

## **Chapter 18**

### ***THE TWELVE TESTS OF THE CALL OF GOD***

#### ***GENESIS 37-50 - THE STORY OF JOSEPH***

#### **SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION (Read Genesis 37:1-23)**

- I. Jacob was in Covenant Relationship with God. The covenant God had made with Abraham had been passed down to Isaac, and Isaac had passed the covenant blessing to his son Jacob. Jacob would one day be responsible to pass the blessing of the covenant on to his sons. Jacob had a favorite son, Joseph, whom he loved more than any of his other sons. Because of that love, he gave Joseph a richly-ornamented robe. The robe indicated Joseph's special status within Jacob's family.
  - A. It was his father's love that created that special status for Joseph. It was because Joseph had been born in his old age and to his favorite wife, not because of any achievement on Joseph's part. Jacob gave Joseph a robe that assured him and displayed to all others that Joseph was especially favored in his father's eyes.
  - B. The "richly ornamented robe" and the love that it represented did make Joseph special. The account in Genesis 37 - 50 of the thirteen years between Joseph's dream of greatness - of leadership - until he became the prime minister of Egypt at the age of 30 is about showing that the love of his father, the special identity his father gave him, and his awareness of God as a good God, did make him special.
- II. Joseph had a dream. He dreamed he would be great. He dreamed he would be a leader of his people. His coat and the special favor and love of his father that it represented gave him confidence and the ability to dream.
  - A. He dreamed he would be a leader of his brothers. He dreamed he would be a leader of his whole family.
  - B. The fact that he felt he was special because of his father's love for him, helped him be a person who could dream. He was able to look beyond petty family bickering and the daily grind and see possibilities for himself.
- III. Joseph's dream was that he would rule and that his brothers and his father and his mother would bow down to him. He thought of it as a dream of personal power and authority.
  - A. At first Joseph saw the dream as being for his benefit and exaltation. Time and experience worked that out of him.
  - B. He learned that his dream was to serve and save his family. Joseph's dream of greatness became a dream of service. It was through sacrificial service that Joseph became a great leader and fulfilled the dream God had given him.
  - C. This was God's intention all along - as it became clear to him in later years – "*to save you*"

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*and your children.” – “God meant it for good.” (Genesis 50:20)*

- IV. The call of God on Joseph’s life was revealed to him when he was a teenage boy living at home with his family. The call was revealed to Joseph through two dreams he was given about his future.
- A. The call or vision was clear at the age of 17. Joseph was called to a place of leadership and influence. This was revealed to him twice, which he later interprets as signifying that it is firmly decided and will soon happen. (Genesis 41:32)
  - B. After thirteen difficult years of delay and reversal of Joseph’s fortunes the fulfillment of the call or vision begins to be manifested when he is 30 years old and living as an alien in a foreign country. (Psalm 105:17-19 AV)
  - C. This is God’s idea of a vision quickly and surely fulfilled? (Genesis 41:32). God’s ways are not our ways, and God’s timing is not our timing.

**SECTION 2: THE TWELVE TESTS OF THE CALL OF GOD**

- I. **The test of enthusiasm and pride.** (Genesis 37:6-9)
- A. Joseph was seventeen years old and he was excited. He was experiencing a spiritual awakening. God was communicating with him and he was having divine encounters and experiences. In an era when there was not much sense of the immediate presence of God among His people, suddenly Joseph began receiving what amounted to prophecies and inspiration about his future.
  - B. Joseph saw himself as being lifted up for his own glory and gain. God intended that Joseph be lifted up for the benefit of others. This led to thirteen years of experiences to test whether Joseph could maintain enthusiasm for God’s purpose under adverse circumstances and to remove pride as a motivating factor in his life.
  - C. When we receive revelation from God concerning His purpose for our lives it is a test of our maturity and an indication of our readiness for His plan if we can maintain a steady enthusiasm for God’s purpose and eliminate personal pride.
- II. **The test of misunderstanding.** (Genesis 37:10)
- A. The first misunderstanding Joseph had to face was that he thought the plan was only for his own benefit and that it was going to happen overnight without any cost or pain on his part. God provided him with thirteen years of difficulties to clear up that misunderstanding.
  - B. The second misunderstanding Joseph had to deal with was that those who were most important to him, his father, mother, and brothers, did not share in his excitement or enthusiasm. His brothers completely misunderstood and rejected his dreams as being from God and “hated him even more.” His father questioned the validity of Joseph’s revelation and rebuked him.
  - C. When God begins to reveal His purpose and call to you, those you expect to rejoice may
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rebuke or mock. Others may mistake your enthusiasm for pride or an “I’m better than you.” attitude. Their response may be, “Who do you think you are? Do you really expect God to use you?” It is a real challenge to cling to the dream and the call without becoming discouraged and bitter or without trying to defend and vindicate yourself.

