

## JOSEPH'S SONS

*Genesis 48; 50:22-26*

Here again we have a lesson in which a familiar story needs to be reviewed briefly by way of introduction—the whole story of Joseph. In the notes for each age group the attempt has been made to suggest the particular features of the story best suited to lead into the lesson for the day with children of that age.

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### Doctrinal Points

*The Lord took on a human nature from Mary and glorified it, or or made it Divine, by overcoming the temptations which came to Him through it.*

*The inmost or celestial sense of the Word describes the inner life of the Lord when He was on earth.*

*The Lord keeps our early states of belief stored up within us as a basis for our later salvation.*

*Good will must really be first, although we have to learn what is right before we can do it.*

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### Notes for Parents

We all know something of the beautiful story of Joseph, one of the few people in the Old Testament who seem wholly admirable. There are many things in the story which make us think of the Lord's life on earth. He was despised by his brothers, as the Lord was later "despised and rejected of men." He was sold for a few pieces of silver. He was providentially taken down into Egypt to preserve him from destruction. And because he trusted the Lord and did right, he became wise and great, as the Lord "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." Finally he became the ruler to whom his brothers bowed down, and he forgave them and saved them.

Joseph is a representative of our higher spiritual perceptions.

These are in all of us, but while our thoughts and efforts are centered on worldly success, we try to forget them, to put them away out of sight. Then the Lord has to preserve them for us, and He strengthens them so that when trouble comes we can go to them for help.

Joseph had two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. How often in the Bible we find stories of two brothers! They always represent faith and charity, or the understanding and the will. Joseph's two sons picture the thoughts and the intentions which spring from our recognition of the fact that we must believe and trust divine truth as the Lord gives it to us in His Word. Manasseh was the firstborn. He is the intention, the will. We never do or think anything except from some impulse of the will. That is the first thing. But we find that Jacob, when he was about to die, put Ephraim before Manasseh. Ephraim is the thought. No intention of ours can be carried out until we have learned how to accomplish it. So we must learn what is right before we can do it. We know that often our good intentions seem to miscarry because, as we say, we "acted on impulse." That is why we bring our children to Sunday school and why we must all continue all our lives to study the Bible and go to church for help in understanding it. We need to learn new truth from the Lord all the time; for no matter how good our intentions, we can make no spiritual progress without it.

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### Primary

Joseph is almost the only individual in the Old Testament story of whom no unworthy actions are recorded; so his story is easy to present to young children. Be sure they get the name Joseph and know whose son he was and that he himself had two sons who were specially favored by Jacob. The crossing of Jacob's hands will interest the children, and help to fix the story in mind. It may be illustrated by action to impress it on their minds. Call their attention to the fact that Jacob himself had been put ahead of his twin brother Esau, who was actually the firstborn.

When a great famine came to the Holy Land, Jacob sent his sons down to Egypt to buy food, and they had to buy it from Joseph.

Joseph was kind to them and forgave them for what they had done to him, and told them to bring Jacob and their families and all their flocks and herds down to Egypt, and he would take care of them until the famine was over. And the king of Egypt, who was called the Pharaoh, loved Joseph so much that he gave Joseph's family the land of Goshen, which was the best land in Egypt. In fact, they were so prosperous there that they did not want to go home and they stayed on in Egypt for many years.

What two sons did Joseph have?

Which was the older?

When Jacob was about to die, what did Joseph do?

The blessing of the head of the family was considered very important.

Which son did Joseph expect to have the better blessing?

To which one did Jacob give it?

When you are older, you will understand why he did this.

Jacob and Joseph both died in Egypt, but they were finally buried in the Holy Land.

Their bodies were *embalmed*, a method the Egyptians had for preserving the body.

An embalmed body is called a "mummy." You may have heard about them.

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### Junior

Draw as much as possible of the story of Joseph from the children's memories. Make the connection with today's lesson through Isaac's blessing of Jacob—it may be well to read aloud some verses from Genesis 27:1-29. This and Genesis 45:4-11 offer a good opportunity to explain how the Lord can make good use of even our wrong actions so that we ourselves learn by experience and those we intended to injure are benefited. Call attention to the reason why Ephraim and Manasseh are later named with the sons of Jacob as heads of tribes in place of Joseph.

