

# **JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN**

BY  
**W. K. TWEEDIE**

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## JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN.



DEATH OF JACOB.

# JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN

See the wan victim of his brethren's scorn,  
In Pharaoh's dungeon, drooping, abject, lone!  
But GOD is there, the friend of the forlorn,  
And Joseph's prison opes beside the throne.

## PREFACE.

The story of Joseph is at once so simple that childhood is arrested and rivetted by it, and so profound that sages may deepen their wisdom by meditating on the truths which it embodies. An attempt is here made to point out some of the more important lessons which the narrative teaches,—to manifest the wisdom and the watchfulness of Providence,—and show how God on high exercises his prerogative of educing good from what we are often tempted to regard as only and hopelessly evil. While man displays his wickedness by committing sin, the Holy One displays his goodness by restraining it; and though his ways are confessedly “a great deep,” we get glimpses through the gloom,—we catch echoes amid the silence, which enable us to know, that when the tangled web of providence shall have been unrolled in light, it will be seen that he “has done all things well.” As the bones of Joseph were carried before the Hebrews during all their wanderings, from Egypt to Canaan, till they found a resting-place in that land of promise, the truth of God here goes before us still, a very pillar of cloud and of fire.





## JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN.

### CHAPTER I.

### JOSEPH CAST INTO THE PIT.

When Jesus would inculcate some of the deepest lessons which he ever taught, he took a little child and set him in the midst of his disciples (Matt. xviii. 2-4), and made that child his text. Truth thus found an inlet into the mind which even the Great Teacher might have attempted in vain to impress, without some material illustration of his spiritual lessons.—Let us endeavour to imitate the Saviour's wisdom, and seek some lessons to guide us in the touching history of Joseph.

It is well known, then, that on a certain occasion that youth obtained permission to visit his brothers at a part of Canaan somewhat distant from their father's home. But, previous to that time, he had given them great offence; and their anger only waited for a fit occasion to break forth in violence against him. And we should not fail to notice what caused that anger. First, Joseph was a great favourite with his father, who testified his partiality to the boy by the gift of a coat of many colours, and thus unwisely laid a foundation for feuds and divisions in

his family (Gen. xxxvii. 3, 4). Moreover, Joseph had dreamed certain dreams which gave great offence to his brothers; for they indicated that the time would come when the other children of Jacob would do homage to Joseph, who was one of the youngest (Gen. xxxvii. 5–11). The feelings which rankled in the bosoms of his brothers before, now rankled more and more, and were ripened by irritation for a violent outbreak at last. It appears, further, that Joseph had, at least on one occasion (ver. 2), complained to his father regarding the misdeeds of his brothers; and all these things made him “hated by them, so that they could not speak peaceably to him.”—All this suggests to us the strange lesson, that there are some men who “hate him that rebuketh them, and abhor him that speaketh uprightly” (Amos v. 10). Men are so wedded to their own ways, even when they lead down to death, that we become their enemy if we tell them the truth. How often did scribe, Pharisee, priest, and people break out in violence against Jesus for his truthful warnings!

No sooner, then, did they see Joseph approaching Dothan, where they fed their flocks, than his brothers thought the time had come at length for humbling their father’s favourite. The first proposal was to put him instantly to death; but Reuben interposed, and their sentence was, to throw Joseph into a pit, and leave him to perish unpitied there! Blinded by envy, or goaded by rage, they trampled on every tender feeling, and evil became their chief good.

In the good providence of God, however, the youth was taken from that pit, in which he was to have been buried alive, and sent to a distant country, there to be the saviour of not a few, in

a temporal sense. To cover their wickedness, his brothers next resolved to show to their father Joseph's coat of tartan, dipped in the blood of a kid, as if he had been devoured by ravenous beasts.—Their brother might become a slave; their father's heart might be torn with anguish; their own souls might be deeply stained with sin piled above sin;—but what of all these, when men are bent on indulging their evil and malignant passions? Let misery be heaped upon misery, yet men will not be diverted from their iniquity.

But wicked as their deeds were, and an outrage at once against a father and a brother, and, above all, against their God, he who makes the wrath of man to praise him employed that wrath remarkably to work out his purposes in this case. And he is doing the same at this hour. Think of the miseries, spread over many years of agony, inflicted by fierce persecutors on the Christians of Madagascar in our day, and then mark how they increase in number notwithstanding. Think of the bloody massacres in India, the martyrdoms of native Christians there, with the butchery of all who wear the Christian name; and yet mark how that is overruled to rouse the churches to spread the truth in that dark-souled land. Think, above all, of the Cross of Jesus,—of the woes which were there endured, with all the malignant passions which nailed the Redeemer to the tree; and then see how God can make our wickedness promote his own glory,—can bring joy out of anguish, and life out of death, and blessings unutterable out of the very curse (Gal. iii. 13).







