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THE TEACHER.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1873.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

SUNDAY, May 4th.

Joseph Exalted.—Gen. xli. 37-49.

COMMIT TO MEMORY.—Vs. 41-43.

Preliminary Statement.—Since our last lesson a great change has come over Joseph's fortunes: we left him in a prison; we find him in a palace—we left him obscure and a slave; we find him raised to the dignity of a king.

What has brought this change about?

Primarily of course the providence of God. But the providence of God works through human means, and Joseph's wisdom and fidelity have contributed to his elevation. His kindness to the chief butler, then a prisoner, led to the mention of him to Pharaoh, Gen. 41: 9-14; his fidelity to his trust in the prison brought him there with a good character and good reputation; and his courage and piety in confessing God, in the presence of the Egyptian priesthood, and declaring that his ability to interpret the dream, which all the magicians of Egypt could not interpret, came from the God of Israel, Gen. 41: 16-32, instead of exciting the king's prejudice secured the king's favor. Verse 39. "What was the secret of Joseph's success?" See last lesson. The story of the process by which Joseph was brought out of prison, and his course in the palace, and his counsel to the king, Gen. 40, 41: 1-37, though omitted from the series of Lessons, ought to be carefully studied by the Sabbath-school superintendent and teachers, and the connection kept up in the minds of the class by a brief narration of the facts. In studying this intermediate history, observe that in the providence of God one event apparently trivial leads to another of great importance, as the imprisonment of the butler and baker to Joseph's release and exaltation, Gen. 40: 3, 4, with 41: 9; that kindness and consideration to the lowly are never in God's providence wholly lost even when they appear to be insensible to it, Gen. 40: 6-7, with verse 23 and 41: 9; that patient waiting is no loss, but that patience does not forbid the use of every right and reasonable means of securing release from evil, Gen. 40: 15, 41: 1; that Joseph was not unmindful of the little courtesies and proprieties of life: and that while he is one of the most courageous, devout, and God-fearing of the holy men of Old Testament history, by his example he repudiates the idea that disregard of dress is a sign of piety, Gen. 41: 14; that his head is not turned by his sudden good fortune, verse 14, nor does he make it an occasion of triumphing over the unsuccessful interpreters, nor of self-seeking, but only of wise and disinterested advice, verses 33-36.

NOTES.—Verse 37.—Servants.—Courtiers and Councillors. The kings of ancient Egypt, though autocrats, were assisted in the management of state affairs by the most distinguished members of the priestly order. Compare Isaiah 19: 11.

Verse 38.—Belief in one Supreme Being, superior to and the author of the many lesser deities of heathen nations, has generally existed among the higher and cultured classes, as it does to-day among the educated of India. Pharaoh recognized, apparently, by this sentence, that the God of Israel was the true God, the Supreme Being, though he may not have relinquished his faith in the subordinate deities of Egypt. He was evidently led to this declaration by Joseph's distinct recognition of the fact that the interpretation of the dream came from God. Verse 16.

Verse 40.—Over my house.—Steward of Egypt as before steward of Potiphar's house; in other words, viceroy of the kingdom.

According unto thy word.—There is some difference of opinion among commentators as to the proper translation here. It appears to be the better opinion that our translators have rendered it correctly, and that it signifies that Joseph should be vested with an autocratic power, second only to that of the king himself. In Eastern despotisms, and indeed often in monarchical countries, the real power is practically exercised, not by the monarch, but by a favorite prime minister. For the greater part of twenty years William Pitt was practically king of England. Only in the throne, i. e., apparently in the symbol and sign of power.

The king would still keep the appearance of royalty; its ordinary exercise was intrusted to Joseph.

Verse 42.—His ring.—The ring contained the king's seal which, impressed on any document, answered the purpose secured in modern times by the signature. To give him his royal ring was equivalent to giving him the power to issue any decree in the king's name and with the king's authority. Compare Esther 3: 10; 8: 2, 8.

Vestures of fine linen.—Egypt was celebrated for its flax and the fineness of its textures. The gift of robes was a common one, by princes or other wealthy entertainers, and is so to this day in the East. In this case it was the external insignia of his rank, as the ring was the instrument of his power. It was analogous to the placing of epaulettes upon the shoulders of a newly appointed military officer.

Gold chain.—This served a similar purpose. It was a badge of office in Egypt, Babylon, and Persia. Compare Dan. 5: 7.

Verse 43.—And he made him, etc.—This appears to indicate a procession in his honor, which at the same time afforded a natural means of announcing to all the people the honor and authority conferred upon him. Compare Esther 6: 10, 11.

