

Joseph is now in Egypt and God's plan for him is continuing to unfold. Not only will He train Joseph to be an administrator but He will also guide the circumstances that will eventually move Joseph to the position where he can save many lives during the future famine. Sometimes what we may see as adversity or setbacks in our own life are the times God is preparing us for future challenges.

¹ And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmeelites, which had brought him down thither.

After the brief detour into the incident between Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar in chapter 38, the narrative of Joseph picks back up where it left off at the end of chapter 37. We are reminded that Joseph has been sold as a slave to Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh who is described as "captain of the guard." Commentators believe Potiphar was either in charge of Pharaoh's executioners or in charge of Pharaoh's bodyguards. This connection to Pharaoh demonstrates God's sovereign control over the circumstances because He is positioning Joseph to eventually move him into the position of being second-in-command over Egypt.

² And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.

Joseph's adversity of being sold into slavery was not punishment for some sin he had committed, but God was with him and blessed him in whatever task was assigned to him. God caused Potiphar to use Joseph in the house and not in the field where the abilities that God had given Joseph would not be recognized. In fact, this choice will lead to the next step in God's plan for Joseph for it will bring Joseph to the attention of Potiphar's wife and trigger the events that will follow.

³ And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand. ⁴ And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all *that* he had he put into his hand.

"And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand" – Because Joseph was working in the house, Potiphar was able to notice that Joseph was good at his job and that everything he did prospered. Whether Potiphar recognized that it was the LORD prospering Joseph is questionable, but he did recognize the results.

"And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him" – Potiphar liked Joseph and retained him rather than selling him to someone else. The Hebrew word translated "served" seems to indicate that Joseph personally worked for Potiphar himself. God's guidance is evident as this places Joseph in a position where Potiphar's wife can cause trouble for Joseph and will advance him to the next step of his journey to Pharaoh's palace.

"and he made him overseer over his house, and all *that* he had he put into his hand" – The LORD caused Potiphar recognize Joseph's abilities and trustworthiness and then make him the steward of his house. Everything that he owned was placed under Joseph's authority.

Verses 5-6: Potiphar benefits from the fact that the LORD was blessing Joseph and all that he did. In fact, he enjoyed the prosperity so much that he didn't worry about his household finances since he had entrusted these to Joseph. We are also told that Joseph was good looking, both in body and face, a fact that complicates matters for Joseph when Potiphar's wife notices.

⁷ And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me.

"And it came to pass after these things" – After an indeterminate amount of time. Apparently Joseph had had time to settle into his new job as steward over Potiphar's house and possessions.

"that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph" – Egyptian women in general of that day had a reputation for having loose morals and sexual affairs were not uncommon. After seeing such a handsome young man as Joseph working around the house day after day, Potiphar's wife notices him and becomes obsessed with the idea of having a sexual encounter with him.

"Lie with me" – She invites or even commands Joseph to have sex with her. She may even be using her authority as the wife of Joseph's master to try to get what she wants.

⁸ But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what *is* with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; ⁹ *There is* none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou *art* his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?

Joseph shows his strength of character and refuses the advances of his master's wife. He tells her he cannot indulge himself in this great wickedness of sleeping with her for two reasons: (1) the trust Potiphar has placed in him (he has promoted Joseph to having authority over all his possessions except his wife; he has entrusted everything he owns to Joseph's supervision to the point that he no longer keeps track of what he has); (2) it would be a sin against God (Joseph has likely noticed that God has been blessing him). If Joseph did what this woman wanted he would be betraying both Potiphar and God after they both have treated him well.

¹⁰ And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, *or* to be with her.

Potiphar's wife does not give up, continually speaking to Joseph day after day. She no doubt flirts with him and tries to get him to spend time with her in the hopes of tempting him to give in to her desires. He continually rejects her advances and invitations to sleep with her (the phrase "to lie by her" is a euphemism for sex). It appears he even found reasons to not be around her when possible because he knew the temptations that it would create for him.

