August 8, 2017

Prison Ministry

**Story of Redemption** (1947) Chapter **14: The Children of Israel**

 JOSEPH listened to his father's instructions and feared the Lord. He was more obedient to his father's righteous teachings than any of his brethren. He treasured his instructions and, with integrity of heart, loved to obey God. He was grieved at the wrong conduct of some of his brethren and meekly entreated them to pursue a righteous course and leave off their wicked acts. This only embittered them against him. His hatred of sin was such that he could not endure to see his brethren sinning against God. He laid the matter before his father, hoping that his authority might reform them. This exposure of their wrongs enraged his brethren against him. They had observed their father's strong love for Joseph, and were envious of him. Their envy grew into hatred, and finally to murder.

 The angel of God instructed Joseph in dreams which he had innocently related to his brethren: "For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf. And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words.

 "And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying."

**Joseph in Egypt**

 Joseph's brethren purposed to kill him, but were finally content to sell him as a slave, to prevent his becoming greater than themselves. They thought they had placed him where they would be no more troubled with his dreams, and where there would not be a possibility of their fulfillment. But the very course which they pursued God overruled to bring about that which they designed never should take place--that he should have dominion over them.

 God did not leave Joseph to go into Egypt alone. Angels prepared the way for his reception. Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, bought him of the Ishmaelites. And the Lord was with Joseph, and He prospered him and gave him favor with his master, so that all he possessed he entrusted to Joseph's care. "And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat." It was considered an abomination for a Hebrew to prepare food for an Egyptian. {SR 101.3}

 When Joseph was tempted to deviate from the path of right, to transgress the law of God and prove untrue to his master, he firmly resisted and gave evidence of the elevating power of the fear of God in his answer to his master's wife. After speaking of the great confidence of his master in him, by entrusting all that he had with him, he exclaimed, "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" He would not be persuaded to deviate from the path of righteousness and trample upon God's law by any inducements or threats.

 And when he was accused, and a base crime was falsely laid to his charge, he did not sink in despair. In the consciousness of innocence and right he still trusted God. And God, who had hitherto supported him, did not forsake him. He was bound with fetters and kept in a gloomy prison. Yet God turned even this misfortune into a blessing. He gave him favor with the keeper of the prison, and to Joseph was soon committed the charge of all the prisoners.

 Here is an example to all generations who should live upon the earth. Although they may be exposed to temptations, yet they should ever realize that there is a defense at hand, and it will be their own fault if they are not preserved. God will be a present help, and His Spirit a shield. Although surrounded with the severest temptations, there is a source of strength to which they can apply and resist them.

 How fierce was the assault upon Joseph's morals. It came from one of influence, the most likely to lead astray. Yet how promptly and firmly was it resisted. He suffered for his virtue and integrity, for she who would lead him astray revenged herself upon the virtue she could not subvert, and by her influence caused him to be cast into prison, by charging him with a foul wrong. Here Joseph suffered because he would not yield his integrity. He had placed his reputation and interest in the hands of God. And although he was suffered to be afflicted for a time, to prepare him to fill an important position, yet God safely guarded that reputation that was blackened by a wicked accuser, and afterward, in His own good time, caused it to shine. God made even the prison the way to his elevation. Virtue will in time bring its own reward. The shield which covered Joseph's heart was the fear of God, which caused him to be faithful and just to his master and true to God.

 Although Joseph was exalted as a ruler over all the land, yet he did not forget God. He knew that he was a stranger in a strange land, separated from his father and his brethren, which often caused him sadness, but he firmly believed that God's hand had overruled his course, to place him in an important position. And, depending on God continually, he performed all the duties of his office, as ruler over the land of Egypt, with faithfulness.

 Joseph walked with God. He would not be persuaded to deviate from the path of righteousness and transgress God's law, by any inducement or threats. His self-control and patience in adversity and his unwavering fidelity are left on record for the benefit of all who should afterward live on the earth. When Joseph's brethren acknowledged their sin before him, he freely forgave them and showed by his acts of benevolence and love that he harbored no resentful feelings for their former cruel conduct toward him.