In Egypt the Lord took care of Joseph because Joseph was good and trusted Him and obeyed Him always. He did well in every work that was given him and rose to become a great man, ruler of all Egypt, second only to the king.

Joseph did not return evil for evil. You know the Lord never lets misfortunes come to us without a good reason. When the great famine came and Jacob sent his sons down to Egypt to buy food,

the brothers were frightened when they discovered that the great ruler of Egypt was their own brother Joseph, whom they had wronged. But Joseph reassured them and forgave them. Read Genesis 45:4-11. So Jacob and all his family came down to Egypt, and Pharaoh the king, because he loved Joseph, gave them for their home the rich land of Goshen in the Nile delta.

In the Bible story the parental blessing is very important, for it was always inspired by the Lord and was sure to be fulfilled. Jacob himself had deceived his father Isaac into giving him the blessing which he would naturally have given to Esau, his firstborn. But this, too, was something which was permitted to happen for a good reason. Now Jacob does intentionally what his father was tricked into doing. The inner reason is the same in both cases, and you will understand it when you are older. You must remember that everything in the Word of God has a deep meaning and lesson within it.

What two sons were born to Joseph in Egypt?

Which was the older?

Why did Joseph bring them to his father?

How did he try to arrange things so that his blind father would know which which the elder?

What did Jacob do?

What did he say when Joseph tried to move his hands?

What special position did he give to Joseph's sons? (verse 5)

This is why we shall find, as we go on in the Bible story, that among the tribes of the children of Israel there was no tribe called Joseph,\* but instead there were two tribes called Ephraim and Manasseh. What the special "portion" was which Jacob added to Joseph's inheritance you may learn by reading Genesis 33:18-20 and John 4:5.

Jacob died in Egypt. We are told that his body was embalmed. The Egyptians had a wonderful way of preserving the body by the use of spices and salt and by wrapping it very carefully in narrow strips of cloth. This was called embalming. Some of the bodies so

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\*But see Rev. 7:8.

treated have been found in the Egyptian tombs perfectly preserved after several thousand years. They are called mummies. The secret of this process has been lost. It took about forty days, and there was a period of thirty more days of mourning before they started for the burial place. So it is said that they mourned for Jacob seventy days. Jacob's sons took his body back to the Holy Land and placed it in the cave of Machpelah, where Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Leah were already buried.

Then they came back and settled down in Egypt.

When Joseph was about to die, what promise did he ask his family to make? What did they do with Joseph's body temporarily?

You will see how they fulfilled their promise if you will read Joshua 24:32. Joseph's body was not placed in the cave of Machpelah but buried in the portion which had come to him by special gift from his father.

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### Intermediate

Try to give the Intermediates a sense of the story of Joseph as a whole and of its general meaning. Use the chapter for today to emphasize the importance of having knowledge of what is right in addition to good intentions, and Joseph's death as a preparation for the change we shall find in the picture with the opening of the book of Exodus.

In Egypt Joseph gradually proved his wisdom and rose to power. Then his brothers had to come to him for help and bow before him, and he was able to save his whole family and keep them from dying of hunger in the time of famine. The Lord preserves the spiritual faculties in us until we are fully grown up and ready to recognize that we cannot live without them.

Our chapter for today comes near the end of the period of our natural development. Jacob is about to die. The story of Joseph's bringing his sons to his father to bless and of Jacob's giving the greater blessing to the younger son reminds us of the earlier story of Isaac's blessing Jacob and Esau. Ephraim and Manasseh picture much the same thing as Jacob and Esau—truth and good—but on

a plane further advanced in the working out of the heavenly life. Truth still has to be put first, although good is really primary. That is, although everything we do proceeds from some desire, we have to learn what to do before we can carry out our desire. In spiritual things we have to learn from the Lord what is right and make ourselves do it before we come to love it. In this story the placing of truth first is conscious and intentional (verse 19), as we now have a more mature understanding of what is necessary, whereas in the Isaac stage of our life we reacted blindly.

Jacob gives Ephraim and Manasseh an equal place with his own sons, thus giving Joseph's family a double portion in the inheritance. Our spiritual faculties have such a double portion when we recognize our debt to the Lord. Note the last verse in chapter 48. The additional portion here given to Joseph is not described, but we find out elsewhere what it was. Read Genesis 33:18-20, Joshua 24:32, and John 4:5.

