

The Lord Was With Him

¹ Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. ² The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. ³ His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. ⁴ So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. ⁵ From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field. ⁶ So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. ⁷ And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." ⁸ But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. ⁹ He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" ¹⁰ And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her.

¹¹ But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, ¹² she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. ¹³ And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, ¹⁴ she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. ¹⁵ And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house." ¹⁶ Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, ¹⁷ and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to laugh at me. ¹⁸ But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house." – Genesis 39:1-18 ESV

While Judah was busy dealing with his own set of problems, his younger brother was hundreds of miles away, attempting to acclimate to his new role as a slave. The Ishmaelite traders to whom Judah and his brothers had sold Joseph, had eventually cashed in by selling him to an Egyptian named Potiphar, the captain Pharaoh's guard. The once-favored son of Jacob was now a household slave to one of the most powerful men in the land of Egypt. His circumstances had taken a dramatic turn for the worst and, yet, Moses indicates that God was with him.

The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. – Genesis 39:2 ESV

This statement almost sounds self-contradictory. How in the world could Joseph be described as a slave and a success at the same time? Those two conditions seem to be mutually exclusive. And how could Moses declare that God was *with* Joseph when all the conditions surrounding his life seem to indicate that God had actually *abandoned* Joseph? From a purely human perspective it would appear that Joseph's life was in a downward spiral. He had traded in his expensive robe for the garments of a common slave. No longer would he enjoy the perks that came with being the apple of his father's eye. This rather spoiled young man would no longer have servants to meet his every need, but instead, he would find himself relegated to the lowly status of a household slave to an Egyptian master.

But despite his seeming fall from grace, God was with him. Not only that, God favored him. Even in the midst of Joseph's less-than-ideal conditions, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was watching over him. In fact, Moses accentuates this point three additional times in the chapter.

...the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands... – Genesis 39:3 ESV

...the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. – Genesis 39:21 ESV

...the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed. – Genesis 39:23 ESV

Joseph had only been 17 years old when his brothers sold him as a slave. So, by the time this story took place, he may have been in his early 20s. He was far from home and living in a strange land where he was unfamiliar with the customs and unable to speak their language. But over time, Joseph became increasingly more acculturated to his new environment, eventually learning to speak their native tongue and perform his duties with both confidence and excellence. And his acclimation didn't go unnoticed or unrewarded by Potiphar.

...he soon made Joseph his personal attendant. He put him in charge of his entire household and everything he owned. From the day Joseph was put in charge of his master's household and property, the Lord began to bless Potiphar's household for Joseph's sake. – Genesis 39:4-5 NLT

Potiphar could sense that Joseph enjoyed the blessings of his God. Purchasing this young Hebrew slave had turned out to be a windfall for Potiphar. It seems that everything Joseph touched turned to gold. And, eventually, Potiphar made Joseph his personal attendant, giving him responsibility over his entire household and land holdings. To Potiphar, Joseph turned out to be a great investment. He was like some kind of lucky charm or talisman that brought him good fortune and great reward. And it was all the work of God.

Eventually, Potiphar put all his fiscal and household affairs under the direct supervision of this young Hebrew slave and, because Joseph was blessed by God, Pharaoh enjoyed a great return on his investment. According to Moses, Joseph was so effective and reliable, that the most difficult decision Potiphar faced each day was deciding what to eat.

But this is where the story takes a decidedly dark turn. Though having been betrayed by his own brothers, this handsome and highly gifted young man was enjoying great success. The trajectory of his life had begun to trend upward, which must have provided much-needed encouragement to Joseph at this dark and lonely period of his life. Once again, he was enjoying the favor of God as expressed through the actions of a father-like figure in his life. Potiphar had bestowed on this young Hebrew slave great responsibilities that were evidence of his great respect for Joseph's integrity and ingenuity.



But Potiphar wasn't the only one who had taken an interest in Joseph. The Egyptian captain's wife was also attracted to Joseph, but not for his management skills. Moses points out that Joseph was "a very handsome and well-built young man" (Genesis 39:6 NLT). And this fact had not escaped Potiphar's wife. For as long as Joseph had been in their home, she had begun to see him as far more than a servant. In her eyes, Joseph had become an object of lust and desire. And it wasn't long until her lust became so intense and insatiable that she propositioned the

unsuspecting Joseph. But out of respect for his master and reverence for God, Joseph refused her advances.

