

Joseph: Tested by the Word

Franklin Church of Christ
Edwin Crozier
March 18, 2007
AM Assembly

Introduction:

Joseph's story is well-known to us from the days of our youth. However, recently, in my daily reading, I came across **Psalms 105:17-19**. It took me off guard somewhat and caused me to scratch my head in puzzlement. The text says, "The word of the Lord tested [Joseph]" (NASU). What does that mean? Does it happen to us today? What can we learn from this? Examine this thought with me, looking at the story of Joseph, how the word tested him and the three lessons we need to know to help us carry on in the midst of tragedy.

Discussion:

- I. Joseph's story.
 - A. In **Genesis 37:2, 5-11**, when Joseph was 17, the word of the Lord came to him in a dream saying that he would rule over his family. What an amazing promise. But how could it possibly come true? He was the 11th of 12 sons. Yet, imagine what a dream that would be and how you could hang on to that when your brothers mistreated you and picked on you.
 - B. However, in **Genesis 37:28**, Joseph's brothers plotted against him and sold him into slavery to so Midianite traders who took him down into Egypt where he became a household slave for Potiphar. How do you think Joseph felt about his dream while enslaved? That doesn't seem so promising regarding ruling over his family.
 - C. In time, he was promoted to be a ruler among the slaves. Potiphar's wife longed for Joseph and tried to seduce him. But Joseph, despite being sold into slavery while under the watchful eye of his God and seemingly in contradiction to his God's promise, Joseph remained true to his God. Therefore, he refused Potiphar's wife's advances. In **Genesis 39:19-20**, she wrongfully accused Joseph and he was thrown in prison. How do you think Joseph felt about his dream while imprisoned? The word of God had said he would rule even over his brothers, but he has been nothing more than a slave and now a prisoner.
 - D. Then in **Genesis 40**, a baker and a cupbearer to the king who were imprisoned both had dreams, which Joseph interpreted. He asked the cupbearer to keep him in mind before the Pharaoh when he was released. But the cupbearer forgot. Can you imagine how Joseph felt when days turned into weeks, weeks into months and he realized that if the cupbearer had even remembered to say anything to Pharaoh, that Pharaoh was not doing anything about Joseph. How could God let this happen. He had promised Joseph through His word that Joseph would be a ruler of men? All He had given Joseph was slavery and prison.
 - E. Then one day, out of nowhere, Joseph was called out of prison to interpret a dream for Pharaoh. Through Joseph's interpretation, Pharaoh learned seven years of plenty were coming for Egypt and then seven years of famine. He needed someone to plan throughout the seven years of plenty for those years of famine. Who better than the man blessed by God enough to be able to interpret dreams? In **Genesis 41:38-42**, Joseph was made second in command over all Egypt. Notice in **Genesis 41:46**, Joseph was 30 years old. As we read through a few chapters in just over five minutes, we might miss the time frame here. It may seem like a short time. A matter of days, weeks, perhaps months. Instead it was 13 years.
 - F. How did Joseph hang on for 13 years of slavery and imprisonment? He hung on to the word of God. The word had been testing him. It had come to him and offered him a promise, but then for 13 years it looked like that promise could not possibly come true. The word of the Lord had claimed Joseph would be blessed by God, but for 13 years it looked in some ways as though Joseph had been abandoned by God. But God had always been with Him and God's promise would come true.
- II. "The word of the Lord tested him."
 - A. The word translated "test" in **Psalms 105:19** is used in metallurgy. The silversmith would have to test the silver to see if it could be used for any good purpose. The word is used in two similar ways that bear on what happened to Joseph and what happens to us.
 1. *Testing*: For the smith to know if the silver was any good, he would have to melt it over intense heat. When he did, I understand impurities would rise to the top. Isn't that the case

with men? When heat is applied, the character of men rises to the top. Adversity reveals character. The word of the Lord tests us to reveal our hearts.

2. *Refining*: The word goes a second level though. In that intense heat, melting the silver, the smith could remove the impurities. While the silver is solid, it is impossible to remove the impurities that tarnish the silver. However, when the heat is applied and the impurities rise to the top, the smith can remove them, refining, purifying and strengthening the silver. The word does the same to us. In fact, **Romans 5:3-5** demonstrates that we can exult in the heat and tribulation which purifies us because through that we gain hope.
- B. Understand this, the word of the Lord tests us today. We have been promised great things. We have been promised that God will be with us. We have been promised that a home in heaven is reserved for us. We have been promised that God will carry us through all adversities. But then we will be tested and refined. We will endure hardship and tribulation, whether it be the natural adversity of life or messengers of Satan sent to buffet us. The question is will we pass the test, hanging on the God's promises, hanging on to God's word? Or will we believe God doesn't keep His promises just because He doesn't keep them on our time and terms?
- C. As we face this dilemma, whether we have faced it for days, weeks, months or years, consider three lessons we learn from Joseph as he was tested by the word of the Lord.

III. Lessons for our lives.

- A. *No matter how bad it gets, God is still with us.* Consider what David wrote in **Psalms 139:7-12** drives this point home. Some days, our life will feel as if we are flying in heaven. God is with us then. But other days, it will feel as though we are living in Sheol on earth. No matter how dark it gets. No matter what we face. No matter how abandoned we feel (and all you have to do is read through the psalms to know that God's servants sometimes feel abandoned by Him). No matter what, God is with us. As **Hebrews 13:5-6** promises, God will never abandon or forsake us. Hang on to God. He is there, even when it doesn't feel like it.
- B. *No matter how bad it gets, God's word and promises will come true.* Things may get bad. We may face oppression and tribulation. We may endure sickness. We may have financial trouble. We may have family trouble. We may be betrayed repeatedly by friends and loved ones. We may sink to the lowest depths of fortune. We can have faith that God's promises and God's word will come true. Remember **Hebrews 6:18**. God cannot lie. If He makes a promise, it will come to pass. It will be in His good time, but it will come to pass. When you are enduring hardship and wondering if God's promises really will come true. Remember Joseph's 13 years.
- C. *No matter how bad it gets, God will work everything together for good in the end for those who love the Lord.* We may wonder why it works this way. Perhaps we can see at least one reason from Joseph's life. In **Genesis 50:20**, Joseph's brothers feared that with the death of their father, Joseph would finally get vengeance on them. But Joseph said, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (NASU). We must remember that God can see the big picture. We may never see it. We may never quite get why all the little things, even the bad ones happen. However, God can see the whole picture and He will use all things, even the bad ones to work together for good for those who love the Lord and remain true to Him (**Romans 8:28**). No matter how dark it gets, have faith that God can, in the end, pull all the strings together and use everything that is happening to you for good, getting you to heaven in eternity.

Conclusion:

Some days are dark. Some months are miserable. Some years are awful. Some decades are despicable. But keep your faith. We will be tested by the word of the Lord. Remember Joseph's 13 years. Please understand, 13 years is not a limit. Some of us may go through dark days for 3 years, some for 30. However, no matter how long our dark days last, God is with us. God's promises will come true in His time. God will work everything together for good for those who love Him. Will you pass the test and hang on to the hope offered by God's promises? Or will you fail the test, leaving the Lord and turning your back on His word? The choice is yours. No matter how bad it gets, remember Joseph's 13 years.