Verse 44.—An exaggerated expression of Pharaoh for the purpose of expressing the absolute character of Joseph's authority.

Verse 45.—Zophnath-paaneah.—Revealer of secrets. On, same as Heliopolis, where was a famous temple to the Sun. Joseph married the daughter of the chief priest of this temple. The priestly class was the highest class in Egypt; the king himself belonged to it. Thus by his marriage Joseph was secured the protection of the only class from whose enmity he would be likely to suffer. The suddenness of this promotion seems to us surprising. But it is in accordance with Eastern character and governments, and especially in a case where, as here, the impression was produced on the king and people of a divine presence and sanction to the individual promoted. Several analogous cases are related in secular history, though none so striking.

Verse 47.—Handfuls.—Great abundance.

Verse 48.—Gathered up.—That is, he levied a tax of one-fifth, verse 34. Laid up.—In barns or granaries.

Verse 49.—Without number.—That is, so abundant that he ceased to keep a record of the amount.

THOUGHTS FOR THE CLASS.—Verse 38.—Joseph for at least thirteen years has faithfully served God. In all time of trouble he has acknowledged Him. Now God honors Joseph, and causes the honor given him by the king to be placed on the express ground that God is with him. Because Joseph confesses God in verse 16, the king honors Joseph in verse 38. "If any man serve me, him will my Father honor." John 12: 26. Compare Matt. 10: 32.

Verse 39.—The heathen king teaches the Christian a lesson. He is truly wise whom God guides. Divine grace is larger and more generous than we are accustomed to think. "The Lord giveth wisdom," Prov. 2: 6. He not only inspires moral qualities but also guides us in earthly perplexities if we put our trust in him. There is not a doubt which we may not carry to him.

Verse 40.—The road to authority is obedience. It is Joseph's patient obedience to the hitherto inexplicable will of God that brings him to the place of power. He that humbly himself shall be exalted. Luke 14: 11.

Verse 42.—Compare with Luke 15: 22. Like Joseph the sinner is a slave and in prison. Like Joseph he is brought before the king. Like Joseph he is exalted to be a prince and a ruler. Like Joseph he receives a ring, symbol of power; the robe, symbol of honor. But unlike Joseph all this is conferred on him, not for his excellence, but for the wisdom, the grace, the love of another.

worries concerning it. Joseph illustrates the truth that the highest worldly wisdom and the truest piety are not inconsistent.

Joseph and David are both illustrations, also, of the truth that one may maintain the most devout experience of trust in God the most sincere service of him in periods of alternate distress and exaltation.

Compare, on this whole lesson, Phil. 4: 12. He who like Joseph can be "Cast down but not destroyed," 2 Cor. 4: 8, 9, like Joseph can be exalted and not puffed up.

Observe that prosperity is never the result of "good luck." Men that are called "lucky" are so because they have fitted themselves by industry to take advantage of the opportunities. Joseph's being brought to the palace would have brought no preferment if he had not been faithful before as a steward. "A great occasion is worth to a man exactly what his antecedents have enabled him to make of it." F. Arnold. "There are moments that are worth more than years: . . . and this all-important moment, this moment disproportionate to all other moments, who can tell when it will be upon us? What a lesson to have our resources for meeting it available and at hand." Dean Alford.—Christian Weekly.

Scripture Catechism, 115.

SUNDAY, May 11th.—The Report from Egypt.—Gen. xlii. 29-38.

Youths' Department.

IN A BUDDHIST TEMPLE.

Miss S. H. Woolston writes to the *Heathen Woman's Friend*:

"Having dismissed school for vacation, we have come up to Drum Mountain Monastery to spend a few days, for rest and a change. We have brought our chairs out into the centre temple, the coolest place we can find, and have it all go ourselves, excepting the idols. Facing us are the 'Three Precious Ones'—the past, present, and future Buddhas—immense images seated in lotus-flowers. They reign 25,000 years each. They have quite contented expressions so far as their faces are not blank. At the right of the centre idol, which holds a tiny image eight inches high in its hands, is a standing figure with a young face; at the left another, old and wrinkled. All these are looking down with eyes nearly closed. Down the sides of this temple are the eighteen disciples of Buddha, nine on either side. They are much larger than life, and have various expressions and positions—some with open mouths and one hand raised as though speaking, several have staring eyes, and there is one with dimpled cheeks and smiling face. One has a ring in his hand, another a mosquito-brush, others a staff, cymbal, lotus-flower. A fat fellow with a rosy air is laughing, his next neighbor sits with folded hands, and the next is reading a book. One quite aged has but two teeth left. Several wear sandals or boots, others shoes and stockings, while two or three have their shoes slipped off lying in front of them, and their feet tucked up, tailor-fashion. There is one with a tiny ball between his thumb and finger, about which he is earnestly talking; his eye-brows and beard are rather like grains of corn than hair, and are painted red. All those have flowing robes, are made of clay, and gilded; their eyes, hair—if they have any—lips, teeth, and shoes are painted. These images are not all, but I shall have to go round and count the others and see what they are.