## CHAPTER II. JOSEPH SOLD TO THE ISHMAELITES.

We have just seen that Joseph's brethren, moved by envy, sold him to some Ishmaelite merchants, by whom he was carried into Egypt, and there sold as a slave. Regardless of their brother's cries, and deaf to all that affection might whisper, the future patriarchs *would* make him the victim of their hatred; and it is deeply instructive to notice how many sins are contained in this one transaction.

1. There was a sin committed by brothers against a brother. The ties of nature were outraged. Affection was trampled in the dust,—it was in truth cast into the pit beside Joseph,—it had no power in the hearts of those hating and hateful men. Surely such a case occurring in the Bible so soon after the murder of Abel by his brother Cain, was designed by God to show us the terrible ravages wrought by sin in the soul. Just as war, with its bloody work, has often deflowered the fairest regions of the earth, does fierce passion waste the soul of man.
2. There was sin committed against their father. What although the patriarch should suffer uttermost woe when bereft of his

favourite son! or what although his heart should break when the tidings reached him that Joseph had been cruelly devoured by a wild beast! It was not to such things that those men would listen: it was to their own malicious hearts; and, cost what it might to their father, their brother must either die or become a slave. You may assure the sinner that the wages of sin is death,—you may tell him that agony for ever is attached to guilt by God’s decree; but all that will not turn the wicked from his way. God must turn us, or we rush unchecked upon ruin.

3. In the sin of Joseph’s brethren there was falsehood, and that to a parent. Those men deliberately plotted to deceive Jacob, by showing him the coat of Joseph dipped in the blood of a kid. They utterly forgot that God saw them; they listened only to their own hearts; and sin was added to sin, that their passion might be indulged. To the crime of murder—the murder of a brother—which some of them were willing to perpetrate, they added that of deception, deep in itself and sad in all its results. Now in all this they were just showing us more and more clearly what iniquity lurks or reigns in the heart of man, till the Almighty Spirit make all things new.

4. In that sin there was spite, and that against a brother. We have seen that there is reason to believe (Gen. xxxvii. 2) that Joseph had formerly blamed some of the practices in which his brethren indulged while they were from under their parent’s eye, and that had provoked their antipathy: “They hated him” when they saw that his father loved him. And here again we see one reason why men have always ranked envy among the vilest and the meanest of the sins.

5. It need scarcely be added that there was cruelty in that crime. Those brothers were deaf to the cries of the stripling; the majority of them were not unwilling to put him to death amid lingering agonies,—that is, to leave him to die of hunger in a pit, unheeded and unrelieved. When we see fools making a mock at sin, and multitudes seeking in it the only pleasure or the only gratification which they know, surely that is because they do not know the dark depths into which it sinks them!

6. And, to name no more, there was in that sin the love of money, which is the root of all evil. Those unnatural brothers, blinded by hatred, and eager to get the offender out of the way, actually sold him for a slave. They valued gold or silver more than their brother's life, his happiness, or his affection. He might have to wear chains, or carry burdens heavier than he could bear; but what of all that, if their hatred was indulged, and Joseph put out of their sight! Till then they could not be at ease. His deportment was a rebuke to them. He seemed holier than they, and because of that he must suffer; they must contract guilt upon guilt. Now, is not this, in spirit, the very same kind of sin as that which led Satan to tempt and ruin man?

Such are some of the views suggested by this sad transaction—the selling of Joseph. But little did his brothers know that these sins would find them out. Little did they expect that even upon earth they would see in Joseph all that his dreams had predicted,—themselves at his feet, and doing him obeisance with all their heart. And little did they know that God was to be with their brother of a truth, to bless him and make him a blessing. But so it was; and Joseph became a type of Jesus, persecuted by his brothers, but exalted by his God; buried out

of sight, yet raised to a throne; the victim of malignity at man's hand, but beloved of God, and therefore set on high.



