

A Rood Awakening!

Presents

Awakening in the Word

By Glenn McWilliams of TK TORAH KEEPERS
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THE OVERVIEW

Our portion this week returns to the Joseph narrative. Recapitulating with greater detail the information already given at the end of chapter 37, our portion begins by informing us how Joseph came to be in Egypt in the employ of Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officers. From this point on the story of Joseph takes us on a roller-coaster ride of good fortune and misfortune. Joseph begins his journey in the privileged position of master of Potiphar's house and ends this part of his journey in Pharaoh's prison. After informing us of Joseph's rise to favor in his master's house, the story shifts to Joseph's near seduction by Potiphar's wife. When Joseph dutifully resists, he is falsely accused of having attempted to rape his master's wife. It is this accusation that is the impetus for Joseph's imprisonment. Our portion concludes with Joseph finding favor in Pharaoh's prison.

THE OUTLINE

The outline for this narrative is quite simple and true to narrative style.

- Genesis 39:1 The scene is set
- Genesis 39:2-6 Joseph finds favor in his master's eyes
- Genesis 39:7-10 Joseph finds favor in his master's wife's eyes
- Genesis 39:11-16 Potiphar's wife seeks a second witness
- Genesis 39:17-19 Accusations are brought to Potiphar
- Genesis 39:20-23 Joseph goes to prison

SUGGESTED STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Who is Potiphar? What does he do?
2. How does Joseph get down to Egypt?
3. Judah went down from his brothers, and now Joseph goes down. What is the difference?
4. Who is Joseph's constant companion?
5. Why is Joseph not sent to the fields to work?
6. How do these events connect with Joseph's earlier dreams?
7. What are the four stages of Joseph's rising to prominence?
8. What is not put into Joseph's hands?
9. What does Joseph find in Potiphar's house and in prison?
10. What biblical principles are in play in this passage?
11. What are Joseph's reasons for not obliging Potiphar's wife?
12. What is significant about the order in which he gives them?
13. What garment is left behind?
14. Why does Potiphar's wife change her story concerning the garment?

THE TEXT

Genesis 39:1-23 *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 Ishmaelites, which had brought him down thither. ²And YHWH was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. ³And his master saw that YHWH was with him, and that YHWH made all that he did to prosper in his hand. ⁴And 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. ⁵And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that YHWH blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of YHWH was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field. ⁶And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat. And Joseph was a goodly person, and well favoured. ⁷And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. ⁸But 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; ⁹there 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 Elohim? ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹And 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. ¹²And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out. ¹³And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and was fled forth, ¹⁴that she called unto the men of her house, and spake unto them, saying, See, he hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us; he came in unto me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice: ¹⁵and it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled, and got him out. ¹⁶And she laid up his garment by her, until his lord came home. ¹⁷And she spake unto him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me: ¹⁸and it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out. ¹⁹And 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. ²⁰And 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. ²¹But YHWH was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. ²²And 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. ²³The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because YHWH was with him, and that which he did, YHWH made it to prosper.*

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Our portion this week returns to the narrative of Joseph, which was interrupted by the story of the fall of Judah in the previous chapter. We should note that our portion begins with the account of Joseph's descent into Egypt, which was first introduced to us at the breaking point of the Joseph story. Let us now compare the two edges of this breach.

Genesis 37:36 *And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard.*

Genesis 39:1 *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 Ishmaelites, which had brought him down thither.*

Clearly the point of these two verses is to place Joseph in Egypt in the house of Potiphar, an officer in Pharaoh's court. Regarding this fact both verses are very clear and in agreement. According to both texts, Potiphar is an "officer" or *saris* (*samech, resh, yud, samech*) and a "captain" or *sar* (*sin, resh*). The Hebrew word *sar*, here translated as "captain," may also mean "chief," "prince," "ruler," or "leader." There is little dispute about this word or its use as a title for someone in a position of authority. The Hebrew word *saris*, (pronounced *sa-REES*), however, does raise some questions. This word appears forty-two times in the Tanach. Seventeen times it is translated as "eunuch," thirteen times as "chamberlain," and twelve times as "officer."¹ This title or description appears only four times in the Torah, all of which are found in the book of Genesis and are connected with Pharaoh's court. Victor Hamilton addresses this issue in the following manner.