**Days of Prosperity**

 The children of Israel were not slaves. They had never sold their cattle, their lands, and themselves to Pharaoh for food, as many of the Egyptians had done. They had been granted a portion of land wherein to dwell, with their flocks and cattle, on account of the service Joseph had been to the kingdom. Pharaoh appreciated his wisdom in the management of all things connected with the kingdom, especially in the preparations for the long years of famine which came upon the land of Egypt. He felt that the whole kingdom was indebted for their prosperity to the wise management of Joseph; and, as a token of his gratitude, he said to Joseph, "The land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell: and if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle."

 "And Joseph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. And Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread, according to their families." }

 No tax was required of Joseph's father and brethren by the king of Egypt, and Joseph was allowed the privilege of supplying them liberally with food. The king said to his rulers, Are we not indebted to the God of Joseph, and to him, for this liberal supply of food? Was it not because of his wisdom that we laid in so abundantly? While other lands are perishing, we have enough! His management has greatly enriched the kingdom.

 "And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them. Now there rose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land."

**The Oppression**

 This new king of Egypt learned that the children of Israel were of great service to the kingdom. Many of them were able and understanding workmen, and he was not willing to lose their labor. This new king ranked the children of Israel with that class of slaves who had sold their flocks, their herds, their lands, and themselves to the kingdom. "Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure-cities, Pithom and Raamses.

 "But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel. And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: and they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour."

 They compelled their women to work in the fields, as though they were slaves. Yet their numbers did not decrease. As the king and his rulers saw that they continually increased, they consulted together to compel them to accomplish a certain amount every day. They thought to subdue them with hard labor, and were angry because they could not decrease their numbers and crush out their independent spirit.

 And because they failed to accomplish their purpose, they hardened their hearts to go still further. The king commanded that the male children should be killed as soon as they were born. Satan was the mover in these matters. He knew that a deliverer was to be raised up among the Hebrews to rescue them from oppression. He thought that if he could move the king to destroy the male children, the purpose of God would be defeated. The women feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive.

 The women dared not murder the Hebrew children, and because they obeyed not the command of the king, the Lord prospered them. As the king of Egypt was informed that his command had not been obeyed, he was very angry. He then made his command more urgent and extensive. He charged all his people to keep a strict watch, saying, "Every son that is born in Egypt ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive."

**Moses**

 When this cruel decree was in full force, Moses was born. His mother hid him as long as she could with any safety, and then prepared a little vessel of bulrushes, making it secure with pitch, that no water might enter the little ark, and placed it at the edge of the water, while his sister should be lingering around the water with apparent indifference. She was anxiously watching to see what would become of her little brother. Angels were also watching, that no harm should come to the helpless infant, which had been placed there by an affectionate mother and committed to the care of God by her earnest prayers mingled with tears.

 And these angels directed the footsteps of Pharaoh's daughter to the river, near the very spot where lay the innocent little stranger. Her attention was attracted to the little strange vessel, and she sent one of her waiting maids to fetch it to her. And when she had removed the cover of this singularly constructed little vessel, she saw a lovely babe, "and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him." She knew that a tender Hebrew mother had taken this singular means to preserve the life of her much-loved babe, and she decided at once that it should be her son. The sister of Moses immediately came forward and inquired, "Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go."

 Joyfully sped the sister to her mother and related to her the happy news and conducted her with all haste to Pharaoh's daughter, where the child was committed to the mother to nurse, and she was liberally paid for the bringing up of her own son. Thankfully did this mother enter upon her now safe and happy task. She believed that God had preserved his life. Faithfully did she improve the precious opportunity of educating her son in reference to a life of usefulness. She was more particular in his instruction than in that of her other children; for she felt confident that he was preserved for some great work. By her faithful teachings she instilled into his young mind the fear of God and love for truthfulness and justice.

 She did not rest here in her efforts but earnestly prayed to God for her son that he might be preserved from every corrupting influence. She taught him to bow and pray to God, the living God, for He alone could hear him and help him in any emergency. She sought to impress his mind with the sinfulness of idolatry. She knew that he was to be soon separated from her influence and given up to his adopted royal mother, to be surrounded with influences calculated to make him disbelieve in the existence of the Maker of the heavens and of the earth.