"...my master trusts me with everything in his entire household. No one here has more authority than I do. He has held back nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How could I do such a wicked thing? It would be a great sin against God." – Genesis 39:8-9 NLT

As the old saying goes, Joseph was between a rock and a hard place. By denying his master's wife, he was risking her wrath. But if he gave in, he would be violating his master's trust and, worse yet, he would be guilty of offending the righteous will of a holy God. And Joseph knew that his recent stretch of good fortune had actually been the work of his good and gracious God.

But Potiphar's wife proved to be persistent because her lust was exigent. She was not going to give up easily.

She kept putting pressure on Joseph day after day, but he refused to sleep with her, and he kept out of her way as much as possible. – Genesis 39:10 NLT

Poor Joseph was left with no other alternative but to avoid all contact with the woman. But that proved to be difficult, if not impossible. Unfortunately, the day came when Joseph found himself all alone in the house with her. It seems likely that this unlikely state of affairs had been arranged in advance by Potiphar's wife. No longer able to control her lustful thoughts, she orchestrated the perfect scenario to see them fulfilled.

She came and grabbed him by his cloak, demanding, "Come on, sleep with me!" Joseph tore himself away, but he left his cloak in her hand as he ran from the house. – Genesis 39:12 NLT

Joseph ran for his life. In doing so, he illustrated the point made by the apostle Paul centuries later.

Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. – 1 Corinthians 6:18 NLT

But while Joseph had escaped the grasp of Potiphar's wife, he had not escaped the anger fueled by her damaged ego. She was livid that this common slave had dared to spurn her sexual advances, and she decided to make him pay for it. This vindictive woman crafted a sordid tale of attempted rape and painted herself as the innocent victim of Joseph's unwanted advances.

And it is at this point that the reader must wrestle with the question: But where was God in all this? It is difficult to read this story and not question why God did not step in and protect Joseph. It is clear that, by running away, Joseph did the right thing. He took the proper path and honored his master and his God. But why did God allow this woman to put Joseph in this compromising and potentially catastrophic situation? Could He not have prevented it? Why did faithful Joseph have to endure yet another case of undeserved and premeditated vengeance? He had done nothing to deserve being sold into slavery. And now, he had done nothing to deserve being falsely accused of rape. But it is important to remember what Moses point out four different times in this chapter.

The Lord was with Joseph... – Genesis 39:2 ESV

While Joseph's circumstances were about to dramatically change, his relationship with God remained the same. The Lord had not abandoned him. The Almighty was still with him. And God's plans, while taking a slightly unexpected path, remained unchanged.

The Lord Made It Succeed

¹⁹ As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, “This is the way your servant treated me,” his anger was kindled. ²⁰ And Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. ²¹ But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. ²² And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. ²³ The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph’s charge, because the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed. – Genesis 39:19-23 ESV



Angered by Joseph’s repeated refusals to accommodate her sexual advances, Potiphar’s humiliated wife falsely and maliciously accused him of attempted rape. And her husband, shocked but also angered by this news, was forced to confine Joseph to prison. Had the master truly believed in Joseph’s guilt, it is likely he would have ordered his execution. After all, for a common slave to attempt to violate his master’s wife would have been a crime worthy of death. Considered to be little more than personal

property, a slave had no rights, and his life was in the hand of his master. But rather than having Joseph executed for this egregious crime, Potiphar chose to spare his life by confining him to prison.

This echoes the treatment Joseph had received at the hands of his brothers. When he had shown up in Dothan, their first response had been to put him to death.

“Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams.” – Genesis 37:19-20 ESV

But Reuben had intervened and spared Joseph’s life. Rather than committing murder, he suggested that they confine Joseph to an empty cistern, where he would be left to die of natural causes. Reuben had hoped to come back later and rescue Joseph. But before he could do so, Judah convinced his brothers to sell Joseph to Ishmaelite traders. And that sale had resulted in Joseph’s purchase by Potiphar, which eventually led to his imprisonment for a crime of which he was completely innocent. But, as before, Joseph was spared from death.

While preferable to capital punishment, Joseph's imprisonment was still undeserved and would have been a far-from-pleasant experience. Yet, Moses points out that "the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (Genesis 39:21 ESV). This theme runs throughout the entire narrative found in chapter 10. God had been the one to protect Joseph from the murderous intentions of his brothers. And God had been behind Joseph's sale to the Ishmaelites and his eventual purchase by Potiphar. None of this was blind luck or a case of cosmic karma.