¹¹ And it came to pass about this time, that *Joseph* went into the house to do his business; and *there was* none of the men of the house there within. ¹² And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.

“And it came to pass about this time, that *Joseph* went into the house to do his business” – During the period of time that she made it her habit to speak to Joseph every day, we are told about a particular day when Joseph came into Potiphar’s house to attend to his duties as he always did.

“and *there was* none of the men of the house there within” – There were no witnesses to restrain the behavior of Potiphar’s wife. Either Joseph didn’t realize that he would be alone in the house with this woman or else he had no choice considering he had duties to perform. Either she arranged for the men of the house to be gone on this day or else she just took advantage of the opportunity.

“And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me” – The woman would not take “no” for an answer so she grabs Joseph by his clothing so he could not escape, demanding that she go to bed with her.

“and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out” – Joseph chose to flee the temptation rather than take the chance that he might succumb to it. Likely he only left his outer garment, meaning that he may not have been naked as he left the house. However, he apparently left enough clothing behind to incriminate him and make this woman’s lie about him more credible.

Verses 13-18: Apparently this final rejection made Potiphar’s wife feel angry and insulted and so she decides to retaliate. She calls for the men of the house and accuses Joseph of attempted rape, using his abandoned garment as “evidence.” She then repeats her story to her husband when he came home.

¹⁹ And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, saying, After this manner did thy servant to me; that his wrath was kindled. ²⁰ And Joseph’s master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners *were* bound: and he was there in the prison.

The usual view is that Potiphar was angry at Joseph but many commentators believe it’s possible that he was actually angry at his wife. Potiphar could easily have had Joseph executed for this offense, but he seems to have been merciful. If he didn’t believe his wife’s story then perhaps he felt it would be best to remove Joseph from the situation lest his wife attempt to seduce him again. He may have imprisoned Joseph to satisfy his wife. Regardless of the dynamics of the situation, God is still in control of the circumstances and has protected Joseph from a potential death penalty while moving him along toward fulfilling God’s plan.

Something else to notice is that Joseph was not cast into any prison but he was put in the prison “where the king’s prisoners were bound.” Likely this was because Potiphar was “captain of the guard” (either over the king’s executioners or the king’s bodyguards) and so he had the authority to place Joseph here rather than go through the legal system and lose control over Joseph’s fate. This could be evidence that Potiphar did not believe his wife’s accusation and wanted to give Joseph as light a sentence as possible. Regardless, we can see the LORD’s sovereign hand in the fact that he had been bought by Potiphar and so that he would eventually be placed in the king’s prison, which leads to the next step in God’s plan.

²¹ But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

“But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy” – It is no secret that prison can be a horrible and dangerous place, and yet the LORD mercifully protected Joseph and never left him.

“and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison” – Just as with Potiphar, the LORD caused the keeper of the prison to favor Joseph, insuring that he would be well treated as a prisoner and not suffer the horrors of prison life.

²² And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners that *were* in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer *of it*. ²³ The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing *that was* under his hand; because the LORD was with him, and *that* which he did, the LORD made *it* to prosper.

“And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners that *were* in the prison” – No matter the circumstances, the LORD caused Joseph to rise to the top. Again, Joseph’s management skills were recognized, this time by the keeper of the prison who placed Joseph as a “steward” of the prison. The LORD is still watching over Joseph!

“and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer *of it*” – Joseph managed every aspect of the prison’s business. The LORD had to be with Joseph for the keeper to entrust everything to a prisoner.

“The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing *that was* under his hand” – The keeper never checked on Joseph’s work because he trusted Joseph’s integrity and ability.

“because the LORD was with him, and *that* which he did, the LORD made *it* to prosper” – Here is the reason that people seemed to always entrust Joseph with management duties: because the LORD was with Him, causing everything he did to prosper. Joseph’s reliability and success got people’s attention and the LORD moved their heart to give Joseph management responsibilities. They discovered the benefits of letting Joseph manage things and placed him in positions of authority. Again, God is preparing him to be the steward of Egypt in order to save lives during the famine that was coming.