### CHAPTER III. JOSEPH IN PRISON.

God has, in his holy providence, made great use of his people in prison. Jeremiah, Daniel, Paul, Silas, and Peter, were all honoured by him in such a place. Luther, while a captive in Wartburg Castle, translated a large portion of Scripture, and promoted the spiritual emancipation of millions in Christendom. Bunyan in his prison, where blinded persecutors had immured him, wrote a book, second to no human production in its knowledge of the heart and its delineations of truth. And so of many more. Joseph's name is to be added to this list. Having been basely accused of a foul crime which he refused to commit, he was cast into prison, and pined there for years, the victim of malignity,—or apparently forgotten. Now this seemed the completion and the cope-stone of the machinations of Joseph's brethren. When he was immured in that dungeon at On, in Memphis, in Thebes, or some other of the royal cities of ancient Egypt, it might appear as if all hope concerning him were gone: his aspirations, whatever they were, now seemed to be blighted for ever. It was with him, to mortal eye, as it was with Jesus when he was crucified, dead, and buried,—when a stone was rolled to the door of the sepulchre,—when the entrance was sealed with a seal, and a

guard of Roman soldiers set, as if they could baffle Omnipotence, and make all escape hopeless.

In truth, however, the imprisonment of Joseph was meant and used by God as a step to his exaltation. If he was for a season like one entombed, he had a resurrection at last by the mighty power of Him who sees the end from the beginning. It was like the planting of an acorn soon to become an oak, or like the bubbling up of a little stream from the depths of the earth soon to become a mighty river, while all around exclaimed,—

“The gloomy mantle of the night,  
Which on my sinking spirit steals,  
Will vanish at the morning light  
Which God, my East, my Sun, reveals.”

His God was with Joseph, then, as his sun and shield, even in the prison-house of Pharaoh, and friends were soon raised up to the Hebrew lad; he was even advanced to a degree of honour akin to royalty itself. There was no Bible then to embody the mind of God to man, such as it is now our most blessed privilege to enjoy; and in the absence of such a book, knowledge was sometimes mysteriously imparted by dreams. We are not able to explain how that took place; but He who made the mind can impress it as he wills, and he often impressed it by dreams, by visions, or by voices. For his companions in prison, Joseph had the chief butler and the chief baker of Pharaoh’s household; and as they dreamed dreams which he was enabled to interpret, that, in the providence of God, led to his liberation. The chief butler was restored to his former place in the royal household, as Joseph had foretold; and though he forgot for a time his companion in prison, yet

when the king in his turn was troubled by certain dreams, the butler remembered Joseph, pointed him out to Pharaoh, and the captive slave was summoned into the monarch's presence.

There for the present we leave him, and observe that Joseph is now on the high road to dignity and honour. By one of those sudden transitions far from being uncommon in the East, where impulse often takes the place of principle, or where what appears to be caprice does the work of system, the prison door is shut behind Joseph, and that of the palace is opened: he is soon to become the grand vizier of an Oriental potentate. His brethren had sought to bury him out of sight; for, to their mind, selling him into Egypt was equivalent to that doom. They had no design but to get rid of a troublesome or an offensive brother; but as God had restrained the remainder of their wrath, and in his providence prevented the perpetration of fratricide, so he had further purposes to serve by that remarkable youth; and Jehovah accordingly hid him in the hollow of his hand; he was with Joseph when he went out, and when he came in.

From this time forward, then, all went well with Joseph. He had refused to yield to temptation to sin. By the help of God, he was steadfast and immovable; he became, as we shall see, the recognized benefactor of millions. And what was the secret of all this? The Bible explains it, in one brief clause: "The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man" (Gen. xxxix. 2). That is the basis of all true prosperity. With that, we need not fear the face of man. "The Lord will provide," may then become our assured confidence. In youth and in age, in sorrow and in joy, in temptation and in safety, in life and at death, all will be



well, all will prosper, if “the Lord be with us.” Some, indeed, try to prosper without the Lord’s guidance. They attempt by fraud what they can accomplish only by the Lord’s blessing upon honesty. Deception is systematized, and iniquity is drawn “as with a cart rope.” But all is like a building upon the sand, or worse,—upon a sea-wave, unless the Lord be with us. The whole is found at last to be a mockery, like the mirage of the desert.

But what were Joseph’s prison thoughts? Perhaps hope deferred made the heart sick. Perhaps he sometimes desponded, and because the chief butler long forgot his promise, the prisoner might fear that God had also forgotten to be gracious. As year passed after year, till about thirteen had rolled away, who will wonder though his heart sometimes failed! But after all the Lord is not slack concerning his promise. A thousand years are with him as one day. Joseph was liberated precisely at the moment best for him and for all Egypt; and it is ever so with those who wait upon the Lord.

Now, in connection with these events, it may be observed that we often hear of representative men—these are men who represent some great interest, or who are the champions of some great cause. One man, for example, is the representative of great learning; and we cannot hear him named without thinking of great scholarship, or all varied lore. Another man represents the cause of the people—not as a demagogue does, for selfish or for turbulent ends, but for man’s social improvement or social elevation—for man’s happiness, in short, in time and for ever. Knox, for example, or Chalmers—what intelligent Christian, with the open Bible for his standard,

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