: How does God train men and women to carry out His stupendous plans in all ages? Listen to the story of Joseph, and see!

What Was God's Plan?

Jacob grew to love this son above all the others, and unwisely showed his favor by making for him an embroidered coat such as was worn by the princes of that time. [3] His brothers promptly resented this partiality. And when he told them of two strange dreams he had dreamed, they could not speak peaceably with him.

But the dreams were so mysterious! Who could keep quiet? It was absolutely impossible.

"Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed," said the boy.

"Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and stood upright; and behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf--they bowed down to it."

"Made obeisance?" The angry brothers saw the meaning of the dream at once. "Shall thou indeed reign over us? Or shall thou indeed have dominion over us?" And they hated him yet the more.

But a dream still more curious was given to Joseph. "Why, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me!" said the wondering lad. "What could it mean?" "Mean? These dreams come because thou art always thinking thyself better than others." And his brothers angrily nursed their hatred and jealousy.

Envy Brings Dark Plans

Envy and jealousy, these green-eyed monsters have wrecked many a home. Had the brothers only known what sorrow was to come to the tents of Jacob in the Hebron valleys as a result of harboring those bitter feelings! Shortly after the dreams had so angered them, these older sons of Jacob traveled far from home, leading their flocks over hills and valleys where pasture was to be found. They were away for a long period, and Joseph was sent by his gray-haired old father to see how they fared.

After a weary journey of sixty-five miles he heard the bleating of their flock around Dothan, and joyfully hastened forward to greet them. But there was no welcome from them for him.

"Behold, this dreamer comes," growled one of them angrily.

"This dreamer; let us kill him--this son of Rachel the envious--the little upstart! Kill him--and see what becomes of his dreams."

"Yes! No! Yes! Kill him and throw him into this pit. And tell his father some wild animal has killed him."

"Yes! Yes!"

"No! No!" disagreed Reuben, the eldest brother, shrinking from such a foul deed. "No, let not his blood be upon us! Not that! Let us cast him down this pit and leave him there to die. Poor lad--look how tired he is. Do not sin against the child."

They were scowling, jealous faces that greeted the boy as he came wearily but joyfully up to his angry brothers. Then alarm and terror came over him as they seized him threateningly. What was the matter?

"Come, you dreamer--down in this pit! Down, down! We will see what becomes of your proud dreams."

Terror-stricken, Joseph pleaded with his brothers. But all in vain. They lowered him into the pit, and having made sure he could not escape, they sat down to cook and to eat their meal.

But after the heat of the moment had passed, conscience began to stir. What was the next step?

To kill their own young brother would be a terrible crime. No, they must not do that.

But to release him now would be to expose themselves to the anger of their father. Joseph would be sure to tell him all. What should they do?

Just then they saw along a distant stretch of the road, a group of travelers coming toward them.

"Look over there toward Gilead! A caravan of traders with camels is coming this way. Where are they going?"

"To Egypt, no doubt. See, the camels bear loads of myrrh and balm and perfumes, to rejoice the fair ladies of Egypt while they live, and to embalm them when they die!" [4]

"Die listen! what profit is it if we cause our brother to die?" broke out Judah. "Come, let us sell him to these Ishmaelite traders. Let not our hand be upon him, for he is our own brother and our flesh."

"Good, good! sell him to the traders. Then it cannot be said that we have killed him. And he cannot go back to tell his father. And those dreams--we shall see what will become of his dreams!"

Sold as a Slave

The brothers halted the merchants. Joseph was hauled out of the pit. The haggling for a price began. But when Joseph understood his brothers' dreadful design, his anguish was pitiful to see. He struggled vainly to get free from those muscular arms, then broke into an agony of weeping.

"A slave? In Egypt!" he cried out in terror. "Oh, no, not that! No! Not that! No! No!"

To be a slave in the land of the Pharaohs, where one might die under the taskmaster's lash! Fate worse than death! Oh not that!

Was he never to see his father again? Never to play with laughing Benjamin again? Ah, no! "Let me go!" he pleaded.