"There is a small, fat, 'Laughing Buddha' seated in a red arm-chair, two gods riding elephants, two on tigers, two standing in lotus-flowers. Kwang Ing, the 'Goddess of Mercy,' is seated in a lotus, a crown on her head, and five attendants around, one of them just presenting her something, another looking very fierce, with a sword lying across his clasped hands. I must not omit the two gods in armor, each occupying a little curtained niche of its own.

"Behind the partition against which the 'Three Precious Ones' are placed are thirty-six other images, from one foot high to more than life size, all, with one exception in meditative mood, with downcast eyes. The gods have wonderfully large ears.

"On the altars in front of the three colossal images are small idols, incense-urns, candlesticks, and flower-vases. A large drum in one corner of the temple and a bell in another are used every day at worship. Lanterns are hung here and there, three of which are kept constantly burning. Sister asked the man who came in to trim these, 'Why do you keep a light burning when the sun shines?' He said, 'So the gods can see.'

THE ISLAND OF MADAGASCAR.

Madagascar as a field of missionary labor and success is not excelled in interest by any country in the world. There has been less said of this island of late than there was a few years ago. A friend who is deeply interested in it has forwarded us a few extracts from "Mr. Ellis' Three Visits" which he believes will be very instructive to many of our readers who have not had the opportunity of reading the book. Those who know but little of the trials of the Christians there will peruse these portions with pleasure, and it induced to a further acquaintance with the island they will be amply repaid:

The Island of Madagascar, extending over an area larger than that of Great Britain and Ireland combined, and inhabited by more than three millions of people, has at different periods attracted the notice of the chief maritime nations of Europe, but, with the exception of a short period in the early part of the seventh century, it is only since our possession of Mauritius, and the subsequent treaty of friendship and alliance entered into between the late king Radama and the Governor of Mauritius in 1817, that our own countrymen have given much attention to the island or its inhabitants.

Missionaries from the London Missionary Society reached the coast of Madagascar in 1818; and, after the treaty with the British government had been finally ratified in 1820, they proceeded to the capital, and were cordially welcomed by the king, who appeared still more delighted when they were followed by a number of intelligent men sent out by the same society to instruct the people in the practice of many of the most useful arts. The strange and somewhat complex language of the people was acquired by the missionaries, who introduced an alphabet into the language, arranged its grammar, prepared elementary books, and translated the Holy Scriptures into the native tongue.

In the space of ten years after the settlement of the teachers at the capital, not fewer than 10,000 or 15,000 of the natives had learned to read, many of them also to write, and a few had made some slight progress in English, at the same time that a number professed themselves Christians. Within the same period, among the 1000 or 1500 youths who had been placed as apprentices under the missionary artisans, some had been taught to work in iron, which abounds in the country; others have been trained to be carpenters, builders, tanners, carriers, shoemakers, etc. These were some of the most satisfactory results of the king's alliance with the English, and the settlement of English missionaries in his country; and although the advantage of so sudden and large an increase of fire-arms among a people very partially civilized may have been questionable, the substituting of legitimate and honorable commerce for the degrading traffic in slaves, the opening of a way for frequent and friendly intercourse with foreigners, the teaching of useful arts, the introduction of letters, with the knowledge of Christianity by which this was followed, will ever cause the treaty between Sir Robert Farquhar and the king Radama to be regarded as one of the most important events in the modern history of Madagascar.

To his own people, Radama's reign was one of unprecedented prosperity, though of comparatively short duration. He was a ruler greatly in advance of his time and his people; but he died in the year 1828, at the early age of thirty-six, and the enlightening and humanizing influences which were so full of promise for the nation appear, in a great measure, to have terminated with his life. The amiable and intelligent Prince Rakatobe, eldest son of Radama's eldest sister, was nominated by the king successor to the throne, but on the death of Radama he was assassinated, and the queen was raised to the supreme authority. For a time the schools and the religious teaching of the missionaries were allowed, but it soon became evident that the policy of the government was changed. The influence of the idol-keepers, and the supporters of divination and other superstitious of the country, was soon restored to its former supremacy. In 1835 the profession of the Christian Religion by any of the Malagasy was prohibited; it was also required that all Christian books should be given up to the government, and in 1836 the missionaries and their excellent coadjutors, the Christian artisans, departed from the island.

