

Hebrews 11:22
“Joseph’s tested faith”

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I. Introduction

We come now to the last of the patriarchs of faith, Joseph. He, like his father and grandfather, died never receiving the promises but his story is even greater as **he spent his entire adult life in Egypt outside the land of promise. Joseph couldn’t even claim that he sojourned in the land of promise, let alone inherited it.** From the time that God first told Abraham in Genesis 12:7 that he would make his seed a mighty nation and that they would inherit the land of Canaan as their home **two hundred years had gone by** without any sign of fulfillment. **Further more by the time of Joseph’s death do to the famine in the land of Canaan not one Hebrew remained in the land of promise and would not for over 400 years.** Yet with those facts Joseph’s dying words for his fellow Hebrews was that **WHEN** God brought them out of Egypt that they were to take his bones with them. His thought evidently was; **if in his earthly existence he couldn’t inherit the land then in his death at least the land could inherit his bones!** What a great example to these Hebrews who were using the fact that Israel still was under Roman occupation as the reason to reject the clear teaching and evidence that Jesus was the Son of God and long a waited Messiah. Jesus had addressed this in John 10:36-38 when the religious leaders accused Him of blasphemy saying, “do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of

God'? *If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.*” All three of these patriarchs believed God’s Word in the face of death, their testimony was that through out their life nothing they had experienced ever changed their view of the truth that God had told them.

II. Vs. 22a Testing of faith

Like the other patriarchs of faith, we have studied, I believe that these Hebrew readers would have read into this passage their extensive knowledge of their ancestor. It is here that Joseph is a radical departure from his father and grandfather, as he is one of the few subjects that we can not find a negative statement or example in the pages of their life. Instead what stands out in Joseph is his continual response to adversity and the testing of his faith. We shall examine two of those before we get to the text that the writer of Hebrews refers too here in Genesis 50:24 and Exodus 13:19. To gain the understanding that the original readers would have possessed regarding Joseph we will need to only deal with Genesis 39 as this chapter provides great resources for two of the greatest struggles any person can ever deal with in life:

- Suffering
- Temptation

What we learn about Joseph and the two greatest paralyzing trials that test our faith that is quickly discovered when we realize that four times in this chapter we read that despite the situation and adversity we read that: “*The LORD was with Joseph*”. They key to Joseph’s character remaining true to the Lord was a direct result of the Lord being with him! Because of this truth even though the circumstances changed Joseph’s walk did not.

The same qualities that cause Joseph to advance into a successful position in

Potiphar's house in the first six verses were he same ones that land him in jail in the final seven verses. What Joseph's life teaches us is that obedience to the Lord does not always bring about prosperity, popularity, or prestige. Many people wonder WHY trials that come our way. Moses answers this question in Deut 8:2-3 when he says, "*God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, **to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.** So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, **that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.**"*

In Genesis 37:36 we were told that "*the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard.*" The 39th chapter of Genesis is the story of what transpired in the house of Potiphar and Joseph tells us two things about this man Potiphar:

- a. **He was a "officer" of Pharaoh:** The word here can be translated "eunuch" as it was common to make a leader a eunuch in order to insure their devotion.
- b. **He was the captain of the guard:** He was the head of the secret police if you will.

In verse 2 we read the first of the "*Lord was with Joseph*" phrases and **the context deals with Joseph success under Potiphar.** What is not immediately apparent in this passage is the length of time that it took for this success and the subsequent temptation to transpire. According to Genesis 37:2 Joseph was 17 years old when he was sold into slavery. Then according to Genesis 41:46 Joseph was 30 when Pharaoh promoted him. When we add in Genesis 41:1 where we are told that Joseph served two years in prison we conclude that **Joseph served Potiphar for 11 years. Saint's it took 11 years for this process of success through God's blessings to take place. We often think that if God is behind something it will transpire in 11 days or 11 months but not 11 years.** Further more the reality of Joseph's temptation takes on a whole new perspective as this temptation lasted for many years not a just few days. The secret of Joseph's success in saying no to temptation was the same as his secret to success: "*The Lord was with Joseph!*" Joseph discovered the truth that Jehovah means, "**the God that makes and keeps His promises**". Examining Genesis 39:3-9 reveals six things that enabled Joseph to exercise his faith the way he did:

1. Vs. 3 **The Lord in his life** "*The Lord was with him*": As already noted in the text **the Lord was in his life, it was what powered him and moved him.**
2. Vs. 4 **Diligent in small things** "*Joseph found favor and served him*": Joseph was diligent in the small things. During those 11 years Joseph who was from a different culture and language learned to speak and think like an Egyptian. **He didn't wait for**

the Lord to bless him instead he was faithful to do what he needed to be used of the Lord.

3. Vs. 5a **Everything he did was unto the Lord** “*The Lord blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake*”: Whatever Joseph did he did as unto the Lord. Joseph did not work for Potiphar he worked for the Lord; he was diligent in serving with excellence because it was all about the Lord.
4. Vs. 5b **Desired to be a blessing above being blessed** “*The blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field*”: **Joseph worked not for advancement, promotion or notoriety but for the benefit and blessing of others.** The quickest way to be raised up in the Lord is not to care about being raised up.
5. Vs. 6a **Operated in the gifts and callings of God** “*Thus he left all that he had in Joseph’s hand*”: **Though the Lord was with Joseph; God worked through the natural talents and gifts that He had given Joseph. All Joseph did was operate under the Lords guidance and power while serving in those gifts.**
6. Vs. 9 **Gave all glory to the Lord not his abilities** “*There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*” Joseph recognized that all of the success he had was because of the Lord and not his own abilities.