The anguish in the boy's eyes remained with his brothers for years. [5] But now it was too late. The price was paid: twenty pieces of silver. Blood-money!

The old caravan road to the south left the grasslands of Dothan, skirted the plain of Sharon, kept east of Jaffa, and passed through the old town of Gaza. Ah, those hills, away on the eastern horizon! Beyond them lay his father's tents at Hebron. The kind, kind father, perhaps waiting expectantly. No wonder if Joseph broke into an agony of weeping again as those beloved hills faded into the distance.

The green of Canaan departed; the sandy desert south of Gaza appeared. As a weeping boy Joseph left the plain of Dothan. But it was as a resolute young man that he arrived at the slave market in Egypt. Joseph had remembered the God of his fathers, and "his soul thrilled with the high resolve to prove himself true to God." [6]

Joseph was sold to Potiphar, the captain of the king's guard. "A strong, good-looking lad; almost a man," thought the captain. Joseph was set to work in various

duties around the house. He did everything with a right good will, and God gave him favor with his Egyptian master. "A fine worker is Joseph," he said to himself.

"The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man," says the Bible story. Or, as Wycliffe's old version puts it: "The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a lucky fellow."

Oh, yes! One can believe in the kind of luck Joseph had. It is "lucky" to be on time every morning. It is "lucky" to work a few minutes extra every evening when necessary. It is "lucky" always to study to please your employer and to look after his interests. "Who keeps the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof," says Solomon. "So he that waits on his master shall be honored." [7]

Potiphar was so pleased with Joseph's work that he finally made him overseer over his house, over his estate, and over all that he had.

Loyalty to God Brought Prosperity

Joseph was loyal to God and openly confessed Him, although surrounded by idol worship. And God showered down His blessing upon Joseph and upon the Egyptian's house. As the years passed quickly by, the Hebrew servant rose high in Potiphar's favor. Tall, handsome, smiling, modest, energetic, and pure-hearted, Joseph soon became treated almost like a son. He was present when Potiphar entertained guests of wealth and position. Captains, generals, diplomats, priests, and princes, they came to visit Potiphar, and Joseph gained from their conversation a knowledge that was to stand him in good stead in the hidden days of the future.

And often, of course, these officers of state brought with them their wives and daughters. Probably when Potipherah, the prince of Heliopolis, came to visit Potiphar he was accompanied by his wife and his lovely daughter Asenath. Joseph's eyes (who shall doubt it) perchance, followed Asenath's graceful movements, and Asenath's laughing eyes may have often met those of the handsome young Hebrew for whom Captain Potiphar had such high praise.

"Best of the azure lotus flowers for thee, O Asenath! Perfumes of Gilead on thy head, and carpets of rose petals at thy feet. May the breezes ever blow sweetly for thee!" For young men and maidens will dream, as the dear God appointed when He fashioned them in the dawn of time. Surely the future was full of glad promise!

An Unexpected Crisis

Then the great crash came. Just when the rosy light of hope strengthened on Joseph's sky, Potiphar's wife charged him with a foul crime and he was thrown into prison. Thrown into prison with the burning brand of shame on him. It came like ruin to him. She had, it seemed, urged him to break that great law of love and purity, "Thou shall not commit adultery."

Joseph refused point blank. "Never! How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God? Never!" Plain speaking, sin against God! Joseph had been loyal to God in prosperity; he would not deny Him in this crisis. This woman would bring him favor and rewards if he denied God. She would probably try to ruin him if he continued to refuse. Well, let the ruin come! He would be faithful to God at all costs.

An innocent man--here he was, in this dark Egyptian dungeon. His freedom gone; his hopes for the future gone. Farewell, happy dreams of Asenath!

REFERENCES:

1. Genesis 28:2; 29:18; 30:24.
2. Genesis 34:25.
3. Genesis 37:3.
4. The Mystery and Lure of Perfume, Pages 13,23.
5. Genesis 42:21.
6. Patriarchs and Prophets, page 214.
7. Proverbs 27:18.

