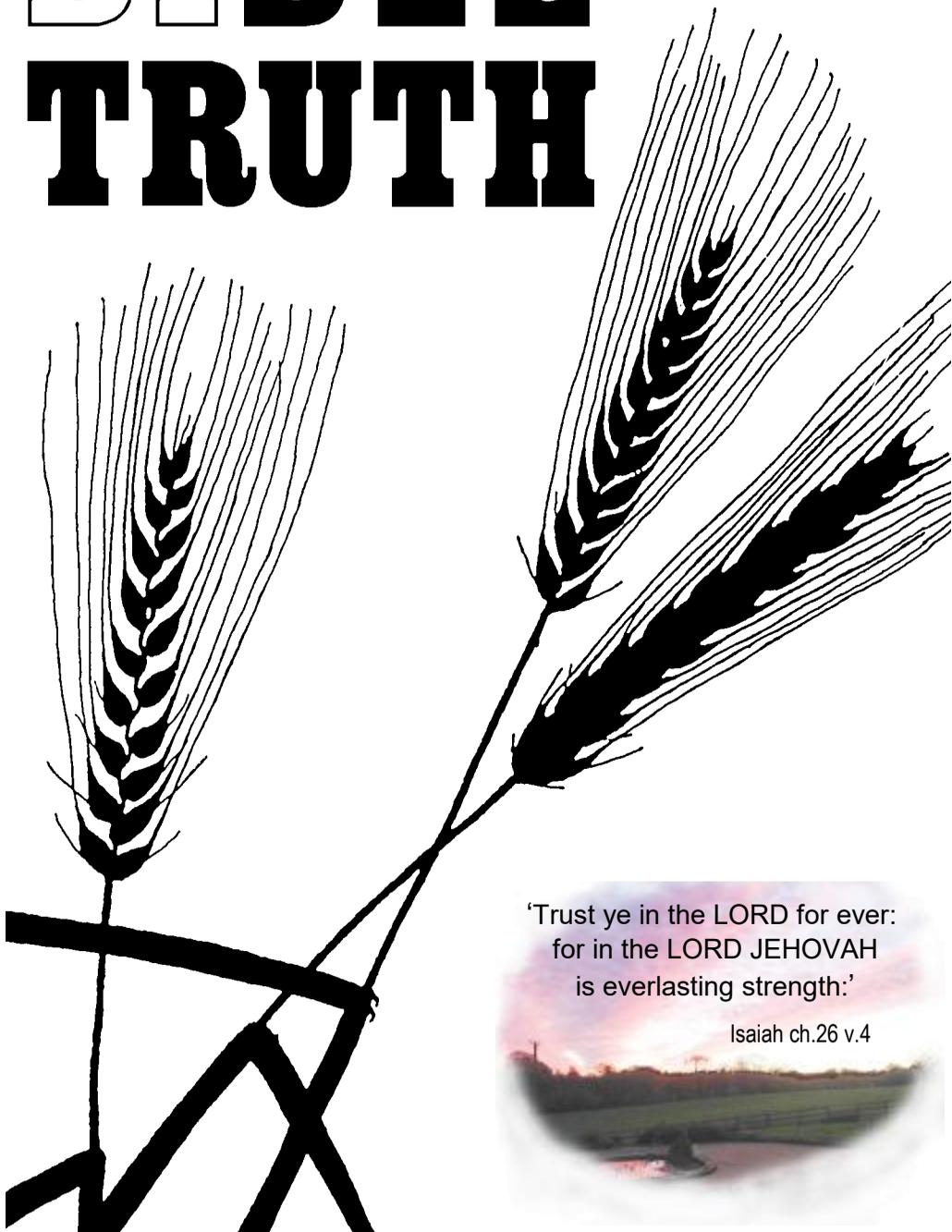


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'Trust ye in the LORD for ever:
for in the LORD JEHOVAH
is everlasting strength.'

Isaiah ch.26 v.4



GOD IS WORKING HIS PURPOSE OUT

by Rev. D.C. Porter

‘... Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?’

Genesis ch.37 v.10

‘Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams.’

Genesis ch.37 v.20

Joseph was one of the great prophetic souls of the Old Testament and a perfect type of Christ, who like The Lord, was rejected by His brothers through envy (see Genesis ch.37 v.11 and Matthew ch.27 v.18). We can well understand why Jacob loved him and made him a coat of many colours, but this only served to engender hatred in his brothers. This is the strange thing about envy, that whilst our eyes are so dazzled by the possessions of others, we fail to see our own blessings.

