

BY PROFESSOR THOMAS LAWRENCE.

Nov. 14. Lesson VIII. Gen. xiv. 1-8.

Subject: "Joseph, the wise ruler."

Two years have passed since the butler, in accordance with Joseph's rendering of the dream, had been restored to the king's favor, and the baker led out of prison to die. The former, courtier-like in his prosperity, had forgotten the request of Joseph to be remembered of him when he should stand again before Pharaoh. But, though forgotten of men, God had not forgotten him. Pharaoh had a double dream which troubled him sorely and which all the magicians of Egypt could not interpret. He saw in his dream seven fat kine come up out of the Nile and after them seven lean kine, which devoured the former; in a second dream he saw seven ears of corn rank and good, come up on one stalk, and after them seven other ears, thin and blasted, which devoured the seven full ears. In the perplexity of the king the butler thought of Joseph, confesses his ingratitude in forgetting the young Hebrew prisoner, tells the story of his interpretation of their dreams while in prison and their verification. Joseph is sent for, and in the royal presence interprets the double dream to mean seven years of plenty to be followed by seven years of famine, and recommends that the fifth part of the harvest during the years of plenty be laid up in store over against the years of famine, and that a man, discreet and wise, be appointed to have the matter in charge. Pharaoh, recognizing Joseph as a divinely-inspired interpreter of his dream, put him at once in charge of the whole matter, making him lord of his house and second only to himself on the throne. This brings us to the subject matter of our lesson.

41-45. Pharaoh—Name common to the Egyptian kings as Caesar to the Roman emperors.

I have set thee over all Egypt.—Such sudden advancement of an obscure stranger in the East, and under despotic governments, is neither so strange or rare as the like were with us. Daniel in Babylon was a parallel to Joseph in Egypt.

Took off his ring and put it on Joseph.—The signet ring given with the seal and signature of the king, used in signing public documents. Its possession clothed the individual with royal authority.

Vestures of fine linen.—Worn only by persons of the highest rank, the texture of which was in touch like to silk and not inferior to the finest cambric. The gold chain was a token of nobility, and its bestowal ennobled the wearer just as do badges and titular decorations bestowed at the hands of monarchs in times more modern.

Ride in the second chariot.—The chariot next to Pharaoh's, at the head of a grand public procession.

How the knees.—The original word somewhat obscure, the rendering in its probable meaning—civil worship to the newly-made prince.

I am Pharaoh.—Swears by himself, the most solemn form of affirmation; God, since He could swear by no greater, swears by Himself.

No man lift hand or foot without thee.—Proverbial expression for absolute authority. Zaphnath Paneah.—The Egyptian name of Joseph, somewhat difficult of interpretation, and variously rendered "revealer of secrets," "saviour of the land" or "a wise man fleeing from pollution," so it may be safely assumed the meaning is doubtful.

Gave him to wife Asenath, daughter of Potipherah (i. e. devoted to the sun), Priest of On (or, as the Greeks called it, "city of the sun").—The then capital of Egypt, the most famous city of the world, where stood a magnificent temple, dedicated to the sun. Priests were the highest and most privileged class, and the priest of On would be primate of Egypt; alliance with his daughter would give Joseph social position.

46-52. Thirty years old.—He had been thirteen years in Egypt.

Went throughout the land.—Locating and arranging for the building of storehouses.

The earth brought forth by handfuls.—The product of a single grain filled the hand of the reaper.

Gathered up all the food (all the surplus food).—It is suggested that a fifth part of the bounteous harvest would support the people, that a fifth part be rendered to the government, and the balance be purchased cheap and stored away in the granaries.

The food of the field, about every city.—Stored where it was produced and where it would be needed.

As the head of the sea.—Proverbial expression for great abundance.

Let's numberings.—Keeping any account of the quantity stored.

Unto Joseph were born two sons.—Manasseh, which means "to forget my toll" in the sense of "gratitude and sorrow," my father's house, not that he had forgotten his father's home but that the great wrong he had suffered from his father's sons.

The name of the second, Ephraim.—Fruitfulness and the reason therefor, "For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." The seed of his prosperity were sown in the years of his affliction and God's hand was seen in it all.

53-57. The seven years of death began to come.—The prediction with reference to the years of extraordinary plenty had proved true and now, that with reference to the seven years of famine begins to be fulfilled. Though rare in Egypt (watered as it is by the annual overflow of the Nile), famines are, not unknown.

The death war in all lands.—Those bordering upon Egypt, such as Palestine and Arabia.

In Egypt, bread.—So brought about that the chosen seed might be brought down to Egypt and the prophecy might be fulfilled in their residence there for 200 years.

