

INTERNATIONAL S. S. LESSON--

LAST DAYS OF JOSEPH.—Gen. 50: 14-26.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Prov. 10: 7. Commit—18-21. Time—1635, B. C.

INTRODUCTION AND CONNECTION.

Between our last lesson and this, a period of somewhat more than fifty years elapsed, of which there are no scriptural records, excepting those of the dying blessing Jacob pronounced upon his sons; Jacob's death; and the particulars of his removal to Canaan, and burial in the sepulchre of his fathers.

LESSON NOTES.

(14, 15). *And Joseph returned into Egypt—he and his brethren, and all that went with him to bury his father.* The embalming of Jacob's dead body had occupied forty days; the mourning seventy days more; and then had followed the long journey into Canaan, the mourning by the way, and the return again into Egypt. During all this time the brothers of Joseph had had ample time to reflect upon the past, their early conspiracy against him, the fact that their father, who had been the great bond between them, and for whose sake it might be possible he had spared their lives, was no more, and that they were thus left wholly at his mercy. With such reflections, would come the fear that the retribution they could not but feel they had merited, would finally be visited upon them by Joseph. This, however unjust to Joseph, was perfectly natural. It is very hard to understand the possibility of perfect and absolute forgiveness and we need not wonder at the state of mind in which the sons of Jacob found themselves on their return to Egypt after the burial of their father.

(16). *Sent a messenger.* So great had become their fear and dread of Joseph, that they could not bring themselves to appear in person before him, but sent a messenger to speak in their behalf.

Thy father did command before he died, saying,—&c. Some have supposed that, knowing Joseph's profound reverence for his father's command, they invented this story in order to draw from him some promise of kindness for the future. This is doubtless unjust; nor is there anything in the fact that Jacob had commanded them to do this, to justify the opinion that he himself had ever suspected Joseph's continued kindness toward them; for he knew the character of Joseph too well to admit of such a suspicion. But the attitude of confession and humiliation which Jacob had commanded them to assume towards Joseph, their saviour and lord, to whom they owed everything, and from whom they deserved nothing but severity, was both proper and becoming. It would have been most unseemly in them, when their father was dead, to go on enjoying Joseph's protection and favor as before, without some formal acknowledgment of demerit, and some request that clemency and favor might still be extended to them. Whatever favor they had, or could have, irrespective of considerations for their father, was matter of pure favor; and it was a good thing for them to both feel and acknowledge it.

(17). There are two petitions in this verse. The first purports to be from Israel, their father—*forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin: for they did unto thee evil;—and the second from themselves—we pray thee forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father.* They claim to be the servants of Israel's God—their humility and confession of sin are evidence that they were such. *Thy father.*

They do not say *our father.* This is regarded by some as artfully introduced for the purpose of more effectually working upon Joseph's feelings. We prefer regarding it rather as evidence of humility and self-distrust which led them to keep themselves in the background, as unworthy to be classed with Joseph in such honorable relationship.

And Joseph wept. We can hardly conceive it possible that Joseph should not have wept. A petition so pathetic asked under such authority, and in such a name, would move even a stern nature to tears,—how much more, one tender and affectionate like Joseph.

(18). *And his brethren also wept, and fell down before his face.* Probably having heard through their messenger of Joseph's emotion, they were emboldened to come before him themselves. They assumed before him the attitude of the deepest

humiliation and the most profound reverence. *It's be thy servants.* This was an assurance of fidelity, both for themselves and their posterity. Here, then, was a renewed fulfillment of Joseph's dream—a full confirmation on the part of his brethren of his title to the birthright.

(19-21). *Fear not, for am I in the place of God? This is equal to saying,—do not torment yourselves with any fear of me. Am I in God's place, to visit you with retribution?—I have passed by your offence, and forgiven it—in regard to it, you have now to deal with God, not with me. True, you thought evil against me—we will neither conceal nor excuse that—but God used your evil act for the accomplishment of good for us all—overruled it in order to save much people alive. Now, therefore, fear ye not; I will nourish you and your little ones, and he comforted them, and spake kindly to their hearts.* Joseph's words here go very far towards confirming the opinion that his brothers were sincere in their professions—truly humble and repentant. Joseph trusted them, and fully accepted their professions;—there is nothing in scripture to show that he was deceived.