The animosity against Joseph was further increased by the reporting of evil deeds committed by his siblings. We dislike tell-tales as a rule but should note that Joseph was reporting the evil deeds of the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. Years ago I was called upon to bury a boy of six years, who had fallen down a quarry whilst searching for bird's eggs. His elder sister knew about his mischievous adventure but did not report it to her father. If only she had been a ‘telltale’, the boy might still be alive today.

To add to the tension in the family Joseph had dreams, the details of which he made known to his family. Some would say that he should never have made known the prophecy to his envious brothers. But surely this is the characteristic necessity of true prophecy, it must be uttered long before its fulfilment, in order to prove its truthfulness. Showing things to come is proof of Deity (see Isaiah ch.41 vv 22-23), but not making prophecy known, defeats its purpose.

These prophetic unveilings came to him as a teenager (see Genesis ch.37 v.2). We are never too young to be used by the Lord (see Ecclesiastes ch.12 v.1) and here the prophecy came via the medium of dreams.

The first had an agricultural theme and the second was of astronomical significance. Despite the difference in the settings, sheaves of corn in a field (see Genesis ch.37 v.7), or eleven stars in the heavens (v.9), the interpretation was exactly identical. In later life Joseph was destined for exaltation and a majestic throne whilst his brothers were destined to kneel at his feet. The very fact that the prophecy was DOUBLED, confirmed its certainty i.e. that the throne life for Joseph was established with God. (For confirmation of the significance of the two dreams refer to Genesis ch.41 v.32). As a consequence of such visions of grandeur, the brothers hated Joseph all the more and if they could help it, never would they bow down to their younger brother.

However, as the story develops, little did Jacob know that when he sent Joseph away from home to visit his brothers at Shechem, that he was putting Joseph's feet on the first step of the ladder to the throne. Likewise, little did Joseph realise that when he bade his father farewell, that he was on the way to this destination. Certainly, neither of them had any notion that the destiny prepared for Joseph was in Egypt.

Arriving in Shechem, in search of his brothers, he was dismayed to find that they were not there. Half inclined to return to the vale of Hebron, out of the will of God, but the Lord put in his way a stranger, who directed him to Dothan (we should always look out for the finger of the stranger!).

Espying their brother Joseph in the distance, alone upon the mountain in Dothan, all their envy welled up into murderous intention. 'Come ... let us slay him ... and we shall see what will become of his dreams', they conspired. If God's purpose for Joseph was to reach fruition, He must intervene immediately. So, into the thought-process of the brothers, God uses conscience and a sense of responsibility, through the elder brother Reuben. 'Let us not kill him ... but cast him into this pit ...', he suggests. His honourable intention being to save him from death and to take him back to his father, in Hebron (see Genesis ch.37 vv 20-22). If this intention is to be thwarted, God needs to act quickly and so in the heart of Judah (just like Judas Iscariot) surfaces the love of money. '... let us sell him to the Ishmeelites ... and thereby destroy his dreams of superiority and simultaneously make a profit for ourselves' he proposes (see Genesis ch.37 v.27). We know from later details (see Genesis ch.42

v.21) that whilst Joseph was in the pit, he cried for mercy, with deep anguish of soul. He must have pleaded at that point, 'Take me back home to father!' But Joseph, this is the way to the throne!

The brothers have twenty pieces of silver in their pockets but the real price for the business transaction is paid for by Joseph, sold in the slave markets of Egypt to Potiphar. However Joseph's new master soon recognizing the talents and virtues of his acquisition promotes him to be head of the household. At last Joseph experienced some elevation in his life after going down into the pit and down into the slave market. Is this the beginning of the fulfilment of the dreams?

Just when all was settled and the prospects looked bright, Joseph's character was put to the test by the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife. Therein was another test of character for one who was destined for the throne. Being falsely accused, he found himself deposed of his high office and plunged into the deepest dungeon, a prisoner of conscience. Down, down, down but not in depths of despair because there he served the two deposed servants of Pharaoh (Genesis ch.40 v.4). What a character! Even in prison the Lord made all that he did to prosper (see Genesis ch.39 v.23) and at least his fellow prisoners had previous royal connections.

One morning, on visiting the cells of the deposed butler and baker Joseph finds them particularly depressed. They had both had dreams and were mystified as to their meaning. Joseph might readily have responded by saying, 'Do not tell me any more about dreams; they have been nothing but trouble to me since I was a teenager'. But no! Joseph remained true to His God-given gift and proffered both of them the consolation of an interpretation. 'In my dream I saw a vine with three branches bearing clusters of luscious grapes, the juice of which I squeezed into Pharaoh's cup, that was in my hand', related the butler. 'Within three days you will be restored to your former office', said Joseph. With such uplifting news, the baker hastened to make known his vision of himself carrying three trays of bakemeats and the birds eating the contents of the top tray. 'Within three days Pharaoh will have you hanged', said Joseph. The butler was naturally delighted with his prospects and gladly agreed to Joseph's request to be remembered and recommended to Pharaoh (see Genesis ch.40 vv 14-15).