The word saris should not be translated "eunuch" (as it is elsewhere in the OT), since Potiphar is married. In fact, Hebrew saris is most likely a loan word from Akk. sar-res, sari, or sa resi, "he who belongs to the king." In 2nd millennium B.C. texts it means "courtier" or "officer," as in the Joseph story. In 1st millennium B.C. texts (i.e. post-Joseph) it assumes the narrower meaning of "eunuch."²

While it is true that Potiphar is married, it is also known that those advanced in power in the courts of the Pharaohs and kings of the Ancient Near East were often made eunuchs in order to prevent the seed of the officers from using court secrets to overthrow the king and establish a new royal line. Thus, it is possible that Potiphar was made a eunuch after he was married and was elevated to prestige and power in Pharaoh's court. This fact may also explain the behavior of Potiphar's wife later in the story. Unfortunately, there is not enough evidence either way to give a definitive answer to this question; therefore, the issue must remain open-ended.

¹ This count is according to the King James Version of the Bible.

² New International Commentary on the Old Testament, The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50, Victor P. Hamilton, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Pg. 458

The Torah also tells us that Potiphar is a *sar* (ruler) of the guard. Here also we may raise question as to Potiphar's occupation and position. The text tells us that Potiphar is a *saris* (officer, chamberlain, or eunuch) and a *sar* (chief, captain, ruler) of the *tabach* (*tet, bet, chet*). The Hebrew word *tabach* may mean "executioner," "bodyguard," "cook," or "butcher." Given that the next story involves the Pharaoh's chief baker and cup bearer, it may seem fitting that Potiphar be the chief butcher. Some of the rabbis confirm this through the etymology of the name Potiphar, indicating that the name is a contraction of the two Hebrew words *pitem* (*pay, tet, mem*) and *parim* (*pay, resh, yud, mem*), which would mean "he fattened bulls"³ If this is indeed the case, then it is possible that Potiphar is also connected with the pagan sacrificial system of Egypt. Others claim that the name Potiphar is of Egyptian derivation and should be understood to mean "belonging to the sun."⁴ This title is also appropriate for one who serves the sacrificial system of the deities of Egypt, including Pharaoh.

While we may not be able to give conclusive answers to either the position or the meaning of the name of Potiphar, what is clear is that he is a man of means and authority in Pharaoh's court, and Joseph is his slave.

There is another question and possible controversy raised by comparing the two edges of the breached narrative. In Genesis 37:36, the first of the two parts of this comparison, we should note that the Torah teaches that it is the Midianites who sell Joseph to Potiphar in Egypt, while in the opening verse of this week's portion it clearly states that it is the Ishmaelites who bring Joseph to Egypt and sell him to Potiphar. This apparent contradiction may become a stumbling block for those who already doubt the faithfulness of the Scriptures; therefore, it is worthy of our study. The question is easily answered simply by understanding the chronology of the events surrounding Joseph's sale and the reference points from which it is told in the narrative. Let us first look at the chronology of events.

Jacob sends Joseph to Shechem to check that all is well with his brothers and the flocks.

Genesis 37:13-14 *And Israel said unto Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? Come, and I will send thee unto them. And he said to him, Here am I. ¹⁴And he said to him, Go, I pray thee, see whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flocks; and bring me word again. So he sent him out of the vale of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.*

"A man" finds Joseph wandering in the field and tells him that his brothers have departed for Dothan. The brothers see Joseph coming from a distance and begin scheming to destroy him.

Genesis 37:18-20 *And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. ¹⁹And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. ²⁰Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams.*

After seizing and stripping Joseph and casting him into a pit, the brothers see a caravan of Ishmaelites carrying spices down to Egypt, and they determine to sell Joseph into slavery.

