

JOSEPH'S STORY GIVES PEACE

- A. Introduction: As part of a larger discussion on not being moved by the hardships of life (I Cor 15:58), we're working on answering certain questions that come to all of us in the hard times.
1. When people encounter life's trials several questions naturally come up: Why did this happen? Why didn't God stop it from happening? What is God doing? If not answered correctly, these questions can move us from faith and confidence in God to fear, doubt, and anger.
 - a. Let's briefly answer these questions. (We've discussed the answers in some detail in previous lessons.) Why does bad stuff happen? Because that's life in a fallen world. Why doesn't God stop it? Because that's not His primary purpose in the earth right now.
 1. God is in the process of unfolding His plan of redemption, His plan to deliver His creation from bondage to sin, corruption, and death. His main goal now is to draw men to saving knowledge of Himself through Jesus so they can have life in the life to come. Matt 16:26; Luke 12:18-21
 2. In connection with the Second Coming of Jesus, the Lord will stop all of life's trials when He renovates and transforms this world. At that time, all pain and suffering forever removed, and life will be what God planned it to be before mankind sinned.
 - b. The hell and heartache in this present world is due to mankind's sinful choices, beginning with Adam. God has given human beings free will. With free will comes not only the choice, but the consequences of the choices people make. But God is able to use human choices—even those He doesn't approved of—and cause them to serve His ultimate purpose.
 2. John 16:33—God's promise to us in the midst of life's hardships is peace of mind. This peace comes to us through the Word of God. The Bible assures us that God is not behind the hardships of life, and it shows us how He works in the midst of life's troubles to accomplish His purposes.
 - a. God's Word is filled with accounts of real people in real trouble who got real help from God as He furthered His plan of redemption.
 - b. In these accounts we see that God often puts off short term blessing (ending the trouble right now) for long term eternal results. We find that He brings maximum glory to Himself and maximum good to as many people as possible as He brings genuine good out of genuine bad. God's timing is perfect, and He gets His people through until He gets them out.
 3. In this lesson we're going to examine another one of these accounts, a historical record of a real man named Joseph who got real help from God as the Lord worked in his circumstances.
- B. Joseph's story gives us peace of mind because it is an example of how God works in and with the hardships of life in a fallen world. It can help us silence the troubling thoughts that come to all of us when we find ourselves in hard places.
1. Let's briefly summarize Joseph's story (Gen 37-50). Abraham had a son named Isaac. Isaac fathered Jacob, and Jacob had twelve sons, one of whom was Joseph.
 - a. Joseph was his father's favorite son. When Joseph was seventeen, his jealous brothers plotted to kill him, but instead they sold him into slavery.
 - b. Slave traders took Joseph to Egypt where he was purchased by a man named Potiphar who was an officer of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. While Joseph was in Potiphar's house, the man's wife falsely accused Joseph of rape and he was sent to prison.
 1. In prison Joseph met a butler and a baker who worked for Pharaoh. They were imprisoned because they had offended their king. Both men had dreams they did not understand. Joseph interpreted their dreams to mean that the baker would be hanged and the butler restored to his butlership. That's exactly what happened.
 2. The newly released butler forgot about Joseph for two years until Pharaoh had dreams that no one could interpret. On the word of his butler, Pharaoh summoned Joseph to interpret the

dreams. Joseph said the dreams predicted seven years of great abundance followed by seven years of famine, and advised that food gathering begin immediately.

- A. Pharaoh put thirty-year-old Joseph in charge of designing and implementing a food gathering and distribution program. Because of Joseph's efforts, when Egypt and surrounding nations faced the famine, there was plenty of food to feed those affected by it.
- B. Joseph's own brothers were among those who came to Egypt for food. Joseph was eventually reunited with his entire family when his father, brother, and their wives and children moved to Egypt to live.