 The instructions he received from his parents were such as to fortify his mind and shield him from being lifted up and corrupted with sin and becoming proud amid the splendor and extravagance of court life. He had a clear mind and an understanding heart, and never lost the pious impressions he received in his youth. His mother kept him as long as she could, but she was obliged to separate from him when he was about twelve years old, and he then became the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

 Here Satan was defeated. By moving Pharaoh to destroy the male children, he thought to turn aside the purposes of God and destroy the one whom God would raise up to deliver His people. But that very decree, appointing the Hebrew children to death, was the means God overruled to place Moses in the royal family, where he had advantages to become a learned man and eminently qualified to lead his people from Egypt. {SR 108.2}

 Pharaoh expected to exalt his adopted grandson to the throne. He educated him to stand at the head of the armies of Egypt and lead them to battle. Moses was a great favorite with Pharaoh's host and was honored because he conducted warfare with superior skill and wisdom. "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds." The Egyptians regarded Moses as a remarkable character.

**Special Preparation for Leadership**

 Angels instructed Moses that God had chosen him to deliver the children of Israel. The rulers among the children of Israel were also taught by angels that the time for their deliverance was nigh, and that Moses was the man whom God would use to accomplish this work. Moses thought that the children of Israel would be delivered by warfare, and that he would stand at the head of the Hebrew host, to conduct the warfare against the Egyptian armies and deliver his brethren from the yoke of oppression. Having this in view, Moses guarded his affections, that they might not be strongly placed upon his adopted mother or upon Pharaoh, lest it should be more difficult for him to remain free to do the will of God.

 The Lord preserved Moses from being injured by the corrupting influences around him. The principles of truth, received in his youth from God-fearing parents, were never forgotten by him. And when he most needed to be shielded from the corrupting influences attending a life at court, then the lessons of his youth bore fruit. The fear of God was before him. And so strong was his love for his brethren, and so great was his respect for the Hebrew faith, that he would not conceal his parentage for the honor of being an heir of the royal family.

 When Moses was forty years old, "he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens; and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand. And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together: and he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow? And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known. Now when Pharaoh heard this thing he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian." The Lord directed his course, and he found a home with Jethro, a man that worshiped God. He was a shepherd, also priest of Midian. His daughters tended his flocks. But Jethro's flocks were soon placed under the care of Moses, who married Jethro's daughter and remained in Midian forty years.

 Moses was too fast in slaying the Egyptian. He supposed that the people of Israel understood that God's special providence had raised him up to deliver them. But God did not design to deliver the children of Israel by warfare, as Moses thought, but by His own mighty power, that the glory might be ascribed to Him alone. God overruled the act of Moses in slaying the Egyptian to bring about His purpose. He had in His providence brought Moses into the royal family of Egypt, where he had received a thorough education; and yet he was not prepared for God to entrust to him the great work He had raised him up to accomplish. Moses could not immediately leave the king's court and the indulgences granted him as the king's grandson to perform the special work of God. He must have time to obtain an experience and be educated in the school of adversity and poverty. While he was living in retirement, the Lord sent His angels to especially instruct him in regard to the future. Here he learned more fully the great lesson of self-control and humility. He kept the flocks of Jethro, and while he was performing his humble duties as a shepherd, God was preparing him to become a spiritual shepherd of His sheep, even of His people Israel.

 As Moses led the flock to the desert and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb, "the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush." "And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. . . . Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come up unto Me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel out of Egypt."

 The time had fully come when God would have Moses exchange the shepherd's staff for the rod of God, which He would make powerful in accomplishing signs and wonders, in delivering His people from oppression, and in preserving them when pursued by their enemies.

 Moses consented to perform the mission. He first visited his father-in-law and obtained his consent for himself and his family to return into Egypt. He did not dare to tell Jethro his message to Pharaoh, lest he should be unwilling to let his wife and children accompany him on such a dangerous mission. The Lord strengthened him and removed his fears by saying to him, "Return into Egypt: for all the men are dead which sought thy life."

Next Mailing: Story of Redemption Chapter **15: God's Power Revealed**