

# DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

**John Kitto, D.D., F.S.A.**

Thirteenth Week -- Sunday

## JOSEPH IN EGYPT

*"And to Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On, bore to him. Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: 'For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house.' And the name of the second he called Ephraim: 'For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction'" (Genesis 41:50-52).*

It is well worthy of special notice that every circumstance in the prosperity and glorious estate to which Joseph is now advanced is contrasted with some other circumstance in his former adverse and calamitous condition. His brethren despised and hated him, subjecting him to most injurious treatment; but now the king of Egypt and his princes delight to honor him and advance him to a high place among themselves, turning his exile into exaltation. All the slavish work of his hands is now exchanged for the royal signet on his finger. His coat of many colors, torn by violence and defiled with blood, as well as the garment left in the hand of the adulteress are exchanged for vestures of fine linen from a king's hand. Irons on his feet have now been exchanged for a chain of gold upon his neck. Just yesterday he ministered to prisoners, but now he ministers to a monarch. The darkness of his dungeon is succeeded by the splendor of the king's second chariot, the nation being called to bend the knee before him. He was scarcely known by name before, but now the king bestows a name of honor upon him. And now he who fled with horror from the solicitations of another man's wife is made happy in a union with a noble consort of his own.

How did all this affect Joseph? In old times men expressed their feelings in the names they bestowed upon their children. Now Joseph gives names to his two sons that embody the sentiments which he desired to be memorialized by them.

The first son he called Manasseh, which means *forgetting*, or which may as a substantive be rendered *forgetfulness*. And why: "For God, said he, has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house." It is a beautiful and interesting circumstance in the history of Joseph that he has God ever before his eyes. When tempted to sin, his cry is, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" When the court officers in prison were troubled by their dreams, he said, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" When the king tells him that he had heard of his skill in the interpretation of dreams, Joseph declares, "It is not in me; God will give

Pharaoh an answer of peace." So in the name of his firstborn son, Joseph erects an imperishable monument of his conviction that it is God who has made him forget all his misery and all his father's house.

Now it is the infirmity of our flesh that makes us look too much to the immediate instruments of our blessings and either forget God in them or merely acknowledge him with a cold and formal heart. It is well for us if we consciously make God's presence and intervention in all our affairs a vital principle of action; for he who most clearly sees God as the source of all his blessings is of all others the man most grateful to the agents through whom these blessings come to him.

In what sense should Joseph be understood as having forgotten his toil and his father's house? It certainly is not that those things were obliterated from his mind, for the very naming of his son is an act of remembrance. It was, in fact, his duty and privilege to remember them, for otherwise his impressions of the Divine goodness would have become weak if he had forgotten the evils from which he had been delivered. But in one sense he had forgotten the misery of his former state: he did not allow the memory of it to embitter his present advantages. He cherished no resentful remembrances against those who had been the instruments of his affliction. The memory of his troubles was comparatively lost in the happiness that had now succeeded. His subsequent conduct shows that he had a most lively recollection of his father and all the tenderness which had been showered upon his early years. Neither had he ceased to remember the cruel treatment of his brothers; but he ceased to lay it to heart. All that was painful in the remembrance of the past was expelled from his mind.

To his other son Joseph gave the name of Ephraim, which means *fruitfulness*; and he states, "For God has made me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." He is now fruitful in that very land in which he had endured so much trouble and disgrace. No man ever had more occasion than Joseph to know the fruitfulness of affliction. His history is a striking manifestation of what we all occasionally experience: that God in the dispensations of his providence and grace cuts even to the quick the branches of the vine that he wills to bear much fruit.

We may in vain search history, as well as explore the knowledge and experience of our own lives, to find unafflicted men bearing much fruit for God. The harvest is generally proportioned to the intensity of the affliction. May God give to all of us fruitfulness in the land of our affliction, always remembering that there are better lands beyond and better days to come.