Genesis 37:25-27 *And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmaelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt. ²⁶And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? ²⁷Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content.*

³ The Kestenbaum Edition Tikkun / The Torah Reader's Compendium, Rabbi Avie Gold, ArtScroll / Mesorah Publications, Pg. 91

⁴ Bible Works 7, Word Analysis, Strong's Information

While the brothers' eyes watch for the arrival of the Ishmaelite caravan, the Midianites hear the cry of Joseph and lift him from the pit without the brothers' knowledge and sell him to the Ishmaelites.

Genesis 37:28 *Then there passed by Midianites, merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.*

When Reuben returns to take Joseph from the pit, he is shocked to discover that his brother has already been taken.

Genesis 37:29 *And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes.*

Thus, the Midianites draw Joseph from the pit and sell him to the Ishmaelites, who later sell him to Potiphar in Egypt. In the first part of our comparison the Midianites are given credit for the sale of Joseph, for they are the active agents in the land of Canaan who instigate the sale of Joseph. In the second accounting it is the Ishmaelites who are given the credit, for they are the active agents who actually sell Joseph to Potiphar in Egypt. The first verse in our comparison is told from the reference point of Joseph's departure from the land of Canaan (at the hands of the Midianites), while the second verse in our comparison is told from the reference point of Joseph's arrival in the land of Egypt (at the hands of the Ishmaelites). Therefore, we should see no contradiction in the matter of the sale of Joseph. The integrity of the Scriptures is clearly upheld concerning this issue.

Dividing the two parts of our comparison is the story of Judah's descent into the realm of carnal living. The bulk of last week's portion focused upon Judah "going down" from his spiritual nature to live in his lower animal nature. The evidence of Judah's fall was made very clear from the description of his behavior. Judah separated himself from his brethren, violated the patriarchal prohibition against mixing seed with the cursed line of Canaan, raised evil sons to a Canaanite wife, deceived his grieving daughter-in-law, hired the services of a prostitute, and condemned a righteous woman to death. Only after being deceived himself did Judah repent and rebound to become a dominant spiritual force in Israel.

Once again this week our portion begins with one of the sons of Jacob descending into a lower realm. However, in the story of Joseph the descent is quite different. Let us compare these two journeys into a lower realm.

Genesis 38:1 *And it came to pass at that time, that **Judah went down** from his brethren, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.*

Genesis 39:1 *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 Ishmaelites, which had brought him down thither.*

It is quite clear from the language of these two verses that the descent of Judah and the descent of Joseph are quite different in nature. In the case of Judah, the descent was clearly of his own volition. Judah's descent was motivated from within himself. The choice to live in the lower realm was clearly Judah's own choice. In other words, Judah chose to descend into his own lower nature to live. It did not matter where Judah went; the descent was within himself.

Concerning Joseph's descent, however, it is clear that he is "brought" down to a lower realm. Joseph does not descend into his own lower nature, nor does he make a choice to live in his animal nature. Instead, Joseph is brought down against his will to a place where others live in their lower animal nature. Repeatedly Potiphar is described to us as an "Egyptian" in order to heighten the contrast between Joseph and the people of the place where he is brought to live against his will. Throughout the narrative Joseph's reputation remains untarnished. From the time that Joseph is mildly rebuked by his father for provoking his brothers' jealousy with his dreams, Joseph is never depicted in a negative light as doing anything

wrong or inappropriate. We must conclude from this that what Joseph endures in his spiritual journey is, in fact, divine providence, not punishment for some sinful behavior.

Unlike Judah, whose loss of two sons is directly connected to his own choice to live in his lower nature, Joseph's plight is clearly not the result of his own will. Joseph does not descend morally to a place of deserved chastisement; instead, we are told that Joseph is well-respected and favored by everyone (aside from his jealous brothers). Once again we may contrast Judah's descent with that of Joseph's.