The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. – Genesis 39:2-3 ESV

God had orchestrated every facet of this story, including Joseph's imprisonment in the facility reserved solely for the king's prisoners. This factor will become more important and pertinent as chapter 40 unfolds. But suffice it to say that each and every sequence of this story took place according to the sovereign plan of God.

Just as God had shown Joseph favor in the eyes of Potiphar, He also elevated Joseph in the eyes of the prison's warden.

...the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. – Genesis 39:22 ESV

This innocent young man displayed an uncanny knack for leadership that led the warden to place all the prisoners under Joseph's supervision. And before long, Joseph found himself functioning more as a prison administrator than a prisoner. He wielded power, authority, and great influence. He had entered as a common criminal but, before he knew it, Joseph was functioning as the second most powerful man in the entire prison.

The warden had no more worries, because Joseph took care of everything. The Lord was with him and caused everything he did to succeed. – Genesis 39:23 NLT

Prison walls were an insufficient barrier against the sovereign hand of God. The vindictive plans of a bitter woman could not derail God's plans for His child. God's love for Joseph was far superior to anything Potiphar or his wife could try to do to him. As the psalmist wrote, "The LORD is for me, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me?" (Psalm 118:6 NLT). They could falsely accuse Joseph. They could imprison him. They could even threaten to take his life. But as the apostle Paul so aptly put it:

"If God is for us, who can ever be against us?" – Genesis 8:31 NLT

And Paul would go on to remind his readers that God's love for His children was inseparable and unwavering.

I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. – Romans 8:38-39 NLT

God, out of His marvelous love and mercy, was making Joseph a success – even in prison. He was protecting Joseph's life, expanding his influence, and preparing him for the next phase of his God-ordained journey. The prison would prove to be a doorway to freedom, a portal to salvation, and a divine pathway to Israel's promised future. No one would have seen this coming, including Joseph. Potiphar and his wife will disappear into the pages of ancient history, never to be heard from again. Joseph's brothers will go on with their lives, oblivious of Joseph's fate and ignorant of their own pre-ordained destiny with drought and famine.

Little did Joseph know that his unexpected and undeserved imprisonment would foreshadow another captivity to come. This son of Abraham would become a symbol for the descendants of Abraham who would one day find themselves also living as captives in the land of Egypt. And they too would discover that, despite their unpleasant circumstances, God was with them. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would step into the darkness of their predicament and turn their seeming failure into success.

Dreams, Nightmares, and Visions

¹ Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker committed an offense against their lord the king of Egypt. ² And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, ³ and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. ⁴ The captain of the guard appointed Joseph to be with them, and he attended them. They continued for some time in custody.

⁵ And one night they both dreamed—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—each his own dream, and each dream with its own interpretation.

⁶ When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. ⁷ So he asked Pharaoh’s officers who were with him in custody in his master’s house, “Why are your faces downcast today?” ⁸ They said to him, “We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them.” And Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me.”

⁹ So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph and said to him, “In my dream there was a vine before me, ¹⁰ and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters ripened into grapes. ¹¹ Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup and placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand.” ¹² Then Joseph said to him, “This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days. ¹³ In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office, and you shall place Pharaoh’s cup in his hand as formerly, when you were his cupbearer. ¹⁴ Only remember me, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house. ¹⁵ For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit.” – Genesis 40:1-15 ESV



To understand the events recorded in this chapter, it’s essential to remember that Joseph was imprisoned in “the place where the king’s prisoners were confined” (Genesis 39:20 ESV). In a sense, this was a prison reserved for those whom we might consider guilty of committing “white-collar” crimes. This doesn’t mean their offenses were minor in nature, but that they were not petty criminals. As an official member of Pharaoh’s administration, Potiphar had been able to have Joseph confined to this minimum-security prison

where he was surrounded by others who had been charged with crimes against the state.

And it was in this environment that Joseph would come into contact with two additional “officers” from Pharaoh’s court. One had served as Pharaoh’s chief cupbearer while the other had held the title of chief baker. Both of these men had committed offenses against Pharaoh that landed them in prison, where they awaited notification of their fate. Like Joseph, they had no way of knowing how long they would remain imprisoned or whether they would ever see the light of day again. And neither of these men had any way of knowing that God was going to use them as part of His sovereign plan for Joseph’s eventual release and meteoric change in social status.