So it came to pass, just as Joseph had predicted but two dreary patient trying years passed without any message from Pharaoh's butler. However, it is good to know that God is never too early with His plan. Even though our patience might be sorely tried, in due time, dreams are the order of God's day. Pharaoh dreamt of seven fat cows being devoured by seven thin cows and behold, they were no better for the meal. And again he dreamed, seven thick ears of corn being consumed by seven thin ears of corn (Genesis ch.41 v.5).

No magician nor prognosticator in the King's palace could provide any intelligent solution to the puzzle. When the palace officials were threatened with death, the butler remembered the young Hebrew in the dungeon. When Joseph was summoned to Pharaoh's presence, he assures the king that interpretations belong to God, who is warning the country that disaster of immense proportions is seven years away. Seven years of plenty followed by seven years of disastrous famine is on the horizon for Egypt and surrounding countries. (We begin to see the reason for the two year delay in the butler's memory). The precise interpretation and the suggested plan for future national survival, were sufficient to persuade Pharaoh of Joseph's qualification for sharing the Throne of Egypt. At last, after many trying years, God has partially fulfilled His purpose of setting young Joseph on a throne. However, for the full purpose of God to be fulfilled, patience has to be exercised once again. We can be assured that God will complete what He has commenced. Those brothers, who sought to frustrate God's will and shatter the dreams of Joseph, must be brought before the throne in humble submission to his authority. The predicted famine arrives and soon Jacob is sending his sons to Egypt to buy grain. Little did the brothers know that the official distributor of all Egypt's agricultural wealth, was none other than the brother whom they sold for twenty pieces of silver. Very soon, after some awesome encounters with the 'ruler of Egypt', Joseph's dream is realized and God's purpose is fulfilled, in spite of all efforts to hinder it.

As the hymnist says 'God is working His purpose out, as year succeeds to year' and God is just the same today!

In Manchester, I met Mary Butterworth a retired missionary, who told me her experience. Whilst at prayer the Lord spoke to her with a clear message that He was sending her to Korea. She promptly applied for a position with The Leprosy Mission and was duly called

to London for interview. She came out of the Board Room and stood on the steps of Portland Place and looking up to heaven she said quite bluntly, 'Now, Lord, You said that You were sending me to Korea but that committee wants to send me to India. You must sort out me or sort out that committee'.

Within two weeks she received a letter stating that TLM had received a letter from the Korean Government wishing to commence a leprosy control programme in their country saying would you like to be the first missionary to represent us in Korea? Surely it is God Who is working out His purpose!

Whilst I was in Nepal, I met Jean Loudon, a missionary with The Leprosy Mission at The Anandaban Hospital. She confessed to being a child of the Nepalese Church because it was there that she met The Lord. Back home in America, she felt the desire to travel abroad and the country that appealed to her was Nepal. At Kathmandu she began to attend the free church where she gave her heart to the Lord. She was welcomed into the church by a Leprosy Mission doctor who enquired about her profession. 'I am a research scientist', she replied. 'My dear Jean, we have been advertising internationally for a research scientist to work at the Anandaban laboratory, would you like to join us there?' Of course, she agreed, how could she refuse when, although she was not a Christian, the Lord moved her out of the USA, because He had a work for her in Nepal.

What about the story of dear Rosemary Hobbs! She had spent her life caring for her mother and had no professional or occupational qualification. As her mother lay dying, she laid her hand upon her head and said, 'Rosemary, God will take care of you'. One night in the Methodist Church before the service, Rosemary heard an audible voice saying, 'Get out of Tintern'. On looking around she could see no one else in the church but resolved to obey the voice not knowing where to go. Ultimately, she arrived in Eastbourne and found work in a school for disruptive children. This work drove her to despair and a nervous breakdown. In her distress she remembered her mother's final words and cried, 'Lord if You are going to take care of me, You need to act quickly'.

A friend advised her to apply for work more suited to her domestic experience, in a home for elderly Christians. Bill Hobbs, a business man in London and chairman of the board, made regular inspection

visits to the home, on behalf of the committee. He was a rich, godly man who was attracted to the new carer, who loved the same Lord Jesus. Marriage was ultimately proposed and Rosemary was taken to Bill's London mansion, where she lived as his wife for many years, never wanting for a thing!

*God is working His purpose out as year succeeds to year;
God is working His purpose out
and the time is drawing near;
Nearer and nearer draws the time;
the time that shall surely be,
When the earth shall be filled with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea.*

Arthur Campbell Ainger, 1841-1919