Although Judah's behavior embodied a sense of godlessness that brought about death and suffering, YHWH was clearly present in the story of Judah's descent, albeit in an adversarial role. While we may have expected to see the name "Elohim," the righteous judge, used in the smiting of Judah's sons, we see the name "YHWH," the deliverer, who was delivering the righteous line by cutting off the Judah line of mixed seed. YHWH was present in the story of Judah's descent, but only in an adversarial relationship to the intent of Judah.

In the story of Joseph, however, we witness YHWH as Joseph's constant companion. Four times within the boundaries of this portion we are told and shown evidence of the fact that YHWH is with Joseph.

Genesis 39:2 *And YHWH was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.*

Genesis 39:3 *And his master saw that YHWH was with him, and that YHWH made all that he did to prosper in his hand.*

Genesis 39:5 *And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that YHWH blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of YHWH was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field.*

Genesis 39:21 *But YHWH was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.*

Genesis 39:23 *The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because YHWH was with him, and that which he did, YHWH made it to prosper.*

Here we see a great contrast between Joseph and Judah. Judah descended into his own lower realm and was at enmity with YHWH. Although Joseph is forced by others to live in a place of a lower moral nature, he continues living in his upper nature morally, and YHWH remains his constant protection and companion. This is a powerful lesson for all of us to understand. We must recognize that the Holy One is eternal in nature. This means that He is without limits in time or space. There is nowhere that the Eternal One is not. There is no moment in time that the Eternal One is not. The Eternal One is without beginning or end or boundary. Everywhere we go, the Eternal One is already there before us. Unfortunately, because we have chosen to live by our lower sensual nature, we are often blind to His very presence. By living in the lower realm, we have strengthened our sensual nature and tend to believe only what we can see with our senses. Unfortunately, we often fail to see what and, more importantly, who is truly all around us. We are like the blind and fearful servant of Elisha.

2 Kings 6:15-17 *And when the servant of the man of Elohim was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! How shall we do? ¹⁶And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. ¹⁷And Elisha prayed, and said, YHWH, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And YHWH opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.*

Those who, like Judah, choose to live in the lower nature are often blind to the presence of the Eternal One.

1 Corinthians 2:14 *But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of Elohim: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

Being blinded by our senses often causes us to stumble and fall along the path of faith. We not only fail to see YHWH, but we also fail to discern His will and purpose in every situation. Therefore, we find ourselves working contrary to His will. Due to this sensual blindness, we find ourselves in an adversarial relationship with the Eternal One. If, on the other hand, we remain in our upper nature in spite of the circumstances around us, we find that the Eternal One is clearly with us, protecting, guiding, and prospering us all along our perilous journey. This is the very struggle that the apostle Shaul so powerfully describes in his letter to the Romans.

Romans 8:5-8 *For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. ⁶For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. ⁷Because the carnal mind is enmity against Elohim: for it is not subject to the law of Elohim, neither indeed can be. ⁸So then they that are in the flesh cannot please Elohim.*

Galatians 5:17 *For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.*

Shaul goes on to emphatically state that those who are led by the Spirit of the Holy One and not their lower nature are indeed the sons of Elohim.

Romans 8:14 *For as many as are led by the Spirit of Elohim, they are the sons of Elohim.*

If we are indeed being led by the Spirit of Elohim, then we should, as Shaul encourages, also walk in the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16 *This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.*

Galatians 5:25 *If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*

As the children of Israel, we have been called to be a blessing and a light to the world. This means that while the rest of the world has sunken into the gross darkness of the lower realm and its immorality, the sons of Elohim are to shine like the stars of the heavens. We have been called to be ambassadors of the reign of YHWH to those who yet sit in the depths of darkness. This requires of us a spiritual strength to resist the temptations and lusts of the fleshly life that rage all around us. We are to master our fleshly nature and exercise dominion over our lower realm so that we may indeed fulfill our calling.