III. **The test of isolation.** (Genesis 37:4, 8, 11)

- A. The tradition in their culture was that the oldest son was most important and the youngest least important, so Joseph’s brothers already envied his favored status as the favorite son of Jacob. Now his dream of greatness led to increased jealousy and envy. (See 1 Samuel 16:1-13)
- B. Instead of support and encouragement, Joseph experienced opposition and accusation. His father rebuked him for what he perceived as youthful pride and arrogance. His brothers hated him and began to openly mock him for his supposed revelation from God.
- C. Joseph’s sense of divine call or purpose isolated him from his brothers and to an extent from his parents. He was forced to carry the calling alone. The call of God not only caused others to exclude him due to jealousy and misunderstanding, but his sense of call prevented him from joining them in their shallow and frivolous attitude and behavior.

IV. **The test of reversal of circumstances.** (Genesis 37:23-24; Genesis 39:1, 2-4, 20)

- A. Joseph’s life so far had been a relatively easy and comfortable life. He was favored by his father above all his brothers. He was given preferential treatment in the family. His father looked after him and protected him from the hatred and envy of his brothers. He was rather pampered.
- B. When Joseph was sent out from the safety and security of home, away from his father’s watchful eye, his brothers seized on the opportunity to vent their hatred on him. They hated the richly ornamented robe, which signified his favored status, and they hated the dream he had, which signified his place in God’s plan, the Call of God.
- C. When Joseph’s brothers seized him, stripped him of his coat, and threw him in a pit, he went from protected son to helpless victim. When his brothers sold him to the Midianites and he was taken to Egypt to be sold as a slave, he went from privileged son to helpless slave. When, after faithful service to Potiphar, he was falsely accused of attempted rape, he went from trusted servant to despised prisoner.
- D. Joseph experienced the test of reversal more than once over a period of thirteen years. Each time he thought he might be in a position from which the call of God could begin to be fulfilled, his circumstances were reversed and he seemingly was back to “square one.”
- E. It is important to learn and understand that the fulfillment of God’s call or purpose for Joseph and for us is not dependent on our circumstances, but on our faith and our attitude. The only thing Joseph had to cling to was his faith in what God had revealed to him. The only thing Joseph could do was to develop and maintain an attitude of confidence in God and not circumstances.

V. **The test of responsibility or faithful service.** (Genesis 37:14; Genesis 39:2-6; Genesis

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39:22-23)

- A. At home, Joseph was trusted by his father Jacob and was sent out to check on his brothers and report back on their welfare and behavior. In Egypt, Joseph earned the trust of Potiphar and was put in charge of Potiphar's household. In prison, Joseph was trusted by the prison warder and put in charge of prison management. He served responsibly in whatever situation he found himself.
- B. Even though Joseph always seemed to be misunderstood, or attacked, or betrayed by others and didn't seem to be rewarded properly for his faithful service, he continued to serve and to use his skills and abilities to bless those around him.
- C. During his years of faithful and responsible service, Joseph was learning the skills and developing the maturity that prepared him for the actual fulfillment of his dream and call which would not be revealed until he was thirty years old. But when he was thirty, there would be no time to prepare or develop the skills. This is why it was so important that he be faithful in times of unfairness and obscurity.
- D. One of the tests that each God-called person must face is the test of serving faithfully and responsibly in that which is another's. You must be willing to use your gift and ability to make others successful. It has been said that there is no limit to what you can accomplish if you don't care who gets the credit. (Luke 16:12)