(22, 23). *Joseph lived a hundred and ten years.* We may infer that Joseph was the first of the sons of Jacob to die; yet this may not be correct as he is the only one whose death is mentioned. His age was much less than that of his forefathers—perhaps owing to the less salubrious climate of Egypt, to which he had been exposed for more than ninety years; perhaps, also, to the more luxurious habits of life to which he became inured after his elevation to the dignity of prime minister to the King of Egypt. Still he lived to see the posterity of both his sons—of the younger to the third generation.

(24, 25). *Joseph said unto his brethren—probably the most, if not all of them were alive—I die, and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land into the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.* This is mentioned by the Apostle (Heb. 11:22) as though it had been the specially distinguished act of faith of Joseph's life. He had implicit confidence that God would fulfil His promise; and accordingly he exacted an oath from his brethren to carry his bones to Canaan when God's time for their deliverance should come. This regard for the care of their bodies after death, argues a deep conviction in the minds of the patriarchs that the mission of their bodies was not finished when they were laid aside in death; and an expectation, however vague, that they would be again claimed to participate with the spirit in the enjoyment of the perfect fulfillment of the divine promises.

(26). *So Joseph died... and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.* Being put in a coffin, while with us nothing else is thought of, was, in Egypt, a mark of high distinction,—swathing and embalming being, in the majority of cases, deemed sufficient; and even these were not universal. So the last service rendered to Joseph in Egypt was such as is shown only to persons of highest dignity. 144 years after, the remains of this great and good man were conveyed to Canaan, (Ex. 13:19; Josh. 24:32) and buried in the portion of land which constituted the last gift of his father to him.

SUGGESTED THOUGHTS.

The sons of Jacob, overburdened with fear and self-accusation, cast themselves at the feet of Joseph, for the purpose of thus turning away his wrath, and found that there was no wrath there, but on the contrary, the tenderest love. So Christians often, under a consciousness of sin, come to God with trembling and fear, only to find their hearts melted under a revelation of His tenderness and love.

Joseph's faith, like that of his fathers, rested in his dying hour upon the promises of God, and looked beyond death to a participation in their blessings. So with God's people ever since. Their crowning joy in death is the hope of a glorious resurrection to an incorruptible inheritance in Christ.

QUESTION SUMMARY.

(FOR THE CHILDREN.)

(14). Where had Joseph and his brethren been? For what purpose? Did they remain in Canaan? Where was Jacob buried?—(See ch. 49: 29-31). Who else were buried there? (15). What did Joseph's brothers think that possibly he might do since their father was dead? (16). Did they go themselves to speak to

him about it? (17). What did their messenger say? Was Joseph angry? What did he do? What was there in that to make Joseph weep? (18). What then did Joseph's brothers do and say? What made them so much afraid after their father was dead? Had they any need to be so much afraid? Do you think Joseph had forgiven his brothers? (19). What does he say here that shows that he really had done so? What does he say his brothers meant what they did to him for? What did God mean it for? What good had God made to come out of what they did? (21). What very kind promise did Joseph give his brothers? What is the meaning of *I will nourish you?* (22). Did he keep his promises? How old did Joseph become? Joseph was 17 years old when he went to Egypt, and 110 years when he died;—how long, then, did he live in Egypt? (23). Whose children and grandchildren did he live to see? (24). What did Joseph tell his brothers would surely happen? (25). What did he make them promise they would do when it did happen? (26). What did they do to Joseph's dead body? What is meant by *embalmed?* Preserved it in such a way that it would dry, but would not decay. Joseph saved his brothers from starvation,—who is a far greater Saviour than Joseph? Is Jesus your Saviour.

THEY BOTH PRAYED.

It was past midnight. Tossing in the restlessness of pain and fever, Florence lay on her wakeful couch, burning with thirst, yet unable to swallow a drop of water to assuage it without adding to her pain.

"Call my father," she cried in her agony to her mother, her only watcher, who had sought in vain to afford any relief.

Softly the mother went to an adjoining room, where Florence's father, exhausted by previous watching, lay in a deep sleep. Hesitating, she went back without disturbing him, to hear again the beseeching request:

"Call my father. I am so thirsty and I cannot drink."