2 Corinthians 5:20 *Now then we are ambassadors for Messiah, as though Elohim did beseech you by us: we pray you in Messiah's stead, be ye reconciled to Elohim.*

Matthew 4:16 *The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.*

Matthew 5:14-16 *Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. ¹⁶Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

Romans 12:2 *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of Elohim.*

The story of Joseph should be a great encouragement to us all. If YHWH is indeed the Eternal One, then there is nowhere that we may be sent or descend to that He is not. Here we may recall the elegant words of the psalmist David.

Psalms 139:1-18 *O YHWH, Thou hast searched me, and known me. ²Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thought afar off. ³Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. ⁴For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O YHWH, Thou knowest it altogether. ⁵Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me. ⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. ⁷Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? ⁸If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. ⁹If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; ¹⁰even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. ¹¹If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. ¹²Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee. ¹³For Thou hast possessed my reins: Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. ¹⁴I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. ¹⁵My substance was not hid from Thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. ¹⁶Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in Thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. ¹⁷How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O Elohim! How great is the sum of them! ¹⁸If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with Thee.*

This, then, is the challenge of faith. If YHWH is indeed eternal, righteous, merciful, just, holy, good, and loving, then we must believe that wherever we go, we shall be met by righteousness, mercy, justice, holiness, goodness, and love. We must likewise believe that even when others' godless behavior and lower living forces us against our will into places of darkness, the Eternal One is there with us and has a purpose and plan for our lives.

We should note that Joseph's life is clearly not his own. His brothers throw him into a pit, the Midianites kidnap him and sell him to the Ishmaelites, the Ishmaelites deliver him into bondage in Egypt, and Potiphar casts him into prison. While Joseph has no control over the physical circumstances of his life, he does have the choice as to which realm of his own nature he will live in. Joseph chooses to live in the upper realm in spite of his physical circumstances. It is this choice on the part of Joseph that allows him to remain hopeful and obedient to the will of the Eternal One. We can only imagine Joseph's fears, frustrations, confusion, and hurt as the events of his life so blatantly contradict the dreams of his youth. Instead of everyone bowing down to him, they all seem to exploit and abuse him. Again, there is an important lesson to be learned from Joseph's experience.

Some of the greatest tests that we face in life are the frustrations of our own expectations. There are times in every believer's life and walk when we believe we see and understand what the Sovereign One wills for our lives. This may be especially so for those who have a strong sense of calling on their lives. But when the calling fails to come to fruition or our expectations continue to go unfulfilled, we begin to doubt and even become offended.

I will confess that when I first came out of the Church and began understanding the Scriptures from a Hebrew perspective, I had a powerful sense that I was called to teach. I was as zealous as an ex-smoker in wanting to teach everybody. I was fired up and burning with desire to be a great Torah teacher. Like a rodeo bull I was just waiting for the Creator to open the gates so that I could charge out into the arena of the world and begin teaching. But the gates didn't open. Fortunately for me and the world, the Sovereign

One saw fit to weld the gate shut until I had matured, been tempered, changed my heart and spirit, and been prepared for His Word and His ministry.

Had the Eternal One opened the gate for me when I expected it, I would have been like a rodeo bull, lasting about eight seconds and hurting a lot of people with my anger. It was extremely frustrating having the zeal within me burn out. It was confusing. I felt YHWH wanted me to teach, but He seemed to close every door that opened before me. Eventually I surrendered. Then the doors opened. Now, I try not to have any expectations. I must simply be surrendered to what YHWH will give me. I must trust that whatever happens, it is with His full knowledge and will be for the good. I must also trust that wherever the Eternal One sends me, it is for the good, and that He will be there when I arrive.

We should note that while the current events in Joseph's life seem contrary to his earlier dreams, the Eternal One is using these events to prepare Joseph for an incredible leadership role in the history of the children of Israel. At the time, however, there is no way for Joseph to know that what is happening is to prepare for what is yet to come. We may also note how the hand of the Sovereign One is guiding Joseph's every move. It is no accident that Joseph is brought down to Egypt. It is also no accident that Joseph is sold to Potiphar. As we have already stated, Potiphar is an officer in Pharaoh's court. That Joseph ends up in Potiphar's house instead of the fields is most likely due to the fact that Joseph could read. Nahum M. Sarna brings an interesting point to light.

