

## **AFFLICTED, YET A COMFORTER**

– *MAY 4.* – *GENESIS 40 AND 41.* –

**"God giveth grace to the humble." – 1 Peter 5:5.**

JOSEPH may well be designated the model young man of Old Testament times. In some respects, he would be a model for any time. There is a distinction to be made, however. Joseph lived before the time of spirit-begetting, and hence was merely a natural man, not a Christian. He lived before the time of Bibles, before the time of preaching and Sunday Schools. He merely inherited from his father a strong faith in the God of Abraham, who had promised that, ultimately, a blessing should come to all people through Jacob's posterity. Joseph, who was one of that family, revered God and sought to live humbly, nobly. His faithfulness to God and his trust in God's Promise served as a rudder to guide and direct all the affairs of his life. Whatsoever he did was with a view to pleasing God and winning His approval.

Such faithfulness was probably rare at that time, as it is today, and the reward came in Joseph's advancement to the highest station in the house of his master – that of steward. His conscientiousness led him to be careful, economical and wise; and his master could and did entrust everything to his care. Young men of Joseph's type are very much valued everywhere today – yea, they have been valued in every period of the world's history – trustworthy men, faithful men, economical men, wise men; and all these qualities go with godliness – with faith in God, and a realization of responsibility to Him.

But just in the height of Joseph's prosperity, calamity came. His steadfastness to principle angered his mistress. She falsely accused him; and he was cast into prison and made to appear guilty of a heinous crime, disloyal to his master and benefactor. Yet all the

while he was innocent; but only God and himself knew of that innocence. The Adversary had made circumstantial evidence to appear so strong that Joseph's guilt was not questioned. The poet Shakespeare noted this trait of human weakness in these words: "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned."

How strange it seems that God would allow so terrible a blight to fall upon the life of one who was seeking to walk in the ways of righteousness! We can imagine Joseph's querying why this evil had befallen him, and saying with the Prophet, "They that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered; while those who seek to live righteously suffer persecution."

But evidently Joseph did not permit himself to question the Wisdom of Divine Providence which took him to prison in Egypt any more than he allowed himself to question the Wisdom of the same Providence in permitting him to be sold a slave into Egypt. His faith in God endured the test. He became stronger as he found himself shut away from all earthly hopes and ambitions – dead to the world. The more did he cultivate faith in the Almighty; the more did he determine that at any cost he would live righteously, soberly, reverentially. Even in prison, his faithfulness, intelligence and general goodness were recognized. He became the prison keeper's trusty man and assistant. Such a character, no matter how much traduced, misrepresented and slandered, eventually will commend itself to those with whom it has close contact. And the principle holds good today, as then.

### **DREAMS OF BUTLER AND BAKER**

The prison regulations of old were less methodical than at present. Joseph had been in prison for years, had probably been forgotten, and might have continued there indefinitely, had not something occurred to bring his case to official notice. When he was twenty-eight years old, two high officials were thrust into prison because Pharaoh had taken some offence at their conduct. One of

these was the king's secretary and butler, or cup-bearer. The other was head of his culinary department.

Joseph, as the general overseer of the prison, came in contact with these men, noted their sadness of face and tendered sympathy. What a noble example! Instead of moping about, bemoaning his lot, Joseph was cheerful, trusting in God and waiting for some circumstance by which God would eventually open up the way before him. Such a noble character can always find time to speak a word of consolation to those in trouble! What an example to worldly men of today! What an example to Christian **[R5216 : page 110]** men of today, who have much advantage over him in so many ways.

There are some who tell us that our race is rising so rapidly from brute nature by evolutionary processes, that impliedly Joseph, living nearly four thousand years ago – two thousand years after Adam's creation – would be almost a brute, only a few removes from the monkey. But how different a view is given of him by this little narrative, which makes no attempt to pointing a moral with his experiences, but merely records them as matters of fact!

When Joseph learned that the two official prisoners were troubled because of impressive dreams, he volunteered interpretations. The one was encouraging, and the other discouraging. He told the butler that within three days he would be back again in favor with the king, but informed the baker that within three days he would be executed. Then Joseph, mindful of the fact that he had a duty to perform in respect to attaining his own liberty, urged upon the butler – the one he had so encouraged and befriended – that when at liberty he would remember his comforter and do something to bring Joseph's case before proper authorities, that he might be heard and, if possible, be released.

But alas, for the hardness of heart so prevalent! The butler forgot all about Joseph, his prisoner friend, for two years! Then the

matter was brought to his attention by Pharaoh's dream; for none of the wise men of Egypt were able to interpret it. With apologies for his neglect, the butler told the king of the dream experiences of the baker and himself in prison and of the wonderful young man Joseph, who by some god-given power had interpreted their dreams, just as these turned out.

During those two years, Joseph doubtless hoped much and waited longingly for some adjustment of his case. We doubt not that, instead of growing faint in respect to his faith in God, he all the more earnestly laid hold upon the Lord, and realized that his experiences must be for good. And so they were; for it was when Joseph was just thirty years of age – when he had just reached manhood under the old-time law – that Pharaoh sent for him to interpret his dreams, and rewarded him very highly.

### **PHARAOH'S DREAMS INTERPRETED**

Pharaoh related his two dreams. In the first he saw seven fine, strong cattle, and a little later the same number of very poor, lean cattle – the worst he had ever seen. In the dream, the lean cattle ate up the fat ones, and looked none the better. In the second dream, the king saw a fine stalk of corn grow up out of the earth, bearing seven full, healthy ears of corn; and then he saw another stalk with seven withered ears, good for nothing. The latter swallowed up the former, and looked none the better.