Jacob died at the age of one hundred and forty-seven, and his body was embalmed. Mr. Worcester in *The Sower* tells us that the Egyptian practice of embalming did not mean that they thought the body was to be used again, for there are evidences in their paintings that they knew that the soul left the body at death and continued in a spiritual body. It probably meant that the physical body had taken on the form of the soul, and with those who had been good they wanted to indicate that this form would be preserved. They did not even bury the evil. Whether the ancient Egyptians really knew this or not, it is the meaning of the embalming of Jacob and Joseph. Jacob's body was taken back to Hebron and buried in the cave of Machpelah with Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Leah. All that we accomplish on the plane of natural goodness is stored up at once as part of our permanent character.

Joseph makes his family give him the same promise that he had given his father, but when he dies, it is not immediately fulfilled. His body is embalmed and put in a coffin in Egypt. As we go further in our worldly development, our spiritual faculties, though

preserved for us by the Lord, are apt again to become dormant for a time, laid away in the memory. All through the period of slavery in Egypt, Joseph's body was still there embalmed and in a coffin, waiting for the promised release and return to the Holy Land.

*Basic Correspondences*

Ephraim = the truth we learn  
by means of Joseph

Manasseh = our desire to live according  
to the truth

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**Senior**

The lesson for the Seniors may be centered on the meaning of Manasseh and Ephraim, sons of Joseph, as compared with Esau and Jacob, sons of Isaac. Show them how in our lives similar states recur again and again, but always on a different level, higher or lower according to whether we are progressing spiritually or not.

When we, at the beginning of our adult life, determine to obey the Lord instead of the dictates of worldliness—which is the beginning of the church in each of us—the real struggle within us begins. All our selfish thoughts and habits rise up to resist this new spiritual impulse. But the Lord preserves our “Joseph” in obscurity and he develops to greatness and power without our knowledge. And in the time of famine—when real trouble comes—we rediscover him and submit ourselves to him in Egypt. That is, we begin in earnest the task of learning what the Lord would have us do in order to save our souls. Jacob and all his family go down into Egypt and put themselves under Joseph's protection and care.

. Our story for today reminds us of the story of Esau and Jacob, in which Jacob, although not the firstborn of the twins, succeeded in taking from Esau both the birthright and the paternal blessing. Manasseh and Ephraim, like Esau and Jacob, represent good and truth, but the level has changed. Esau and Jacob, when they were born, represent good and truth on the unregenerate natural plane,

a good disposition and a lively mind, perhaps—but we have now advanced, through Jacob's sojourn in Haran and return to Bethel and through the rise of Joseph to power, to the point where we are able to understand truth and experience goodness intellectually.

Swedenborg makes a distinction, however, between “the intellectual of the church” and what we popularly call “intellectual,” as you will see from the quotation at the end of this lesson. Ephraim and Manasseh represent not our understanding of truth and our will to good unrelated to God, but the intellectual of the church and the good of the church in us. This is still on the natural plane—Ephraim and Manasseh were born in Egypt—but it comes from the higher plane of our souls where the Lord reaches us—their father was Joseph.

Manasseh, like Esau, was the firstborn son. The will is always first. We do nothing and think nothing except from an act of will. It takes a good impulse in our hearts to make us even begin to think about what we ought to do. But the impulse does not teach us what is right. We all know that our good intentions often seem to get lost, and we find ourselves doing harm when we meant to do good. We have to think and to learn from the Word what is right before our good intentions can result in right action. This is why Jacob was permitted to take precedence over Esau and Ephraim over Manasseh. Joseph, our internal perception, knows that the will comes first, but Jacob, our “practical” nature, recognizes that our understanding must for a time have first consideration.

Jacob presently dies in Egypt, but according to his last request, his sons take his body back to Canaan for burial in the cave of Machpelah, where Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Leah are already buried. Joseph lives for some time after his father but he, too, eventually dies in Egypt. He does not ask to be taken back immediately but foresees that in the end his people will all go back and makes them promise to take his body with them when they go. By the time of Joseph's death it has become evident that the Israelites have settled down for a long stay in Egypt.

