

JOSEPH IS TESTED

Lesson Aim: Accept the tests of God to make you a good servant in His sovereign plan.

Suggestion: Have the students read the Scriptures and answer the questions in the student lesson and insert the following questions where they fit the lesson for class discussion.

God tested Joseph in at least four areas to show that he was qualified to be the leader that would bring His people into Egypt where they would live for 400 years and become a nation. "Study (be diligent) to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed" (2 Tim 2:15).

How was Joseph's morality tested? Gen 39

God did not test Joseph to learn how he would act. He knew what Joseph would do before He made His plan in eternity. The foreknowledge of God enabled him to know every deed and every thought of every person when He made His sovereign plan and decreed it to be done. So why was Joseph tested? It was for Joseph's benefit to make him strong and it was for a testimony to others. God allowed Joseph to be sold to Potiphar, the captain of the Pharaoh's guard, to test his morality. Potiphar must have tested his skill and diligence, but his moral honesty must have impressed him the most since he made Joseph responsible to care for everything that he had. But God used Potiphar's household to test Joseph's sexual morality. Potiphar's wife repeatedly solicited Joseph to have sex with her, but he refused each time. He knew it would be a sin against Potiphar who trusted him with all his goods, but he knew it was primarily a sin against God. Then one day she grabbed Joseph and insisted he commit this sin with her, but he fled from her, leaving his garment in her hand. When her husband came home, she lied to him about Joseph and used his garment as evidence that he had attacked her. Potiphar was furious with Joseph and put him in prison. It was a tough test, but Joseph passed it. God tells His own children, "Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:16). We must pass the test of morality as Joseph did.

How was Joseph's tenacity tested? Gen 40

Joseph showed his tenacity to do what is right when he served as a slave in Potiphar's house. Potiphar trusted Joseph and put him in charge of all his goods. Joseph showed tenacity to do right in the eyes of God when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. Joseph was tenacious in doing right when he was unjustly cast into prison due to the lie of his master's wife. He could have given up and said, "What is the use of doing what is right. It did not keep me from being sold as a slave and it put me in prison." But Joseph continued to do right and found favor with the prison keeper, who put him in charge of the prisoners. This brought him into contact with Pharaoh's butler and baker, who had cast them into prison until he determined what should be done to them. The butler and baker each had a dream while they were in prison, but they had no one to interpret the meaning of them. Joseph learned of their problem and told them that his God interprets dreams. They told Joseph their dreams and by the interpretation that God gave to him, he told them what the dreams meant. In three days the interpretations proved to be accurate. Joseph asked the butler to speak to Pharaoh on his behalf to release him from prison. The butler forgot about Joseph and he remained in prison for two more years. We are to be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor 15:58). We must pass this test as well.

How was Joseph's humility tested? Gen 41

The butler finally remembered Joseph when Pharaoh had two dreams that no one could interpret. He told Pharaoh about the dreams that Joseph accurately interpreted for him and the baker, when they were in prison with him. Pharaoh called Joseph from prison and said to him, "I am told that you can understand a dream and interpret it." Joseph humbly denied that he had such power and said, "It is not in me: God shall give you an answer of peace" (41:16). Pharaoh then told Joseph his dreams and God gave Joseph the interpretation of his dreams. Then he advised the Pharaoh to find a wise man who could prepare Egypt for the seven years of famine during the seven years of plenty. He didn't suggest to Pharaoh that he should get the job since God used him to reveal to him the meaning of the dream. No, he humbly waited to let Pharaoh make that decision. We must learn to be humble. Prov 22:4 says,

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"By humility and the fear of the LORD *are* riches, and honor, and life." And Peter said, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (1 Pet 5:6).

How was Joseph's authority tested? Gen 42

Joseph used his authority to help people. He stored extra grain in Egypt during the seven years of plenty to provide food for the people during the seven years of famine. He wisely made the people pay something for the grain and the people thanked him for sparing their lives. Some people have the mistaken idea that we should give money, clothes, food and housing to the poor without having them give some kind of work or payment in return. Such a policy does not help the receiver in the long term. He is not thankful for what he has received and depends on the giver to continue to take care of his needs with no sacrifice on his part. Paul told the Christians in Thessalonica that "if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thess 3:10). We must learn to use our authority wisely as Joseph did.

When Joseph saw his brothers come to him for food, how did he use his authority? He could have sold them into slavery as they had done to him. He could have imprisoned them as he had been imprisoned for many years. He could have refused to give them food, but he did none of those things. So what did he do? He charged them with being spies in the land. Why did he do this? He wanted to know how they were treating his younger brother. Were they treating his younger brother as they had treated him? They denied that they were spies, but Joseph said they had to bring their youngest brother to Egypt to prove they were not spies. To be sure that they would return, he kept Simeon in prison until they returned with their youngest brother. Joseph used his authority to test them before he would reveal himself to them. But he had compassion on them and sold them the grain that they needed. However, he put the money in their sacks that they had given him for the grain, he did not tell them what he had done. He did not want them to depend on his generosity. Joseph used his authority with godly wisdom to help his father and family. God promises to give wisdom to every believer who meditates on His words and lives by them. The psalmist said, "I have more understanding than all my teachers: for your testimonies *are* my meditation" (Ps 119:99). Paul wrote these words to Timothy to make him perfect (mature) in his life: "All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim 3:16-17). God's words will enable His people to use their authority correctly, whether it is used by parents' authority over their children, business owners' authority over their employees or government officials' authority over their citizens.