The people cried to Pharaoh for bread.—This, to the ruler, was the most fearful of all cries when there was nothing to satisfy it. He bids them go to Joseph, who feeds the starving nation with bread, and under God saves it from the most awful calamity.

Joseph opened all the storehouses.—Grain in a dry country like Egypt will keep indefinitely; some grains of wheat taken from a mummy pit, where they had lain for thousands of years, on being cast into the earth germinated and ripened.

Sold unto the Egyptians.—Having bought and stored up their grain he now sells it back to them; providing for the necessities of the people he does not betray the interest of the government.

The famine waxed sore.—Source of supply there was none outside of Joseph's storehouses. Their money exhausted they sold their cattle and finally their lands to the Crown for bread. The terms which Joseph made with them were not harsh but generous as may be learned from Gen. 47: 26, "Came into Egypt to buy food." This prepares the way for the descent of Jacob and his sons into Egypt. Which with their sojourn there is the subject of the remaining chapters of Genesis.

PRACTICAL THOUGHTS.

1. Sudden adversity is a severe trial. Sudden and unexpected prosperity is still severer. The one depresses the other indelibly. The one leads us to distrust the other to forget God; under either trial Joseph was not found wanting.

2. The years of famine no less than the years of plenty sent of God.

3. The plenty of life's more prosperous years, if husbanded would tide us over its years of want.

CATECHISM.

Q. 103. What do we pray for in the third petition?

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1. To the third petition, which is, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven, we pray, that God, by His grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to His will in all things, as the angels do in heaven.

Nov. 21. Lesson VIII. Gen. xiv. 30-34, xlv. 1-8. Subject: "Joseph and his brethren."

The famine had now lasted two years, Joseph had been twenty-two years in Egypt and nine next to Pharaoh on the throne, Benjamin was a youth of 23. Jacob's home in Hebron was distant from On (Heliopolis) 250 miles, supplies having been exhausted, Jacob sends his sons, save Benjamin, to Egypt to buy corn, grain. Brought into Joseph's presence they are at once recognized, though naturally enough they fail to recognize him.

That he might know all about his father and Benjamin his favorite and youngest son, son of his own mother Rachel and how his brethren, so envious and cruel in his own case, stood disposed towards them, he affected to treat them as spies. The ten brethren were thus led without questioning which might have awakened suspicion, to give him the family history. They assert that they are true men.

Twelve brethren the sons of one man in the land of Canaan and behold the youngest is this day with his father and one is not.—Assuming to doubt their story he bids them verify it by bringing down to him their youngest brother, whilst one of their number, Simeon, should remain in chains as a hostage, to be put to death in case their story proved false. A guilty conscience leads Joseph's brethren to connect the evil which had befallen them at the court of Pharaoh with the crime they had committed a score of years before against their brother, and they said to one another, in long ways as they supposed unknown to the Egyptian ruler in whose presence they stood.

We are verily guilty concerning our brother.—With a pang which almost breaks his heart Jacob consents that Benjamin should go down with his brethren to Egypt. The sight of Benjamin overcomes Joseph. That he may not prematurely betray himself, he hastens from the presence of his brother that he might find relief in tears.

After feasting them Joseph dismisses his brethren, telling his steward to put his silver cup into the mouth of Benjamin's sack. This he did that he might prove to the bottom their love for their father and their affection for the favorite son of their father. This would be shown by the sacrifice they were willing to make to release Benjamin and save the father's heart from breaking. With heavy hearts they return to Joseph's presence when Judah in the name of his brethren pleads for Benjamin and the desolate old man his father Judah's speech for eloquence and pathos has not its equal in any language or literature. He first reminds Joseph of what had been said with reference to any attempt to separate Benjamin from his father whose life was found up in the led life. So that should he leave his father the old man would die, and how he Joseph, had said:

Except your youngest brother come down with you, ye shall see my face no more.—He tells him the old man refused to part from his son, even for a time lest evil befall him and his gray hair be

Brought in evil to the grave.—He tells how under the stress of famine they had wrung from Jacob a reluctant consent that Benjamin should accompany them and it is here that our lesson takes up Judah's speech before Joseph.

30-34. When I come to my father.—He had already witnessed the going of the old man in bereavement. The scene of Jacob's sorrow over Joseph's loss had haunted him all these years.

And the lad is not with us.—The return of his ten sons were nothing whilst the youngest and only remaining son of Rachel languished in chains.

His life is bound up in the lad's life.—How tender and deep the affection of the aged father, harm to the one life would extinguish the other.

Shall bring down the gray hairs in sorrow to the grave.—This language has become a proverbial expression for broken hearted desolate old age. The love of a father for a son stronger than that of life. "Oh, Absalom, my son, would to God I had died for thee!"

