

## *God Has Made Me Forget*

By Rev. Erik Buss

January 19, 2020

Life can be hard, and even if things are good for you right now, you can probably look back into the recent past to see a time when you were really struggling. How much do you hold onto those hard times, especially if the suffering was traumatic?

Joseph suffered a great deal and yet seemed to be able to forget his past pain. He was a slave and prisoner for 13 years, made so by his own brothers. And then he was raised to prominence, power, and wealth.

In the modern era we might expect him to spend years in therapy recovering from the trauma of the first 30 years of his life but Joseph had a remarkable ability to leave the past behind. He counted it a blessing that God had allowed him to forget his pain and named his oldest son "Forgetfulness."

Naming your son "Forgetfulness" is a bit ironic because saying the name begs the question, "What are you forgetting?" Each time he said the name, he would be reminded. Clearly, he was not trying to forget what actually happened. He was forgetting the past pain in the sense of not allowing it to run his life. You can picture him holding his son and thinking that the past was unimportant compared to this present joy. He was living in the present.

We are told that for the angels in heaven, all the past and future is present. That does not mean that they don't think of the past or prepare for the future. It means that they do so in the present. Dwelling on the past only to grieve for it serves no purpose. But grieving for a past pain so that you can let go of it and live a life free of that hurt is worthwhile. A challenge of this world is that we choose what we dwell on. If we ignore the past, we won't learn or grow, but if we dwell on things too much we become stuck. A question to ask is, "How is remembering this helping me to be a more useful human being today?"

On a deeper level Manasseh means the new will that the Lord gives us when we try to follow Him. That new will is a desire, not just deep within us but even in our outer life, to do what the Lord says. When we try to develop this, the hells attack and we feel enslaved and imprisoned for a time. But in the end we break free and find that we have changed. Forgetting, in this context, means the Lord's removing that old desire, bit by bit (*Arcana Caelestia* 5353). The Lord is waiting to come in and make us forget old ways of being and thinking. And as with Manasseh's name being a reminder, it's not that we'll forget that we hurt someone in the past. But we will, as it were, forget why we could have done something like that. His gift is to make us look back and say, "Was I ever really that selfish that I could act in that way?"

Lessons: Genesis 41:39-52, *Arcana Caelestia* 5354