

JOSEPH IS TESTED

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

God's foreknowledge to accomplish His sovereign plan can be seen in these chapters. Read Rom 8:29-30 to see that God's foreknowledge precedes all His other decisions. God from eternity knows the thoughts and decisions of all people and He incorporated them into His sovereign plan before He created anything. He may wait for years or even centuries for the right set of people's decisions to occur to accomplish some parts of His sovereign plan. He may use the obedience of people or their disobedience to accomplish His will, but it will be done as He planned. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? or who has been His counselor? Or who has first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto Him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory forever. Amen" (Rom 11:33-36).

When Joseph was sold as a slave by his brothers and sent down to Egypt, God used it to eventually bring Jacob and his sons to that country. The presence of these people in Egypt would fulfill the prophetic word that God gave to Abraham concerning his descendants. He told Abraham that his people would be in a strange land where they would be afflicted for four hundred years before they would be delivered from it (Gen 15:13-16). God used Joseph not only to bring these people to Egypt, but also to protect them from the ravages of a seven-year famine.

Joseph, like all of God's leaders, was tested and proved before he was given his greatest responsibility in serving God. These chapters indicate several areas in which his character was tested so that as much as possible, he would be a leader above reproach. His morality was tested by Potiphar's wife who wanted him to commit adultery with her. His tenacity was tested by being imprisoned for more than two years for a crime that he did not commit. His humility was tested when he stood before Pharaoh and gave God the glory for his ability to interpret dreams. His authority was tested by the way he treated his brethren when they had so badly mistreated him. In all of these tests, God's foreknowledge of Joseph's character, plans and decisions allowed Him to use him to accomplish the purposes of His sovereign plan.

I. Joseph Tested in Relation to Morality — 39:1-23

A. The Occasion for the Test — 39:1-13

1. His exalted position — 39:1-5

39:1-5 - Joseph had been providentially brought to Egypt and purchased as a slave by Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh (c. 37:36). He was only 17 years old at this time, but Joseph proved he was a diligent servant and he was blessed by God. Potiphar noted this and promoted him to be in charge of everything he owned. God rewards those who diligently and energetically pursue their work.

2. His esteemed appearance — 39:6-7

39:6-7 - Joseph was not only diligent in his work, but God also blessed him with an attractive appearance. There is no sin in being attractive, but it should be for God's glory, not one's own. Because Joseph was attractive and exalted, Potiphar's wife desired to commit adultery with him. Perhaps Potiphar had neglected his wife, but she was a woman without devotion to God or to her own husband. This was a serious moral and spiritual test for Joseph.

3. His ethical response — 39:8-9

39:8-9 - Joseph must be commended for his godly motivation which enabled him to be victorious over the temptation to be immoral. He refused her solicitations for sex (James 4:7-8). Joseph was a man of integrity before both God and man. He refused her request because he wished to remain faithful to his

master (39:8, 9a), but most of all, to his God (39:9b). He realized the wickedness of any sin is first of all against God. Contrast his moral standards with those of his brothers, Reuben and Judah (35:22; 38:1-26).

4. His exemplary conduct —39:10-13

39:10-13 - Potiphar's wife daily attempted to seduce Joseph. There is great power in a daily attack of this sort. Notice how Samson yielded to sin because of daily pressures (Jud 14:17; 16:16-17). The Scripture warns of the tragic end of a young man who would succumb to such wickedness (read Prov 5:8-23; 6:23-35). Finally, Potiphar's wife physically tried to force Joseph to lie with her but he fled leaving his coat in her hand. His conduct is scripturally correct (2 Tim 2:22). This test of Joseph's purity proved the strength of his moral character, but it also allowed God to use it to promote him to second place in the kingdom of Egypt in an unusual set of circumstances.

B. The Result of the Test — 39:14-23

1. Expelled by his master — 39:14-20

39:14-20 - Because of Potiphar's wife's reputation and position, her story was believed and Joseph was cast into prison. This seems to be an unfair result, but the true saint does not give up because of the circumstances; he continues to serve God in spite of the circumstances.