For thy servant become surety.—Not only used because of his pity for his aged father, and affection for Benjamin in common with his brethren for sorrow seems to have softened the fierce and envious sons of Jacob, but a special obligation rested upon him to bestow to his father his darling son.

If I bring him not, I shall bear the blame.—He had promised to come between Benjamin and harm between Jacob and sorrow.

Let thy servant abide a bondsman instead of the lad.—The change which time had wrought (perhaps a diviner and more powerful influence still) in the sons of Jacob, seen

in their conduct, in the matter of Benjamin, as contrasted with their treatment of Joseph, they sold him into slavery because their father loved him better than themselves, whilst they are ready now to take Benjamin's place, as a bondsman, for no other reason than that their aged father loved him better than he loved them.

How shall I go to my father?—He could not endure the thought of meeting his father. Did Benjamin remain behind in chains, fetters in Egypt would be more tolerable than his father's grief.

Let I see the evil.—Jacob's death of a broken heart at the loss of his son.

Judah's speech had melted a heart of stone, much more a nature as tender and affectionate as that of Joseph. His object had now been accomplished; he was satisfied as to the filial and fraternal affections of his brethren and concealment was no longer possible.

Chap. xlv. 1-8. Could not refrain himself.—Judah's appeal too much for his self-control, he must sink the ruler in the man and brother.

Cause every man to go out from me.—There are moments when the fountains of the soul's emotions are broken up, when the presence of a child as a witness were painful as a profanation. Perhaps too, Joseph would not have his servants known the enmity of his brother towards him; to their prejudices.

He wept aloud.—The strength of Joseph's character shows thus far in his self-control. Its depth of tenderness in the irresistible tide of his emotion when nature must give away. There is no weakness in tears, Jesus wept.

The house of Pharaoh heard.—Joseph's passage was near that of the king. Whilst the eleven look on with mingled feelings of fear and astonishment at the seemingly stern ruler who bent before them under an uncontrollable tide of emotion he masters himself so far as to sob out, "I am Joseph, does my father still live?" His brethren could not answer him. All save Benjamin, overwhelmed with the shame and the confusion, could but bow their heads in guilty silence. They were troubled, their sin had exposed them.

Come near to me.—He hastens to relieve them as they shrink from him under a sense of guilty fear. As they stand stupefied under the influence of feelings so strong and conflicting he breaks the silence again, repeating the words, "I am Joseph, your brother; your brother still; neither time nor cruel treatment has loosened the bond nor dissolved the tie of affection."

Whom ye sold into Egypt.—This was not added by way of reproach, but to fix his identity and to enable them to trace God's providence in overruling their act.

Be not grieved or angry that ye sold me thither.—Instead of being angry with them Joseph bids them not be angry with themselves; he would have them not to dwell so much on the evil they had wrought as the good God had brought out of it.

God did send me before you.—These words spoken not to condone their crime but to assure them of his forgiveness and to emphasize the wisdom and goodness of the Divine promises.

Five years.—Two years of the famine had passed.

Neither sowing.—Literally plowing. Nor harvest.—Our expression would be neither sowing nor reaping, seed time or harvest. This might be occasioned by the Nile either failing to overflow its banks, or its excessive overflow. It has been conjectured that the famine was due to the latter cause, and was occasioned by the giving way of some basin which hemmed in some of the great lakes in the centre of Africa, whence flows the Nile.

God sent me before you.—From the human stand point Joseph goes down to Egypt as a slave, but from God's standpoint as a Divine messenger. They sold him to the midwives that he might never rule over them. God had simply through them conducted him to a throne. When in fulfillment of his dream his father's eleven sons were now doing him homage.

Not you but God.—In God's higher purpose wiser, holier, and more powerful instrumentality, he chose sight of their wretched instrumentality.

Father to Pharaoh.—Second author of life to him and Saviour of his land. We call Washington "the father of his country."

PRACTICAL THOUGHTS.

1. True eloquence is the offspring of deep emotion, and virtuous feeling springs from the intellect rather than the heart.

2. Judah is willing to bear Benjamin's chains, Christ was wounded for our transgressions.

3. Strength of character not at all inconsistent with tenderness of feeling. The bravest are the tenderest; the loving are the daring.

4. As in the case of Joseph's brethren their sin was overruled to their salvation. So Christ doeth at the hands of sinful men, save men from their sins.

CATECHISM.

Q. 104. What do we pray for in the fourth petition?

A. In the fourth petition, which is, Give us this day our daily bread, we pray, that of God's free gift we may receive a competent portion of the good things of this life and enjoy His blessing with them.

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