This is a picture of a time in our lives when we think our spiri-



tual health and comfort are assured without further effort on our part. Today we sometimes read and hear about “making the decision for Christ,” and the assumption often is that one who has made this decision is “saved.” Even in the New Church there is a tendency to imagine that once we have joined the church and established ourselves as respectable Christian people, we can stop studying the Word and the writings and just “let our conscience be our guide.” The fallacy of this attitude is brought out in the first chapters of the book of Exodus. But no matter how long we remain in Egypt, we should remember that the body of Joseph, though embalmed and in a coffin, is there with us waiting to be restored to its proper place. The Lord preserves our former spiritual perceptions until we are ready to do something with them. And the Lord’s providence is over our external lives, permitting such experiences to come to us as may awaken us again to a sense of need.

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### Adult

The correspondence of Joseph and Benjamin and of Ephraim and Manasseh is the focal point of the lesson. In discussing the latter the teacher may want to read to the class the quotation from the writings found at the end of the lesson. There is excellent discussion material in the whole of AC 6222.

One of the most striking features of the Bible story is the recurrent cycles, often involving very similar incidents. Our chapter for today, with its account of the blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh, takes us back to the blessing of Jacob and Esau, and still further back to the offerings of Cain and Abel. Each pair of brothers represents faith and charity, or truth and good, but in different contexts and at different levels. In each case a series of events leads up to and follows from the relationship between the two brothers. In the first instance, because of the immediate background of the story, the brother representing faith is born first. In the other two, although the brother representing love is the firstborn, he is supplanted by his brother.

These repetitions are not accidental, and the lesson they teach is an important one. Our lives proceed in cycles, beginning anew with each new emergence of truth and good. If we are progressing spiritually, the cycles carry us ever higher. If we have turned away from the Lord, their course is inverted. We recall that the hells are described as a man upside down (AC 3641).

The life of Jacob followed one cycle: He lived through his time of temptation and development, returned to his childhood home, became reconciled to his brother, and inherited his father's position as head of the family. Joseph and Benjamin, his last-born sons, were still in their childhood. But they constituted the beginning of a new cycle. They, too, represent love and truth; but this time the conflict was not between the two but between Joseph and his older brothers, and Joseph was the one who was despised and rejected. This is because Jacob was the last representative of the Ancient Church, which was a true church, as well as the immediate ancestor of the Israelitish Church, which was only representative of a church. You recall the difference between the names *Jacob* and *Israel*. Note their use in this chapter. A new period is beginning, in which the church is being built up. In order that it may exist at all, it must have some connection with the Lord, and that connection is established through Joseph. The spirit of the older brothers in the story is the spirit of that church toward any internal spiritual qualities.

In technical terms Benjamin represents “the spiritual of the celestial” and Joseph the “celestial of the spiritual.” This is not a mere juggling of words. We can understand them and the difference between them if we remember that between the inmost or celestial plane of the soul, where the Lord's influx enters, and the outmost natural plane, which is in contact with the material world, there is the interior or rational plane, which opens both ways. Benjamin represents divine truth as it flows in from the celestial plane through the rational into the natural. Joseph represents the good—the celestial—which belongs to this truth. The older brothers are the various faculties developed in the natural plane itself. They

are good or bad as they serve or resist Joseph.

In terms of the general development of the man or woman who is regenerating, the period of Jacob is the time when he is developing his independent life on the natural plane. At some point in that period he becomes conscious of the possibility of a higher development within him than the merely worldly. This is the birth of Joseph. He returns to the Holy Land of his earlier years and reestablishes himself in worship of the Lord. But this is the signal for a new struggle. The natural faculties resist the encroachment of a higher authority. The older brothers say, “Behold, this dreamer cometh,” and sell Joseph into Egypt. That is, at this point the first desire of our natural faculties is to relegate divine truth to the plane of memory-knowledge and keep it a prisoner there.

The story of Joseph is quite generally recognized as a foreshadowing of the Lord’s life on earth. The Lord was carried into Egypt to escape the wrath of the jealous Herod. He, too, was lost to the sight of the recognized church and in obscurity “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.” In the regenerating person, the Lord’s providence cares for and develops the faculty of receiving divine truth until a time of famine comes and the person realizes his own helplessness and is ready to submit his judgment to providence. Then a new learning period begins. Jacob and his whole family come to Egypt.