Moses ended the previous chapter with a revealing statement regarding Joseph: “the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed” (Genesis 39:23 ESV). While it would be easy to view Joseph’s presence in prison in a negative light, Moses wants his readers to know that Joseph was under the gracious and all-powerful care of the sovereign God of the universe. This young man, who had been falsely accused and unjustly imprisoned, was right where God wanted him to be. And God was providentially overseeing every aspect of Joseph’s life, pouring out His unmerited favor and ensuring Joseph’s ultimate success.

So, it should come as no surprise that God had preordained for the cupbearer and baker to be incarcerated in the very same prison as Joseph. And, not only that, but He had arranged for both men, on the very same night, to have their sleep disturbed by a dream. And when Joseph saw them the following morning, he could sense that something was wrong. Their countenance revealed that something had greatly disturbed them, and he inquired as to the nature of their distress. When they revealed their desire to know the meaning of their dreams, Joseph offered to act as their interpreter.

“Interpreting dreams is God’s business,” Joseph replied. “Go ahead and tell me your dreams.” Genesis 40:8 NLT

Joseph was familiar with dreams. After all, he had experienced a few of his own. And he knew from personal experience that the meaning behind a dream could produce some pretty serious consequences. In one of his own dreams, Joseph had envisioned he and his brothers as bundles of grain. And in the dream, all of the other “bundles” had bowed down before him. It was his brothers who had assessed the meaning of the dream, stating, “So you think you will be our king, do you? Do you actually think you will reign over us?” (Genesis 37:8 NLT).

And this dream had been followed by a second one that Joseph eagerly shared with his brothers, and with his father and mother.

“The sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed low before me!” – Genesis 37:9 NLT

And as before, Joseph was given the interpretation, along with a stern rebuke from his father.

“What kind of dream is that?” he asked. “Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow to the ground before you?” – Genesis 37:10 NLT

So, for Joseph, discovering the interpretation of a dream didn't seem to pose a big problem. If God was behind the dream, He could easily provide its meaning. Joseph wasn't claiming to have the gift of dream interpretation. He simply believed that if God was behind the dream, its meaning would not remain obscure or hidden. After all, his father and brothers had managed to interpret his dreams without a problem.

Anxious to discover the meaning behind his dream, the chief cupbearer spoke first.

"In my dream," he said, "I saw a grapevine in front of me. The vine had three branches that began to bud and blossom, and soon it produced clusters of ripe grapes. I was holding Pharaoh's wine cup in my hand, so I took a cluster of grapes and squeezed the juice into the cup. Then I placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand." – Genesis 40:9-11 NLT

And almost as if he had done this a thousand times, Joseph boldly and confidently declared, "This is what the dream means..." (Genesis 40:12 NLT). Then he promptly shared his interpretation of the rather cryptic and surprisingly disturbing dream. Without batting an eye, Joseph stated, "The three branches represent three days. Within three days Pharaoh will lift you up and restore you to your position as his chief cup-bearer" (Genesis 40:12-13 NLT). And that news was like music to the cupbearer's ears. Much to his relief, whatever he had done to deserve imprisonment was not going to result in his death or further confinement. In fact, within three day's time, he would be released and restored to his former position.

Having delivered the good news, Joseph took the opportunity to appeal to the cupbearer's sense of fair play. Since Joseph had given the cupbearer a new lease on life, he asked that the man show his gratitude by putting in a positive word for him to Pharaoh. Joseph explained that he was an innocent victim, having been sold into slavery by his own brothers and then unjustly imprisoned for a crime he didn't commit. Joseph was hoping that a good word from the cupbearer might prompt Pharaoh to intervene on his behalf. He desperately wanted to get out of prison but it's unlikely that Joseph believed he could be released from his status as a slave. Perhaps Pharaoh could find him a place to serve in the royal court."

But Joseph's interpretation skills were still required. The baker, having witnessed the positive outcome of the cupbearer's dream, eagerly divulged the content of his own personal nightmare. But his high hopes would soon come crashing to the ground as Joseph shared the less-than-promising interpretation of his dream.

But through it all, God was speaking, leading, working, and orchestrating every facet of Joseph's complicated and highly conflicted life. Nothing escaped His attention. No one was outside His range of influence. Even the dreams of men were subject to His sovereign authority. The cupbearer and the baker were in the prison because of their own crimes, but the timing and the place of their captivity had been completely up to God. The slowly unfolding story of Joseph's life continues to point to the faithfulness and omnipotence of God.