2. Exalted by his God — 39:21a

39:21a - Because of Joseph's faithfulness to God in spite of adverse circumstances, God continued to bless him and caused him to prosper in the prison.

3. Elevated by his guard — 39:21b-23

39:21b-23 - Because the Lord was with Joseph and he remained diligent in his duties, he was soon elevated to a higher position. Possibly this prison was some sort of labor camp. If this were the case, it seems that Joseph's hard work at first freed him from much hard work later. Also, do not fail to see God's providential plan once again in promoting Joseph.

II. Joseph Tested in Relation to Tenacity —40:1-23

A. The Occasion for the Test — 40:1-19

1. Exasperation of the prisoners — 40:1-7

40:1-7 - While Joseph was faithfully serving in prison, he met two men who had served the Pharaoh. The one was the Pharaoh's butler. He was a cupbearer - the official food-taster for the Pharaoh. The other man was the Pharaoh's baker. One day these men showed themselves to be very dejected and sad because they each had a dream, but they knew of no one to interpret them. Dreams were very important to people in that day; it was the means of divine communication to them. God even gave dreams to unbelievers to reveal some information to them that would accomplish His sovereign plan.

2. Explanation of the dreams — 40:8-19

40:8ff - Joseph was truly a godly man for he immediately gave God the glory for being able to interpret dreams. Joseph, through God's aid, was able to predict that within three days the butler would be restored, but the baker would be executed (40:19). Joseph asked the butler to remember him before Pharaoh. He hoped he would soon be released from his prison duties.

B. The Result of the Test — 40:20-23

1. Exaltation of the butler — 40:20-21

40:20-21 - True to Joseph's interpretation, the butler was restored to his former position.

2. Execution of the baker — 40:22

40:22 - Again, Joseph's interpretation proved to be correct when the baker was executed.

3. Exclusion of Joseph — 40:23

40:23 - It must have been exciting for Joseph to see the butler restored. He must have anticipated that the butler's words would soon reach the Pharaoh and he would be released from prison. But God's ways are not man's ways and neither is His timing. Joseph was forgotten by the butler for two full years. This was a real test of Joseph's endurance, but his faithfulness to the Lord would be fully rewarded in due time.

III. Joseph Tested in Relation to Humility — 41:1-57

A. The Occasion for the Test — 41:1-37

1. Exhausted magicians — 41:1-13

a. Pharaoh's dreams — 41:1-7

41:1-7 - Two years after the butler had been restored, Joseph was still in prison. However, in God's time, Pharaoh had two dreams which greatly troubled him. The Egyptian religion stressed the importance of dreams. In these dreams, God was graciously behind them for three apparent reasons. First, it was to be the occasion for promoting Joseph. Second, it would be the means of preparing Egypt to survive the famine. And third, it would be that which would result in Jacob's descendants moving to Egypt. The first dream saw seven well-fed cattle coming out of the Nile (the source of life for Egypt) and being consumed by the seven frail animals. The second dream saw seven plump ears on a stalk being consumed by seven thin ears. The east wind (41:6) is synonymous with the desert wind.

b. Magician's failure — 41:8-13

41:8-13 - None of the Pharaoh's magicians were able to interpret his dreams. This caused the butler to recall how Joseph had interpreted his dreams and so Joseph was recalled from prison. God's plan not only released Joseph from prison, but would promote him to the palace.

2. Endowment of Joseph — 41:14-37

41:14ff - Joseph shaved and properly dressed before appearing before Pharaoh. The reference to shaving is historically important because it shows that the Pharaoh was an Egyptian king. Egyptians shaved - Hebrews did not. When Pharaoh told Joseph that he had heard that he was able to interpret dreams, Joseph was careful to give all the glory to God and not to accept it for himself. It must have been a real temptation to bolster his own ability so that he might be promoted. Nevertheless, he was able to give the meaning of the dreams - seven years of bumper crops would be followed by seven years of famine. The double dream signified its certainty (41:32).

