

[R2895 : page 330]

## THE CLOSE OF A NOBLE LIFE.

– GEN. 50:15-26. – *NOV. 3.* –

**"So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." – Psa. 90:3.**

JACOB was a hundred and thirty years old when his sons returned with news of Joseph's greatness in the land of Egypt. His joy at hearing that his son was still alive, and now great, was offset by the natural weakness of his advanced years. Hence he could scarcely trust himself to believe the report, even with the explanation given by his sons, of how they had sold Joseph into slavery, and had besmeared his coat with blood for their father's deception, twenty-two years before. However, the story of his sons was well attested by the royal present which Joseph had sent to him, and by the Egyptian wagons sent to bear him and the family as comfortably as possible in the journey. These wagons were doubtless the carriages of that day, workmanship in that line not having advanced to present proficiency. Jacob was persuaded, and started on the journey, during which he offered sacrifices to the Lord, possibly questioning in his own mind the wisdom of thus leaving the land of promise, and whether or not it might be interpreted of the Lord as an abandonment of his faith, or a relinquishment of the blessing which from earliest childhood had centered and directed his course of life. [R2895 : page 331]

The Lord answered his query, and his sacrifices (probably by a dream) assuring him that he was taking the proper course in going into Egypt, and that ultimately his posterity should come again into "the land of promise." The spiritual Israelite should thus have in view at all times that which by his covenant has become the center of his life, the center of his interest, of his hopes and of his aims – the Abrahamic covenant and his share therein. He, too, must be on the look-out lest there shall be deceptions of the

Adversary combined with earthly prosperity and the world's favor. When we are undergoing disadvantages or persecutions we are in much less danger than when the tide of worldly prosperity sets in our direction. Let us remember at such times to go often to the Lord, to seek to know his will, fully, completely; to bring to mind our covenant and its value, as above all earthly considerations. And let us offer unto the Lord the true sacrifice – presenting the merits of our dear Redeemer's sacrifice as the ground of our acceptance, repeating the full devotion of our hearts – renewing our covenant. This is the only safe way in this pilgrim journey.

We pass hastily over the narrative of the presentation of Jacob and Joseph's brethren to Pharaoh, and their settlement in the land of Goshen. After they had resided there seventeen years (Gen. 47:28) Jacob died, was buried with all the ceremonials common to the Egyptian court, because he was a relative of Pharaoh's representative. And it is here that our lesson proper begins. Joseph's brothers judged him to have a disposition considerably like their own; they could not believe him to be thoroughly generous and forgiving, and though they acknowledged his kindness toward them, they said to themselves, This was merely on account of our father Jacob, and not on our account, and now that our father is dead Joseph will treat us differently. It was because moved with such feelings that they first sent a messenger to Joseph, and afterward followed themselves into his presence, to ask his mercy and to declare themselves willing to be his servants.

It strikes us that this well illustrates the condition of many who come to the Lord with an insufficiency of faith. They are convinced of his mercy toward them, and yet are always fearful. The truth is that they do not know him; they think of him as moved by like passions with themselves, more or less depraved, more or less controlled by animosity. It is an evidence of growth in grace when we come to that place in our experiences where, admitting

our own guilt and unworthiness of divine favor we have, nevertheless, become so intimately acquainted with the Lord as to have a full assurance of faith in his declaration that our sins are forgiven. It is to such a development of grace that the Lord referred, saying, "This is life eternal, that they might *know* thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3.) But such a knowledge is not to be obtained instantaneously, but rather is to be the result of a growth in grace; for we grow in grace as we grow in knowledge, and we grow in knowledge as we grow in grace; – the two keeping pace, the one with the other, as do our feet in walking. It is because the majority who have named the name of Christ do not grow in grace and in knowledge that they fail to attain to that grand condition of which the Apostle speaks as "full assurance of faith" – full confidence in the Lord, in his goodness, in his wisdom, in his love, in his providential care over all of their affairs. And the lack of such growth is owing to their failure to offer their sacrifices unto the Lord – to commit all of their ways to him.