Young Joseph quickly gave the explanation of the dreams; but before doing so, he very distinctly told the king that the interpretation came not from himself, but from God. Thus he exemplified the Scriptural teaching, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him," and "He shall give thee the desires of thine heart." – Prov. 3:6; Psalm 37:4.

Joseph explained that the two dreams referred to the same matter – that unitedly they taught that there would be seven years of

great plenty in the land of Egypt; and that these would be followed by seven years of famine, which would fully consume all the surplus of the plentiful years. Proceeding, Joseph offered the suggestion that God evidently meant this information to be used by Pharaoh, and recommended that, forthwith, a special agent of the king should be appointed to buy up all the surplus grain in the seven years of plenty and to store it for use during the seven years of famine.

Pharaoh very wisely acceded, and with manifestation of great breadth of mind and desire to serve the interests of his people, promptly appointed Joseph himself to be the purchaser of the surplus corn of the years of plenty, to have full charge of the matter and to attend to its disbursement in the following years of famine.

Thus Joseph stepped out of prison into a fourteen years' contract. From suffering because of slander he suddenly stepped into a place of highest authority, next to Pharaoh, in the greatest empire of those days. Can we doubt that God's hand was in the matter of Joseph's success and exaltation? Surely not! Nor should we infer any lack of Divine favor in Joseph's experiences of adversity. **[R5217 : page 110]** On the contrary, we may feel sure that the lessons of his adversity were merely preparations for his subsequent experiences as Pharaoh's logos, or mouthpiece, throughout the kingdom.

We are reminded again of the lesson of a week ago – that Joseph's experiences were typical of those of Jesus and the Church, His followers. The Bible assures us that the graces of humility and patience are both closely related to love and loyalty. St. Paul reminds us of this when he declares, "If ye be without chastisement,...then are ye...not sons. For what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" He reminds us that "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." – Hebrews 12:6-8.

It was so with Jesus, and with all the faithful Apostles, and has been so with all the followers of Jesus during this Gospel Age. It will undoubtedly continue to be true in the case of all the

consecrated Church. It is because the Lord Jesus loves these noble characters that He counts them worthy of trials and testings, disciplines, etc. These are necessary to qualify them for the positions of honor, glory, immortality and great responsibility, to which the Father has called Jesus and His brethren, the Church.

## **THE VALUE OF ADVERSITY**

Jacob's special love for his son Joseph manifested itself in favoritism – the princely coat, or robe, etc. Quite possibly he would have spoiled his son, had not Divine Providence interfered and taken him entirely out of this father's control. Many fathers, especially the rich, have made similar mistakes. Hence the sons of the rich are not always a credit to their fathers.

The great Heavenly Father, however, makes no such mistakes. His people are assured that trials and difficulties are marks rather of their relationship to God and of His loving care over them. True, this providential care is restricted: "The Lord knoweth them that are His." His special dealings are with His consecrated people – those who have entered into a covenant with Him, who have become His servants and His children. To these alone belongs the promise that "all things shall work together for good to them that love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." – Romans 8:28.

While this special call applies peculiarly to the Church of this Gospel Age, there is a sense in which it was applicable to the Hebrews, since the time of Abraham. Joseph belonged to this line which was in covenant relationship with God. This accounts for God's dealing with him rather than with young men of other families than Abraham's. Incidentally, it is worthy of notice that the Israelites passed through many trying experiences because of being God's people. Many of those experiences they might have escaped, had they not come into covenant relationship with God. But had they escaped the trials **[R5217 : page 111]** and difficulties, they would have escaped certain privileges and blessings also. And the blessings

which God gives always outweigh the adversities which prepare for them.

## **JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN ELECTIONS**

This reminds us that the Bible declares that the Jewish people, and subsequently the Christians, are God's Elect – God's Chosen People – the Seed of Abraham, natural and Spiritual. Both have offers of God's blessings not accorded to other peoples; and in both cases the trying experiences are to fit the elect ones for the future glories to which they have been invited.

Nevertheless, God has also a great blessing in store for the non-elect. During the thousand years of Messiah's reign, the elect Church, the saintly only, will be Messiah's joint-heirs in the great Kingdom of God, which will then take control of the earth. Then also the Elect from the Hebrews will be used, in another part of the work, in conjunction with the Christian Church, the one on the Heavenly plane, the other on the earthly. Through these two Israels, God's blessings are to be poured out on all nations, kindreds, peoples and tongues.

Although God has not specially supervised the affairs of any except these two elect classes, nevertheless we see that He has permitted, in a general way, great lessons of adversity to come to the whole human family. As the special trials and difficulties of the elect classes are intended to work for them special blessing and qualifications for their work as God's agencies, so the general tribulations of the world will give general lessons that will be helpful to all people by giving all experiences with sin and death – by teaching all thus the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

By and by, when Messiah's Kingdom shall be established, when Satan shall be bound, when the reign of righteousness shall begin, when the curse shall be lifted, when the blessing shall flow instead – then the lessons of sorrow and tears and crying and dying will all

prove valuable. Humanity will appreciate the great blessings of God in the future very largely by contrast with the evils and sorrows of the present time. When, by and by, they shall learn fully and conclusively that all these sorrows and tears are the results of violation of God's laws and disregard of His injunctions, the lesson undoubtedly will be one that will never be forgotten.

Wherever the plowshare of trouble has gone, it has served to break up the fallow ground and to make ready for the seed of Divine Truth and grace. The next Age, under Messiah's beneficent rule, will be the time of sowing the seeds of knowledge of God and appreciation of His glorious character and Plan. The results will undoubtedly be glorious, as the Scriptures declare. Eventually all will participate in these blessings everlastingly, except such as intelligently refuse them, choosing sin rather than righteousness, in that Day when the knowledge of the Truth will be given to all and when assistance to righteousness will be apparent.

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