This was something beyond the mother's experience, that water taken when craven so earnestly should distress, not afford relief. She felt that some power beyond her own must bring help, if it came. For twenty-four hours Florence had neither slept nor drank. Once, when she had tried holding water in her mouth to assuage the thirst, she had swallowed a little, which caused intense distress, and she turned from it as from an enemy. Again the mother went into the next room, and again returned without disturbing the sleeper. She lay down softly by the restless child, and earnestly yet silently prayed that if possible God would relieve her. In a moment came the words:

"Mother, I feel better; I would like a drink."

Too much for the mother's faith, she replied:

"A drink! You know how even a swallow distresses you."

"Please give me a drink, mother," was the reply.

The glass of cold water was held to Florence's lips, and eagerly and without fear she drank freely of its contents and lay back on the pillow with a look of perfect quiet on her face. Hardly daring to move, her mother repeated in a low voice two verses she had learned when a child younger than Florence, and which hundreds of times since she had repeated to herself when wakeful at night, to find them bring rest, if not sleep.

"When courting slumber
The hours I number,
And sad cares number
My weary mind.
This thought shall cheer me,
That thou art near me,
Whose ear to hear me
Is still inclined.

"My soul thou keepest,
Who never sleepest,
Mid gloom the deepest
Thine eyes behold me,
Thy word has told me
That God is love."

She looked at Florence as she finished the lines, and the restless eyes were closed. She was asleep. Not daring to move, she lay perfectly quiet, with her eyes fixed on a clock which stood on a bracket near by. Twenty minutes of sweet sleep and Florence opened her eyes with a smile, and said:

"I would like something to eat."
No one but a mother who has watched with intense solicitude over a sick child can tell the music in those words.

Quickly she prepares a delicate morsel and was surprised to find it could be eaten with no more pain following than had been caused by the draught of water. The crisis was passed, and Florence was out of danger.

"I was at my wit's end," said her mother to her the next morning, "while watching with you last night. And if ever I prayed in my life I did when I came in the second time and lay down beside you."

"I was praying too, mamma," was the unexpected and most welcome reply.

"And mother," she added, "why did you never say those sweet verses to me before?"

"I do not know," was all the reply her mother could give; "but you may take them now, and if they prove of as much comfort to you as they have long been to me, I shall be very glad; and neither you nor I," she added, "must ever forget the night when we both prayed.—*South Western Presbyterian.*

PRESUMPTION.

A young German countess, who lived about a hundred years ago, was a noted unbeliever, and especially opposed to the doctrine of the resurrection. She died when about thirty years of age, and before her death gave orders that her grave should be covered with a solid slab of granite; that around it should be placed square blocks of stone, and that the corners should be fastened to each other and to the granite slab by heavy iron clamps. Upon the covering this inscription was placed: "This burial place, purchased to all eternity, must never be opened." All that human power could do to prevent any change in that grave was done; but a little seed sprouted, and the tiny shoot found its way between the side stone and the upper slab, and grew there, slowly but steadily forcing its way until the iron clamps were torn asunder, and the granite lid was raised and is now resting upon the trunk of the tree, which is large and flourishing. The people of Hanover regard it with almost a kind of superstition, and speak in lowest tones of the wicked countess; and it is natural they should, for as I stood beside that grave in the old churchyard it certainly impressed me more deeply than I can express.—*Standard.*

MRS. HAYES' WORK.

Very valuable testimony to the excellence of the work Mrs. Hayes has done for the cause of temperance is found in a recent letter from Washington to a Hartford paper. The writer had talked with a drummer from a New York liquor house, who was emphatic on the decrease of the trade in Washington. He said: "We don't sell one case of wine in Washington now where we sold thirty some years ago. Mrs. Hayes' 'No wine at state dinners,' may have sounded easy to other people, but it was almost a sound of death to the wine trade. Many is the time we have sold hundreds of boxes to dealers who we knew in turn furnished them to the Executive Mansion. That trade is entirely gone now. Mrs. Hayes having declared against wine, of course it became unfashionable in a manner, and its consumption fell off very much. Last winter there was not one case of wine sold where forty was sold even ten years ago." The paragraph is headed "Mrs. Hayes' Awful Work" all over the land, and may God bless the brave woman who inaugurated so true a reform.—*Illustrated Christian Weekly.*