The book of Genesis leaves us with a picture of the Egyptian state when it is orderly. Pharaoh—the natural principle—is on the throne. But he has voluntarily placed Joseph in full control of the land, and Israel and all his family have been settled in the best of the land that they may be nourished and protected during the years of famine. It is a picture of an orderly learning period. Our freedom of choice is unimpaired, but we have chosen the Lord as our ruler, set our natural affections and thoughts in their proper relation to Him, and settled down to receive instruction from Him.

One feature of this picture is Jacob’s final setting up of Joseph’s two sons as equal to his own. He says, “as Reuben and Simeon they shall be mine.” Reuben and Simeon represent faith and obedi-

ence on the natural plane. Ephraim and Manasseh represent faith and obedience on the intellectual plane. In AC 6216 Swedenborg says, “The intellectual of the church is ‘Ephraim,’ and the will of the church is ‘Manasseh.’” From this point on in the Word, the spiritual church is represented by Israel and the children of Israel, even though the Jewish Church, represented by Jacob, is not itself a true church even on the natural plane. We should note here a statement made by Swedenborg in AC 6222 concerning Ephraim: “This intellectual, which is called the intellectual of the church, is more interior than the intellectual which comes from mere memory-knowledges, for it is a perception that the thing is so, not from the dictate of memory-knowledges and philosophy, but from the dictate of the Word in its spiritual sense.” Ephraim and Manasseh are adopted by Jacob, but they are actually the sons of Joseph, who represents the Divine as it enters the rational plane of the mind from above.

The placing of Ephraim before Manasseh by Jacob, although Manasseh was the firstborn, teaches a lesson which recurs so frequently in the Word and is also expressed so clearly in the writings that we have no excuse for ignoring it. The will is primary. We do or think nothing without an act of will. But before the will can accomplish any purpose, the mind must be instructed. And this cannot be done once for all. The same situation recurs in every cycle in the Word. However good our intentions may be, we make no spiritual progress unless we are constantly trying to acquire new truth from the Word and the writings. If we think our conscience, as already developed, is a sufficient guide for the rest of our lives, we are woefully mistaken. We have simply embalmed Joseph and put him in a coffin and settled down to take our direction from the Egyptians.

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#### From the Writings of Swedenborg

*Arcana Coelestia*, n. 6222: “It is believed that those have an intellectual in the things of the church who are skilful in confirming the tenets or doctrinals

of their own church by many things, and this even to persuasion that it is so, and who also are skilful in dexterously confuting many heresies. But this is not the intellectual of the church, for to confirm a tenet is not of the intellectual, but of ingenuity in the sensuous, and it is sometimes found in the worst of men, and can also be done by those who believe nothing whatever, and also by those who are in very falsities. Nothing is more easy than for all such persons to confirm whatever they please, even to the point of persuading the simple. But the intellectual of the church is, to perceive and see, before any tenet is confirmed, whether it is true or not, and then to confirm it. This is the intellectual which is represented by Ephraim, but the good of the church, which is represented by Manasseh, is the good of charity which is insinuated by the Lord into the man of the church by means of the truths of faith, for these, together with the good of charity, are what flow into the intellectual and enlighten it, and also make the intellectual and the will constitute one mind. . . all the affection of good and truth, by which comes enlightenment, flows from no other source, and thus is born from no other source, than the internal, that is, through the internal from the Lord ”

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### Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Why did Joseph's brothers go to Egypt? *famine*
- P. What did Joseph do for his family? *fed, housed*
- P. What two sons were born to Joseph in Egypt? *Manasseh, Ephraim*
- P. Which was the older? *Manasseh*
- P. When Jacob was about to die, why did Joseph bring his sons to him?  
 *blessing*
- P. Which son did Joseph expect to receive the better blessing? *Manasseh*
- P. To which one did Jacob give it? *Ephraim*
- J. What special honor did Jacob give to Joseph's sons? *“adopted” them*
- J. Where was Jacob buried? *cave of Machpelah*
- J. Who else had been buried there? *Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Leah*
- J. When Joseph died, what did he make his family promise? *take bones to Canaan*
- J. How did they preserve his body? *embalming*
- I. What do Manasseh and Ephraim represent?  
*Ephraim—knowledge of church*  
*Manasseh—desire to live according to it*
- S. Why did Jacob give the younger son the first blessing?  
*our continuing need first to learn what is right*