Joseph's answer to his brethren was most noble, and gives good evidence that his conduct was not merely an outward profession, but the result of an established character. He did not even say to himself, My brothers have misunderstood me, but though I freely forgive them I will use their fear as a stepping stone to greater power over them, and will say to them, I will do you no harm, but on the contrary treat you most kindly, as long as you are fully obedient to me, and send me presents yearly, or give me tithes of your increase, or come annually to make obeisance before me, and to acknowledge afresh your wrong, and to confess my generosity. No; he had too noble a character for this; he was too unselfish. On the contrary, he said, "Fear not; for am I in the place of God?" The secret of his right course with his brethren was the correct view which he took of the matter himself; he saw himself as merely God's servant in dealing with his brethren, and in all things. He saw that God's providence had been in the whole affair.

How could he think otherwise? He saw the fulfilment of his inspired dreams; he had noted the miraculous leading of divine providence in the various steps by which he had been led from slavery to the **[R2896 : page 331]** throne of Egypt; he probably reflected that if now he should either do evil toward his brethren, or think unkindly of them, he would be casting a reflection upon one of the instrumentalities which God had used for his blessing. He could not do this and be loyal to and appreciative of divine power, and he communicated to his brothers for their encouragement and comfort this thought; that although they had purposed evil, and had done evil, nevertheless the thing really done was a good thing, but for which they deserved no credit, but discredit, and God all the honor. He would have them see that this was the basis of his dealing with them, and that he felt not the slightest animosity, but a full appreciation of the divine blessing, which had come through their course.

How great a blessing it would be for all spiritual Israelites to learn well this lesson; viz., that if we accept the results of any matter as being good, and if we realize that we were guided to those results by divine providence, we should think and feel most generously, most kindly, toward those who were the instruments used by providence, notwithstanding the fact that they might have been unwilling instructors, or, like Joseph's brethren, have verily intended opposite results. Those who are enabled to take such a view of affairs and forces operating in their daily lives are enabled "always to triumph through the Lord," as the Apostle expresses it. And such find no room for bitterness or railing, either against Satan or against any of his servants. 2 Cor. 2:14; Jude 9.

This does not mean that they call the evil course **[R2896 : page 332]** good; nor that they will or should have any sympathy with the evil course; nor with the evil motives inspiring it; nor with the evil persons, so long as they are in harmony with the evil motives and evil course. But it does mean that their minds will be

so filled with the thought of divine supervision in their affairs, and how all the time they were safe under the protecting care, the shadow of the Almighty, and that all things are working for their good, however they outwardly appear, that they will not have any bitterness whatever, either of word or of heart, toward those who attempted to, and outwardly did, do them evil, but whose evil intentions and conduct were overruled by the Almighty. In proportion as the Lord's people get into the large place where they can take a broad view of the situation, in that same proportion will they find themselves not only delivered from anger and malice and hatred and strife toward their opponents, but instead, possessed of "the peace of God which passeth all understanding," ruling in their hearts, keeping them secure amidst all of the storms and vicissitudes of life – because their anchor holds within the vail. They have "set to their seal that the Lord is true," and hence can rejoice always.

Not only was Joseph's course the right one in the sight of God, the noble one in the sight of all right-minded people, the blessed one as respected his brothers, their comfort, their peace, their love toward him, – but it was in every sense the proper and the best course as respected his own peace, joy, blessing. When he allayed their fears and comforted them, and spake kindly unto them, and promised them and their families the same care as when their father lived, he was taking also the course which must have brought the greatest blessing and comfort to his own heart. All do not know it, but it is a fact that the grandest quality that man can exercise, and the one which brings the largest amount of blessing itself, is the exercise of the God-like quality of *mercy*, compassion, benevolence. Those of spiritual Israel who have not practiced in this direction are not far advanced in spiritual development, and those who have practiced realize the truthfulness of the Lord's words, "Blessed are the merciful," and "Blessed are the peacemakers."

The next few verses of our lesson cover the period of fifty-four years from the death of Jacob to the death of Joseph; and give us comparatively little information, except that they give fresh evidence that the basis of Joseph's strength of character and fidelity to principle which carried him safely through the vicissitudes of his remarkable experience was faith in God – faith in the Abrahamic promise. And so we find it to-day, and all through the past, so far as we are able to decipher the teachings of history; those who have been the Lord's faithful people, have all been inspired by the hope set before us in the gospel. This is the hope of which the Apostle speaks, saying that it is "an anchor to the soul, sure and steadfast;" – it holds firm and secure in the storms and difficulties of life, and prevents the wrecking of our lives upon the rocks of sin, deception, doubt, selfishness, etc.