41:33-37 - Joseph not only could interpret the dream, but he was also able to advise Pharaoh as to how he should prepare for the impending disaster.

B. The Result of the Test — 41:38-57

1. An exalted position — 41:38-44

41:39ff - Because of Joseph's God-given wisdom to interpret Pharaoh's dream (41:39) and because of his spiritual character (41:38), Joseph was the natural choice of Pharaoh to head up the emergency program. In fact, he was made second in authority only to Pharaoh.

2. An Egyptian wife — 41:45

41:45 - Part of Joseph's new position included a new name which may mean "a revealer of secrets." In addition, he received a wife from one of the priestly families. Her father probably served the pagan sun god Ra, at the city of On, about seven miles north of Cairo. It can be assumed that Joseph was careful to train her in the ways of his God.

3. An emergency program — 41:46-57

41:45ff - Joseph had been in Egypt for 13 years and was 30 when he began to have his own administration. During the 7 plentiful years, he put food in storage.

41:50-52 - During these good years, Manasseh, meaning "causing to forget," and Ephraim, meaning "fruitful," were born. These two names symbolized that Joseph's earlier "misfortunes" were forgotten and that God had truly blessed him.

41:53-57 - Next came the 7 years of dearth during which Joseph's emergency program proved its benefit. In fact, because of the abundance of Egypt, surrounding nations came to Egypt to buy food so that they might survive the widespread famine. God blessed Joseph abundantly for his faithfulness and for his determination not to be lifted up with pride.

IV. Joseph Tested in Relation to Authority — 42:1-38

A. The Occasion for the Test — 42:1-24

1. Emergency in Canaan — 42:1-5

42:1-5 - God's program to bring Abraham's descendants to Egypt was being fulfilled through a crisis caused by a famine (cf. 15:13-14). First, Jacob sent his 10 sons to Egypt to buy grain. He kept his youngest son, Benjamin, at home because he was the only son that Jacob thought he had left from Rachel. So Benjamin was his most precious son. (He did not know that Joseph was yet alive.)

2. Expedition to Egypt — 42:6-24

42:6ff - Joseph recognized his brothers and yet they did not recognize him. This was for at least four reasons. First, he was shaven while they were bearded (41:14). Second, about 22 years had passed and he had grown from a boy or 17 years into manhood of 39 years. Third, he spoke in a gruff manner to them and treated them harshly so they would not suspect he was their brother (42:7, 17). Fourth, he spoke to them through an interpreter so that he could understand them as they talked among themselves, but they could not understand him (42:23). Joseph could have exercised his authority and retaliated against them for their evil deeds to him in one of at least three ways, but he did not. He could have permanently imprisoned them; he could have denied them any provisions; or he could have had them executed (Rom 12:17; 13:10, 14).

42:18ff - Joseph determined that Simeon remain in Egypt until their youngest brother was brought to Egypt. These actions were necessary for at least two reasons. First, he was probably trying to humble his arrogant brothers. Second, he was probably trying to get them to confess their deficient moral conduct over the past years. When a man has problems, he often turns to God. At least in part, the brothers made a partial confession of their sins even though they still did not recognize Joseph (42:21-22). In the light of Joseph's godly character, it would not seem he was being malicious.

B. The Result of the Test — 42:25-38

42:25ff - Joseph's brothers returned to Canaan with the grain plus their money (42:26-28), but without Simeon (42:33-36), and they told Jacob that the official at Egypt demanded Benjamin's visit before he would release Simeon and give them grain. Jacob adamantly was opposed to this arrangement because he also feared the loss of Benjamin. Reuben, recognizing the need for food, offered his own two sons for security. But Jacob still refused to cooperate. This seemingly unnecessary grief for Jacob must be viewed with two considerations. First, Joseph probably was not aware of the grief this would cause Jacob. Second, Jacob had sown the seeds of turmoil years before by polygamy and partiality. This lesson clearly demonstrates the providence of God. His ways are sometimes mysterious to men and His timing is certainly not men's timing. Yet, for the faithful servant, Romans 8:28 is always true.