He (Joseph) is not sent to work in the fields. It was not uncommon for slaves in Egypt to be employed in professional tasks such as household management and the administration of property. This situation is illustrated by an Egyptian papyrus (Brooklyn 35:1446) deriving from 1833-1742 B.C.E., which lists the names of nearly eighty slaves in an Egyptian household, together with their occupations. Strangely, the Asian slaves clearly enjoyed superior status and performed the skilled jobs, while the Egyptian slaves were given the more onerous and strenuous labors in the fields. By working in the house, Joseph has the opportunity to display his administrative talents and to win the favor of his master.⁵

The possible reason for the favored status of the Asian slaves may well have been their ability to read and write, which clearly would have given them greater managerial advantages. Joel M. Hoffman describes the development of the Hebrew language that gave the descendants of Abraham a marked cultural advantage over other cultures.

So as we have seen, by the year 1000 B.C.E., the Phoenicians were writing in a 22-letter consonantal script. Their script represented an enormous improvement over previous syllabic and logographic writing systems because the 22 letters could be easily learned. However, while it was much easier to write their script, reading was not so easy because their system did nothing to indicate the vowels in a word. The Hebrews, however, solved this problem. They took three letters w (now, called vav....), h (now called hey), and y (now called yud), and used them to represent vowels (in addition to their consonantal sounds).⁶

Nonetheless, the leap from consonant-based writing to vowel-and-consonant-based writing ranks as one of the most important steps forward in the history of human progress. For the first time, the masses could read and write, and it was the invention of vowel letters that made this possible.⁷

⁵ The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis, Nahum M. Sarna, Jewish Publication Society, Pg. 271

⁶ In the Beginning: A Short History of the Hebrew Language, Joel M. Hoffman, New York University Press, Pp. 23-24

⁷ *Ibid.*, Pg. 42

Hoffman goes on to point out that this change in reading and writing began in the time of Abraham. From this information we may safely assume that Isaac, Jacob, and the fathers of the tribes all knew how to read and write. Without this ability it would have been impossible for Moses to write the Torah.

It is no accident that Joseph is prepared in advance for his position in Potiphar's house. It is likewise the Eternal One's guiding hand that brings Joseph to the house of Potiphar, an officer in Pharaoh's court. It is likewise the protective hand of the Eternal One that uses Potiphar and his lustful wife to send Joseph to Pharaoh's prison, from where he will again be put in the proper place to set the stage for what YHWH has purposed to do. Every event in the life of Joseph takes place in the sight and will of the Eternal One. We should recognize that YHWH does not simply thrust Joseph from one place to the next; instead, He strategically prepares him and moves him into the places where he will be prepared for the next part of his journey.

In many respects we see Joseph's four-part rise to prominence in the house of Potiphar. The first part of Joseph's training begins with his employment in Potiphar's house. It is here that Joseph, by his faithful and successful service, catches the notice of his employer. The second part of his training is the favor he finds in both the eyes of his employer and those around him. The Hebrew word employed here as "favor" is the word *chen* (*chet, nun*), which means "grace" or "acceptance." It is this "favor" that moves Joseph into the third stage of his employment as personal attendant to Potiphar. Finally, Joseph's faithfulness proves him worthy of Potiphar's trust, which elevates him to steward of all of Potiphar's household. We are told that Potiphar entrusts everything to Joseph's care except the food he eats.

Genesis 39:5-6 *And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that YHWH blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of YHWH was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field. ⁶And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat. And Joseph was a goodly person, and well favoured.*

Before we go any further, we should note that the favor Joseph secures in his master's eyes is not solely of his own doing. Abraham was called to be a blessing to those around him. To this end YHWH blessed Abraham so that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed.

Genesis 12:2-3 *And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: ³and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

We have seen in the earlier portions how YHWH blessed others on account of the patriarchs. Kings and kinfolk alike eventually came to recognize that the blessings they enjoyed came from the blessings bestowed upon Abraham and his descendants.