- 2. Why did this happen to Joseph? Because that's life in a sin cursed earth. His troubles were the result of a series of freewill acts carried out by fallen men and women influenced by Satan. His brothers chose to sell him into slavery and Potiphar's wife chose to falsely accuse him of rape. Consider these points.
 - a. We know that God was not the source of Joseph's troubles because, Jesus who is God and shows us God, never treated anyone like Joseph's brothers treated him (John 14:9-10; John 5:19). Note that the Lord delivered Joseph from his afflictions (Acts 7:9-10). God doesn't afflict people, directly or indirectly, only to turn around and deliver them. That would be a house divided. Matt 12:25-26
 - b. Joseph's ordeal has Satan's fingerprints all over it. The Bible says that the devil is a murderer and a liar who seeks to steal from and devour men. John 8:44; John 10:10; I Pet 5:8
 - 1. Joseph's brothers planned to murder him and then lie to their father about what really happened. Potiphar's wife also lied and, as a result, stole years of Joseph's life—all hallmarks of the devil.
 - 2. Did Satan directly cause Joseph's troubles? The Bible doesn't say. But we do know that he works on unsaved men through our fallen flesh (Eph 2:2). He presents our minds (saved and unsaved) with thoughts in an attempt to influence behavior (II Cor 11:3; Eph 6:11). As the god of this world (II Cor 4:4), Satan had had access to Joseph's brothers and all the people along the way, along with the opportunity to influence their behaviors.
 - 3. Before we move on, we need to clear up any possible misunderstandings. Some might say: God may not have caused Joseph's troubles, but He allowed them. And, doesn't God have the devil on a leash and doesn't he sometimes use the devil to perfect His people?
 - a. Remember what we've already said about the phrase that "God allows". This statement is not found in the Bible the way we use it. We've loaded it with meaning not consistent with Scripture.
 - 1. For many of us, implicit in the phrase "God allowed it", is the idea that because God didn't stop it, He is for it, approving of it, or behind it in some way. God allows people to sin. That doesn't mean He is for it or behind it in any way. Men and women really do have free will.
 - 2. God does not stop people from making choices. If He were going to overrule someone's will, He would do it for their eternal salvation, not to make our lives easier.
 - 3. Much of the trouble in life is the result of other people's choices. So we pray to God: Stop that person from doing what they're doing. But we're asking Him to do something He has not promised to do.
 - b. God and the devil aren't working together. Nowhere does the Bible call Satan God's teaching and perfecting tool. The name Satan is from a word that means adversary. (What about Job? For an in depth discussion, read chapter 6 of my book, *God is Good and Good Means Good*.)
 - 1. The Bible tells us to resist the devil (James 4:7). If he is God's instrument sent to perfect us, how can you resist him and still receive the teaching God is supposedly sending through him?
 - 2. The Holy Spirit is the Teacher of the church and the Word of God is His teaching tool. John 14:26; II Tim 3:16-17; Eph 4:11-12; Eph 5:25-27; John 15:3; etc.
4. Back to Joseph's story. We can see in what happened to him how God maximized the consequences of human choice for His glory and much good. We also see that timing was involved. God put off short-term blessing (stopping the troubles before or as soon as they began) for long-term eternal results.
 - a. Why didn't God warn Joseph ahead of time what his brothers intended to do or stop it immediately?
 - 1. That wouldn't have solved Joseph's problem because his brothers would've still had hatred and

- murder in their hearts toward him. It would have resurfaced at another time in another way.
2. Had God stopped the trouble at any point, Joseph would not have ended up in Egypt in charge of a food distribution program, and he and his family may not have survived the famine.
 3. Had the family been wiped out, God's plan of redemption would have been thwarted because Jesus came into the world through Joseph's family. Eternal results are more important than temporary blessings.
- b. Why didn't God step in when Potiphar's wife lied about Joseph? Because He could see where her choices would lead. Joseph went to prison, but it was in prison that he met the butler who was his link to Pharaoh.
 - c. After the butler was released from prison, he forgot about Joseph and his case of false imprisonment for two years. Why didn't God remind the butler?
 1. Had the case been brought before Pharaoh prior to the king's troubling dreams, Joseph may have been released from prison, but there would've been no reason for Pharaoh to promote him. He may have faded into obscurity in Egypt or returned to Canaan and maybe died in the famine.
 2. Once again, we see short term, temporary blessing put off for long term eternal results.
5. God brought great good out of the evil done to Joseph. Joseph ended up positioned to feed his family and preserve the line through which Jesus would one day come. His food plan also saved thousands from starvation and multitudes of idol worshippers heard about the One and Only God, Jehovah.
 - a. During Joseph's servitude in Potiphar's house, Potiphar, a worshipper of the gods of Egypt, realized that Almighty God was with Joseph. Gen 39:3
 - b. While in prison, Joseph acknowledged God as the one who gave him accurate interpretations of the baker and butler's dreams. As a result, many more Egyptian idol worshippers heard about the Only, Almighty God. Gen 40:8
 - c. When Joseph was brought before Pharaoh to interpret his dreams, Joseph credited the Lord as the interpreter. And the king recognized that God was at work in Joseph. Gen 41:38-39
 - d. Many countries came to Egypt for food during the years of famine. Great numbers of these people likely heard about the Sovereign Lord as they were told why Egypt had plenty of food when no one else did. Gen 41:57
 6. God got Joseph through his ordeal until He got him out. Not only did the Lord preserve Joseph, He caused him to thrive in the midst of very difficult circumstances.
 - a. Joseph quickly advanced when he arrived at Potiphar's house as a slave, and Potiphar gave him charge over the entire household. Gen 39:2-4
 - b. Although Joseph was accused of rape and death was the standard penalty for this crime, Pharaoh sentenced him to prison for political captives instead of execution. Joseph was placed in irons in prison, but he was delivered from those chains and put in charge of the entire prison. When the butler and baker arrived, Joseph became their waiter. Gen 39:21-23
 - c. Joseph was eventually promoted to second in command in Egypt. (Only Pharaoh had a higher rank.) Joseph was also given a wife with whom he raised a family. Gen 41:40; Gen 41:51-52
 7. Joseph's story gives us peace because it is a real life example of how God works in a fallen world.
 - a. Because the entire story along with the end result is recorded, we can clearly see how what seemed like a loss or a setback was actually a stepping stone to victory.
 - b. We see how God brought genuine good out of genuine bad as He used the problem (Joseph's ordeal) to solve a problem (potential death by starvation of the line through which the Redeemer will come) and maximized circumstances (brought knowledge of the True God to multitudes).
- C. Joseph himself is an example of a man who had peace of mind in the midst of the storm. Although there is no one verse that specifically says Joseph had peace, the circumstantial evidence is overwhelming.
1. God's promise to His people is that He will keep in peace those whose minds are fixed on Him. Isa 26:3—You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, whose thoughts are fixed on you. (NLT)