VI. **The test of temptation.** (Genesis 39:6-10)

- A. Joseph's faithful service put him in a situation in which he was tempted to sin. Because Joseph served his master faithfully, Potiphar trusted him completely. He didn't require accounting of Joseph's time or of how he managed Potiphar's resources. The smooth-running household was good enough for Potiphar.
- B. Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce Joseph and over a period of time she continually tried to get him to go to bed with her. Joseph resisted the temptation, even though there was every reason to expect that he could get away with it.
- C. Joseph's protection against the temptation to commit adultery with his master's wife was two-fold: He recognized that first, **sin is against God**, and second, this **sin would be a violation of trust**. In a time when we hear much about victimless crimes and sins that "don't hurt anyone" we must keep the same perspective as Joseph had toward sin; "My master trusts me. How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:8-9)
- D. We will all be tested in some way or ways to use our God-given grace gifts to satisfy our own desires. Faithful service and God's grace may give us positions or opportunities that could be abused for pleasure or self-gain. We must keep our eyes on the dream or Call of God and not allow our desires or the temptation of short-term pleasure or gain to keep us from long-term fulfillment of God's Call.

VII. **The test of betrayal.** (Genesis 39:13-20)

- A. The same woman that had expressed love and affection for Joseph when she was trying
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to seduce him, turned on him and accused him of attempted rape when she could not get her own way with him. Even though she had been the one who had tempted him day after day, she suddenly had nothing but hatred for him and tried to destroy him.

- B. Like Joseph, we will discover that the temptation to sin offers a false promise. The devil hates the call of God on your life. He may offer you all sorts of tempting alternatives to God's purpose and call. Don't trust the devil, the same thing that he uses to tempt you to sin, he will use to betray you.
- C. Like Joseph, we must maintain a two-fold protection against temptation to sin. We must recognize that sin is a violation of trust with God and a violation of trust with those around us. It is a "wicked thing...a sin against God."

**VIII. The test of false opportunity or false hope.** (Genesis 40:14, 23)

- A. After being falsely accused of attempted rape and unjustly imprisoned, Joseph again served faithfully and responsibly in the prison. No matter how limited and restricted Joseph's circumstances became, he remained true to himself, true to his character and nature, and true to God. He was soon given administrative responsibility in the prison, which was in fact located in Potiphar's house, the same house he was previously responsible to oversee. (Genesis 39:1; Genesis 40:3)
- B. Some time later, two high officials of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, are imprisoned and Joseph was given responsibility to look after them. When he successfully interpreted dreams they had, he appealed to one of them, Pharaoh's chief cupbearer, to put in a word for him with the king. This turned out to be a false opportunity as the cupbearer forgot Joseph when he was restored to his place in Pharaoh's court.
- C. After serving faithfully and waiting patiently for God's purpose to be fulfilled, it is easy to seize on every hint of an opportunity or glimmer of hope to try to help God's purpose to fulfillment. The very thing that seems to be your open door or your way out can fail you. Not every opportunity is God's opportunity. You cannot always be guided by "open doors." (Psalm 62:5)

**IX. The test of discouragement.** (Genesis 40:15; 1 Samuel 30:6; Psalm 42:5,11; Psalm 43:5)

- A. By this time it had been eleven years since Joseph received the call of God at age seventeen. Joseph was now twenty-eight years old. Joseph had worked hard and faithfully. He had operated all the right principles. His last hope seemed to have been denied him. None of the dreams and visions showed any signs of being any closer to fulfillment than they were eleven years earlier.
- B. This is the first time we hear any hint of discouragement or complaining in Joseph. He had done everything that could be expected of him and yet there was no indication that it was working at all. Joseph was discouraged concerning the Call of God. He began to grasp at straws.
- C. What do you do when faced with discouragement? Do you begin to complain to everyone who will listen to your story of disappointment and injustice? Do you begin to try to get everyone to take up your cause and advance your case? What does it take to get you to

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throw in the towel? Have you got staying power?

