

Genesis Chapters 44-45 Summary - John Karmelich

I can describe these chapters in one word: Testing! A classic question is why does God spend so much time testing us? After all, if God knows all things and He can't learn! (God's perfect by definition. That means in my mind He can't learn!) That leads me back to the question of why does God test us? What I figure is He wants us to grow closer to Him and be a good witness for Him, so for that reason He will constantly test us to help us grow as believers. To quote one of my mentors, "I'm convinced God stays up late at night thinking of new ways to ask me, "Do you trust me now even through this?"" I bring this up as this two-chapter section that focuses on the founders of the 12 tribes of Israel (12 brothers) who'll go through a serious time of testing. A key moment is when one of the 12, Joseph, who his brothers did think was dead or long gone, admitted to his brothers that he was their long-lost brother. A key point is that they didn't have to feel guilty about selling him into slavery roughly 20 years earlier. In effect, that lead to the current situation in our story to test the brothers to see if they have matured and learn to live as God desired. Let me explain further:

The basic story is Joseph's 11 brothers (from different fathers) didn't know he was alive. They traveled to Egypt from Israel to buy grain as there was a major famine. This was their second trip. The previous one didn't include Joseph's full brother Benjamin. Joseph didn't trust his brothers as they sold him as a slave over 20 years earlier. Now that Joseph went from being a slave to the second most powerful man in Egypt, he wanted to see if his brothers had changed at all. Thus, he put them through a series of tests without revealing who he was. By these tests, he found out his full little brother was still alive plus that his father was still alive. Instead of just screaming in their face on the day he first saw them, "I am your long-lost brother Joseph, deal with it"! Instead, Joseph puts them through a series of tests to see if they still hate him! The good news is they passed the tests, which leads to the famous "I am Joseph" phrase, that we read in Chapter 45 of this text.

I suspect you're thinking, "I've known this story for many years, why should I read further?" The issue again is why God tests us. It's not for Him to learn, but for to realize a test (often a time of suffering) is designed to help us be a better witness for Jesus. That's the underlying lesson of this famous story. OK then, time to tell the story for the sake of us learning a few things about how God tests us! If you think He only tests "Bible people", I have learned if one is a witness for Jesus, "stuff happens" to test us!

The previous chapter ended with the brothers all in Egypt for the second time. Joseph fixed all them a meal and gave his youngest brother a much bigger portion. Joseph was leaving clues that he knew they were his brothers (they were seated in birth order). Yet, he didn't reveal who he was as he did not trust them given Joseph's knowledge of the brothers' history of being out for themselves and hating him! So it leads to Chapter 44 where the first thing we read of Joseph sending all of them home, and putting his silver "divination cup" in his youngest brother's bag without their knowledge. Remember, the brothers thought that Joseph was just a powerful Egyptian who used magic for special knowledge!

Once the brothers were on the way, Joseph sent guards "sirens blasting" to stop them, with the purpose of testing them. Maybe Joseph was thinking, "I'll just live with my youngest, as he wasn't alive when I was sold into slavery!" The brothers claimed they didn't steal his "special cup". The brothers said they were willing to put the guilty brother to death. When it was found in Benjamin's bag, they went back to Joseph to plead for Benjamin's life (the youngest one). An interesting bit of trivia is it is the brother Judah (Messianic line) who was the spokesman who pleaded for Benjamin's life! In short, this was a time for serious testing of the brothers to see if they matured!

The good news is the brothers passed the test: They asked Joseph to just let them just be slaves, versus blaming Benjamin for the stolen cup! The good news is Joseph was seeing his brothers "grow up", and they were no longer interested in just looking out for themselves. That leads to the question, how long's my test going to last? One of my favorite prayers when I hear about someone suffering is, "God please help this person learn what You want them to learn from this!" Obviously not all our suffering will end on a note like this story. Still God allows us to go through things ultimately to make us or others in the picture to draw closer to Him through tough situations! Meanwhile back to Joseph and his brothers!

We now get to the big crying moment when Joseph reveals who he is to his brothers. None of them say anything as they're dealing with the shock of it all! After a bunch of hugs, Joseph ordered all of them to return, get dad and bring everyone to Egypt as there will be a famine for five more years (God told that to the Egyptian Pharaoh 9 years ago in a dream and Joseph correctly interpreted it). Now that everyone's aware of all the facts (except dad still doesn't know his sons sold Joseph into slavery), Joseph orders all of them to fetch their father and effect don't argue on the way back. Just fetch dad and that's that! They took a lot of provisions with them to make the point that they're not making up the story about Joseph!

By the way, word of this reached the Pharaoh and when he found it was Joseph's family the king said it was ok for his family to move there. Despite the famine, there were still areas they could graze animals and that's what they did. In fact, the location became isolated from where the Egyptians lived so that is the reason the Israelites were allowed to live separately from the Egyptians (other than the fact they did rule over them and treat them as slaves)!

When Jacob (father of them all) found out, obviously he was in shock and agrees to move the family to Egypt. Jacob was also aware of his grandfather's prediction that Israel would be enslaved for 400 years and as implied in the next chapter I suspect he knew it was beginning. In the meantime, the family now moves to Egypt to ride out the famine.

OK again, most of us know this story but may not have thought about how it affects us. Remember this was a big test for Joseph's brothers as to whether or not they'd tell the truth, in spite of problems they're dealing with including false charges (just as Joseph was sold as a slave unwillingly and was arrested by his slave master under false charges). The point for you and me is God will often work out our lives for His glory in ways we least expect and often always us to suffer in order to accomplish His goals. Keep in mind Romans 8:28 that "says and we know that all (key word "all") things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose". (KJV). In my first paragraph I stated a quote by one of my mentors who would say, "Do you trust me now even through this?" He'd also joke that he checks Romans 8:28 once a day to make sure it's still there. (The late Chuck Missler if you know who that was!)

With that said, the next time you're facing trials with no end in sight remember Romans 8:28 applies to a believer just as much as it applies to Joseph and his brothers as well as you and me.

On the same page as this study is a more detailed study I wrote many years back. You are welcome to email me if you want or join my list to the get the latest lesson. Thanks for reading. John