Eight or nine years afterward the evasion of the queen's orders prohibiting the removal of natives from the island greatly irritated the Malagasy government, and the application of the native laws to Europeans residing in Madagascar, as a means of maintaining native authority, gave great offence to the foreign traders at Tamatave.

The latter appealed for assistance to the English governor at Mauritius, and to the French governor at Bourbon; and in June, 1845, one English and two French vessels of war went to Tamatave to endeavor to adjust the differences and disputes existing there. Failing to effect this by amicable conference, they employed force, fired on the people, burned the town, and landed and attacked the fort. But, though they killed and wounded a number of natives, they were ultimately obliged to retire to their ships, leaving in the hands of the natives thirteen of their number, whose skulls, according to the Malagasy practice, were afterward fixed on poles in front of the fortification which they had assailed.

This aggression, so deeply to be deplored, produced long and serious evils. That government prohibited the exportation of every article of native produce; and the trade in rice and cattle—the latter so important to Mauritius and the Isle of Bourbon—was thus destroyed; and notwithstanding the efforts of the English admiral Dacres in 1848, and the French admiral Ceille, to restore friendly relations between those nations and the Malagasy, all amicable intercourse entirely ceased for a period of eight years.

Long before this interruption of commercial intercourse between the natives and foreigners, which it was the interest of both parties to maintain, the queen's government had shown its fixed determination not only to arrest the progress of Christianity in the country, but to destroy it wherever it might appear. Scarcely had the missionaries left the capital in 1836, before a number of persons, suspected of being Christians, were required to prove their innocence by drinking the *Tangena*, or poison-water which to many of them proved fatal.

In the following year a considerable number of the people were accused of reading religious books and uniting in Christian worship. Several of these were severely punished by fine, imprisonment, or unremediable slavery; and one devoted Christian woman, Rasalama, was put to death. In 1838, Rafaralaby, a young man who had accompanied the first Malagasy martyr to the place of execution, shared her fate; and before the close of the year, Rafaravavy, with four of her companions, who subsequently visited England, only saved their lives by escaping from the island. Others wandered from place to place in much suffering and imminent peril, often seeking concealment and safety in the almost impervious forests and in the dreary caverns of the mountains, until the year 1842, when sixteen of them, while on their way to the coast with a view of escaping from the island were betrayed by their guides and taken back to the capital, were nine of them were cruelly put to death.

The effect of these sanguinary proceedings seemed to be the very reverse of what the government intended. The attention of all classes was thereby drawn to the subject of religion, and the confidence of many in their idols appeared greatly weakened; while the Christians seemed to be confirmed in their faith by the severe ordeal through which it had sustained them.

Among others over whose minds the pretended power of the idols had ceased to operate was the queen's son, then in his seventeenth year. In 1846, after much conference with some of the Christians, this youthful prince was induced to renounce the superstitions of his country. He soon afterward declared himself a Christian, and was baptized; and, whatever may be the extent to which he is himself the subject to religious influence, he has ever since, proved a generous, kind, and faithful friend to the Christians. Through his influence, and that of others, Romanja, a prince of the highest rank, being the son of the queen's sister, was induced to study the Bible, and ultimately to declare his conviction of its truth. The prince publicly identified himself with the Christians, and has ever since, through all their fearful vicissitudes of peril and sorrow, proved himself one of their most efficient and faithful friends, as well as the honorable and consistent exemplar of their principles; sometimes pleading with the queen on their behalf, and setting forth—not always without something like success—the excellency and the value of the Holy Scriptures.

The sympathy of her son with the Christians, and his adoption of their faith, is said to have been exceedingly offensive to the queen, who has regarded him as being the victim of the incantations or witchcraft of the Christians. This feeling, heightened perhaps by unfavorable representations from the political rivals of the prince, her son, may have hastened the violent persecution which occurred in the year 1849. In this fearful season of extreme trial more than 2000 persons were implicated, many were subjected to heavy punishments, and eighteen individuals, including some of high rank and station, were put to death. It was, indeed, a time of the most severe sifting which the persecuted Church in Madagascar had yet been called to pass through; and numbers, as might be expected during such a season, deserted from their ranks. On the other hand, scarcely had the fierceness of their persecutors begun to subside, before others who had witnessed the uncomplaining spirit, the patient suffering, and the heroic constancy of the Christians, were drawn, notwithstanding the prospect of almost inevitable suffering, or death, to seek admission to their fellowship.

For the further account of the persecutions of these Christians, and the subsequent restoration of the land to light and liberty we recommend a perusal of the work.