Joseph’s resume was this, “**Hire me and as I work in the gifts and abilities God has given me by his power your company will be prosperous!**” Because of this we are told in verse 3 that Potiphar saw that the Lord was with him. Joseph witness to Potiphar by being the best worker he had.

Now in Genesis 39:7 we move the second of the great trials we face in life temptation. Although this temptation specifically deals with sexual temptation the principals of dealing with temptation apply no matter what it is that is a temptation to us. This verse gives a three-fold description of Potiphar’s wife:

1. “*His masters wife*”: We are never given her name, just that she is his masters wife. This suggests that she was not a woman of character.
2. “*After these things that his master’s wife cast longing eyes on Joseph*”: This verse suggests that she was not only attracted to Joseph’s appearance but upon Joseph’s power and success.
3. “*And she said, “Lie with me”*”: Here we see that her seduction started subtle with long flirtatious looks. Then came attempts to get him to talk to her, which escalated according to verse 10 to her attempting to do this day by day. Verse ten also suggests that Joseph began avoiding her until finally she just became blunt. The fact that he did not respond to her made him all the more attractive and a challenge.

Remember that this was not a one-time event but rather a daily occurrence that lasted years. Genesis 39: 8-12 reveals five things that Joseph faith did in dealing with the temptation:

1. Vs. 8a **Refused**: He simply ignored her advances by way of silence he did not acknowledge her subtle and not so subtle attempts to seduce him.
2. Vs. 8b-9 **Reasoned**: Realizing she was not getting the hint Joseph tried to reason with her by stating three truths:

- a. **Ethical:** “Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you.” Joseph’s explains that his position was not only one of power but one of privilege and trust. Thus to sleep with her would be a ethical violation of his masters trust.
- b. **Moral:** “you are his wife.” Second he reminds her that she is married to Potiphar and such a relationship between them would be immoral, as it would be adultery.
- c. **Spiritual:** “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” Lastly, and most importantly he tells her that it would be a sin against God and such a thing would hurt his relationship with the Lord.
3. Vs. 10a **Resisted:** Even after he ignored her and reasoned with her she still spoke to him every day and asked him to sleep with her yet we are told **he did not “heed her”**. Joseph gave off no mixed signals there was no way that she could conclude that he was softening to her advances.
4. Vs. 10b-11 **Refrained:** He did not even want to be near her as he sought not to be where she was. He always tried to make sure that someone else was present when she was around.
5. Vs. 12 **Ran:** Finally, when she grabbed a hold of him he ran.

It is an issue of the heart and Joseph had settled that along time before so that temptation and sin could not get a foot hold.

Genesis 39:13-20 reveals that perhaps the most difficult aspect of the temptation was Joseph dealing with his own heart because even though he did everything right the circumstances went from bad to worse. Joseph left in his underwear but with all of his dignity and relationship with the Lord intact. But stand against temptation could have cost him his life he reasoned it was worth the price. The lie she told her husband was exact opposite of what had happened. Yet **there is no mention of him saying anything in his defense. Potiphar could have executed him by way of torture but he did not, which suggests that he did not fully believe his own wife as Joseph’s character spoke louder than her words.** Finally, we see that even in jail Joseph was made the captain of the guard. **The trails and testing of Joseph’s only moved him from the top floor to the bottom floor but it never impacted the way in which he served.** Joseph didn’t just trust God in the good times but also in the difficult times. As we are told that, “**the LORD was**

with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.” Joseph’s obedience wasn’t tied to his success it was tied only to the Lord. And with that truth we learn that:

When we seek to walk with the Lord we will be prosperous no matter what our situation or circumstance.

III. Vs. 22b Take my bones with you

The reference for Hebrews 11:22 is Genesis 50:22-26 where we learn first that 54 years passed between verses 21-22 even though Moses placed these two deaths side by side. Moses tells us that Joseph’s life was full at 110. He lived long enough to see his great, great grandchildren and played with them on his knees. I can think of nothing in this life more fulfilling than to enjoy the simple blessings of spending time with those you love. Joseph was not preoccupied with death he loved life and made the best out of every opportunity but in the end was looking forward to going home. According to Genesis 50:24-26 Joseph left specific instructions concerning his death and burial. He did not want his body to remain in Egypt and like Jacob wanted his bones carried back to the land of promise when the nation left. For 350 more years after this death Joseph’s coffin spoke to the Israelites the value and truth of the promises of God to the nation. Joseph’s death was as much of an example as his life had been; a testimony of faith and trust in the God who holds the future in His hand. Death was not Joseph’s end it was but his beginning to be with the One who loved him and those that love Him. And when it came time to leave in Exodus 13:19 Moses took the bones of Joseph with the nation as they departed Egypt. Joseph was a man of faith who made them promise 350 years earlier to take his bones with them when they left. The author of Hebrews uses Joseph’s bones as an example of trusting God to fulfill His word despite the adversities and trials.