Who can doubt that it was Joseph's respect unto the divine promise that kept him faithful as Potiphar's steward, again in the prison, and again as Pharaoh's representative in the throne? In proportion as heavenly promises are before our minds, earthly and selfish ambitions are dwarfed and lose their power over us. Joseph's eye of faith, centered upon God's promise to Abraham and upon the land of Canaan, exercised a potent influence, because he realized that to be a friend of God, and an heir of God's promises, called for a purity of heart and of life which God could approve. Looking back he saw the influence of these promises upon his great grandfather, Abraham, upon his grandfather, Isaac, and upon his father, Jacob, and we see that the same promise controlled him to his great advantage. The people who today become enamored of wealth and of position and of power, so that they would be willing to sacrifice principles of justice and of truth that they might selfishly grasp these, thereby give evidence that they lack the power of the truth, the power of the Abrahamic promise, to control them and their lives. Had the Abrahamic promise not been forceful and weighty in the mind of Joseph he might have been plotting and scheming for the throne of Egypt or

to have obtained the mastery over his own brethren; but realizing that God was behind the promise he was waiting patiently for that, as the greatest and most wonderful blessing conceivable – far beyond the things which he could have grasped, and the grasping of which would have meant his relinquishment of God's promise. Not, however, that he expected to go up out of Egypt into the land of Canaan himself; for he evidently knew, and it probably came down to us through him, that God had appeared to Abraham, and told him that his posterity should be in Egypt, and be evilly treated there, and that the period of their sojourn would be four hundred years.

Joseph's hope in God and in that Abrahamic promise must have been, therefore, a hope through a *resurrection* of the dead; and although it taught a valuable lesson, it was doubtless because of his imperfect understanding of the resurrection, and the power of God, that he so particularly gave commandment respecting the carrying up of his bones out of Egypt into Canaan, when the time of God's favor should come, and Israel should be delivered. And so must the spiritual Israelite have his mind centered in the future fulfillment of the divine promises, through a *resurrection of the dead*, if he would be delivered from the worldly influences of this present time, and be kept loyal to the Lord and to the highest principles of character. This faith in a future kingdom, future honor, future riches, future glory, dwarfs into insignificance the honor and glory and wealth of this present time, and makes all true believers separate from the world in these respects, and thus prepares them to think of the affairs of this present time from a more just and more equitable and dispassionate standpoint – they are removed from the immediate influence of selfishness in its most powerful forms, even though they still find, notwithstanding their faith in the promises, the necessity for keeping the body under, and mortifying its natural disposition toward selfishness. [R2896 : page 333]

Our *Golden Text* is appropriate to the lesson, and every way worthy of the attention of the spiritual Israelite. We know that our days are numbered as respects the present life. We know that we

need not expect eternal life under present conditions, and thus far the world and the Christian are on a common level; but here they part, the one saying to himself, "Life is short, and I must grasp and use it for myself, the best I can." The other, with a higher wisdom, that cometh from above, realizes his own inability and insufficiency, heeds the message from the Lord respecting an eternal life beyond the tomb – the resurrection life, and goes to the Lord, petitioning for wisdom respecting the life that now is, as well as that which is to come.

In answer to his petitions he is taught of God in the experience of life to more and more appreciate the eternal, the everlasting life, and to spend time and energy in building up such a character as would be pleasing to his Creator, and bring the reward of "life everlasting." The Christian, in numbering his days, does not do so with a doleful or disconsolate sentiment, although he does so with sobriety. He counts the days as they go as so many blessings, so many privileges, so many opportunities to "show forth the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light," to render assistance to others in the pilgrim journey, and to develop in himself more and more of the character pleasing in the sight of God, – to become more and more a copy of God's dear Son. As he numbers the days gliding swiftly by, and perceives how he is using them in harmony with the divine instructions, he ultimately comes to that condition of heart in which he is longing for the Kingdom and the full attainment of all the glories into which he hopes to be ushered, as a sharer in the first (*chief*) resurrection. And from this standpoint he numbers the days as they go by joyfully, and is glad when the days of the years of his present pilgrimage end; because his hope in the Lord, and in the gracious features of his plan, is growing daily stronger, clearer and brighter.

-----