- a. When we read the record of Joseph’s ordeal we find that his trust was in God, and he expressed that trust through continually acknowledging him.
 1. When Potiphar purchased Joseph he noticed that God was with Joseph, causing him to prosper, When Joseph went to prison, the prison keep also noted the same. Gen 39:1-4; Gen 39:21-23
 2. These two men couldn’t see God with their eyes. So how did they know that God helped Joseph? He must have acknowledged God in a demonstrable way. To acknowledge God means to praise Him by talking about who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do. Clearly, Joseph praised or acknowledged God in the presence of Potiphar and the jailer.
 - b. When Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce Joseph, he rebuffed her advances with: How can I sin against God? Notice, he wasn’t thinking in terms of “how could God do this to me”. He was focused on his responsibility toward God. Gen 39:9
 - c. The names of Joseph’s children give us great insight into his state of mind throughout his ordeal.
 1. Gen 41:51-52—Manasseh means forgetting. “God has made me forget all my troubles and the family of my father” (NLT). Ephraim means fruitful. “God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering” (NLT)
 2. Every time Joseph uttered the names of his children, he proclaimed that God had taken away the painful memories of his hardships and loss and given him a life of abundance in what had been a land of suffering. That’s peace of mind
2. Joseph has such peace and victory in his situation that when his brothers came to Egypt for food, he was able to tell them: God sent me ahead of you to preserve your lives. Gen 45:5-7
 - a. When Joseph said that God sent him to Egypt, he didn’t mean that God caused his troubles. Rather, he was expressing how in control God is of His universe and human choice.
 1. God didn’t cause any of it, but He used all of it. God knew what the brothers were going to do to Joseph before they did it and He worked their choices into His plan. Joseph’s brothers did great evil to him. But God used their wicked choices to ultimately bring Joseph to a position of power in Egypt where countless lives were saved and multitudes heard about Jehovah, the One True God. That’s how in control God was and is.
 2. At the end of it all Joseph was able to declare to his brothers: “As far as I am concerned, God turned into good what you meant for evil. He brought me to the high position I have today so I could save the lives of many people” (Gen 50:20, NLT). Now that’s peace of mind.
 - b. Joseph had an eternal perspective that gave him peace of mind and kept him from becoming bitter.
 1. Although he never returned to his homeland during his lifetime, he knew he was going back to the land God promised him and his family. Before he died, Joseph made his family swear to take his bones with them when they returned to Canaan as he knew they would. Gen 50:24-25
 2. When Jesus returns to earth and resurrection of the dead takes place, Joseph’s bones will come out of the ground and the first place will stand when he is reunited with his body is Canaan.
- D. Conclusion: We haven’t said all we need to say, but consider some final thoughts as we close this lesson.
1. To keep your mind focused on God through His Word takes effort when you are in the storm because of what you see and feel.
 - a. Imagine what Joseph had to deal with as far as thoughts and emotions, when he was betrayed by his own brothers and taken as a captive to a foreign land not knowing what awaited him. What did I do to deserve this? God must not love me. God is a bad, unfair God.
 - b. But if we, like Joseph, can learn to acknowledge God in the midst of our troubles by talking about how good He is and how big He is, we will have peace in the storm.
 2. You can answer the troubling questions and thoughts that come to all of us in the hard times with the truth: God didn’t cause any of this, but He sees a way to use it for His purposes. He will bring maximum glorify to Himself and maximum good to as many people as possible as He brings genuine good out of genuine bad. He will get me through until He gets me out. Lots more next week.