X. **The test of delay.** (Genesis 41:1; Galatians 6:9; Hebrews 10:35-36)

- A. “*When two full years had passed...*” Joseph had been discouraged two years earlier. He had attempted to find a way out of an unfair situation. He had tried to help God get the plan in motion. Now he has had to wait and serve and remain faithful for two more years. He is thirty years old. He had spent thirteen of his thirty years as a slave or prisoner.
- B. Joseph didn’t know it, but he was only hours away from the fulfillment of the call God revealed to him as a seventeen-year-old boy. Each day in the prison seemed just like every other day. There was no end in sight and no indication that God was at work at all.
- C. The most dangerous delay is when you are closest to the fulfillment of God’s call. Feelings of frustration and injustice can accumulate. We can develop a bitter, negative, “Poor me, what did I ever do to deserve this treatment? The whole world is against me!” attitude.
- D. Joseph was responsible to keep his attitude right and keep his spirit sweet. The fulfillment of God’s call would depend on his ability to stay sweet, to avoid bitterness, and to remain open to God’s opportunity even though it seemed as if it would never come.

XI. **The test of response to divine opportunity.** (Genesis 41:14,33)

- A. God was at work outside the prison in Pharaoh’s palace. God had given the king of Egypt dreams that foretold future events, but he didn’t know the meaning of the dreams. This is God’s opportunity. God had gifted Joseph with the ability to interpret dreams. So far it had only given him trouble or disappointment when he had used his gift. But this is the key moment.
- B. Joseph had been misled into thinking that the dream of the cupbearer might be his opportunity, but this time it was clear to him that God was at work. Joseph responded with a sweet spirit and with an act of faith. He shaved off his Hebrew beard and became smooth-shaven as an Egyptian. He changed from his prison clothes to palace clothes to go before Pharaoh. He was responding in faith to God’s open door of opportunity. You can’t respond to divine opportunity in faith if you allow resentment and bitterness to accumulate in your soul.
- C. Joseph took a step of initiative and spoke out in faith when he not only interpreted Pharaoh’s dreams with confidence, but recommended a course of action to the king to deal with the coming famine. God honored Joseph’s faith and his response and promoted him that day to be the Prime Minister of Egypt.

XII. **The test of authority or promotion.** (Genesis 45:7; Genesis 50:19-21; Romans 8:28)

- A. Joseph had successfully faced all the previous tests of his faith, his character, and the call of God on his life. Now remained one final test. How would Joseph use his power and authority? Would Joseph use his power to get even or to revenge himself upon those who had wronged him? Would he use his power to secure only his own future or would he use his power to serve and save the very ones who had wronged him so many years earlier?
- B. Joseph’s protection was that he was able to see God’s hand at work in adverse circumstances. Joseph was able to remain faithful when treated unjustly. Joseph was more concerned with the fulfillment of God’s call and purpose than with his own comfort

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or success.

- C. Joseph saw the hand of God at work both through and in spite of the wrongs that had been done him. He told his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good..."
- D. How do you see the process that is at work in your life to prepare you for the fulfillment of God's call? How do you exercise your authority when you come into a position of power or influence? How do you treat those who opposed you?
- E. It important that we realize that we are to serve faithfully not only in times of preparation and testing, but also in the time of fulfillment and blessing.

**QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION**

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- 1. Do you think that Joseph would have been able to see God's Purpose and Call fulfilled through him if he had not faced and overcome the tests? What might have been the outcome if he had failed in his preparation and testing?
- 2. Can you relate any of these tests of the Call of God to experiences in your own life? What lessons have you learned from your experiences of testing? How would you advise a person who is facing one or more of these testing experiences in their life?