Genesis 21:22-23 *And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, **Elohim is with thee in all that thou doest:** ²³now therefore swear unto me here by Elohim that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned.*

Genesis 26:26-29 *Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath one of his friends, and Phichol the chief captain of his army. ²⁷And Isaac said unto them, Wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you? ²⁸And they said, **We saw certainly that YHWH was with thee:** and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee; ²⁹that thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good, and have sent thee away in peace: thou art now the blessed of YHWH.*

Genesis 30:27 *And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by divination that **YHWH hath blessed me for thy sake.***

It is this blessing upon the life of Joseph that is readily recognized by Potiphar and later again by the jailer. Clearly Joseph is special because of the favor that YHWH shows him. Placing trust in Joseph in many ways appears to be a wise investment for his earthly masters. Again, we should recognize that everything that happens to Joseph is to prepare him for the awesome honor and responsibility that YHWH will eventually bestow upon him.

The Torah goes to great lengths to tell us of Joseph's favorable qualities, yet we must recognize that without the help and guidance of the Eternal One, none of these divinely-given skills and attributes would have mattered at all. Here again, we must recognize the great importance of our relationship with the Eternal One. If we are living in our flesh and at enmity with the will and purpose of the Creator, surely not even our spiritual giftings will help us. We should recall here the words of the psalmist:

***Psalm 127:1** Except YHWH build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except YHWH keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.*

So it is Joseph's willingness to surrender his skills and gifts to the purpose and will of the Eternal One that allows the blessings of YHWH to flow and accomplish their purpose.

Potiphar is not the only one to notice Joseph's skills and appearance. Potiphar's wife clearly sees Joseph in a different light than her husband. At various times as opportunity presents itself, Potiphar's nameless wife attempts to seduce the successful and handsome Joseph, but Joseph repeatedly resists her offer. There are several details in the story that we should take note of. First, let us see how seductive Potiphar's wife is, and second, let us look carefully at the manner in which Joseph refuses her invitation.

We should note that there is no romantic wooing involved in the Torah account; instead, there is the vulgar and blatant command..."Lie with me!"

***Genesis 39:7** And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me.*

This invitation is repeated again day after day, but with subtle variations.

***Genesis 39:10** 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.*

Here we see that her strategy changes. Realizing that her blatant and vulgar offer may be too strong for Joseph, she now softens her invitation to simply "lie by her" or "be with her." It is as though she now feigns innocence of intention. What harm could come of Joseph simply lying by her or spending time with her? But again, we see that Joseph rejects even these subtle invitations. Two passages of Scripture quickly come to mind concerning this situation. The first is from the advice and counsel of the apostle Shaul.

***1 Thessalonians 5:22** Abstain from all appearance of evil.*

The second is from David.

***Psalm 1:1** Blessed is the man that **walketh** not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor **standeth** in the way of sinners, nor **sitteth** in the seat of the scornful.*

We should do all within our power to avoid even the appearance of evil, lest we provoke weaker souls to stumble over what they do not understand. Also, as is learned from the verbs used in the psalm, we should not walk in ungodly counsel or behaviors. Nevertheless, if we should happen to stumble into such a circumstance we should not stand there, and we definitely should not sit there. Instead, like Joseph, we should RUN from such behavior or even the appearance of such behaviors.

We may note that Joseph not only rejects the seductive advances of his master's wife, but he does so in such a manner as to gently rebuke her and hopefully convict her of the error of her ways. Joseph gives three reasons for his rejection of her offer, none of which should appear as insulting or hurtful to his master's wife.

Genesis 39:8-9 *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 Elohim?*

The first reason Joseph gives is the sacred trust that his master has bestowed upon him. Joseph clearly values this trust, and in so doing, he demonstrates a genuine concern for his master. The second reason for Joseph's rejection is the sacred bond of marriage. Finally, Joseph declares such an act to be a grievous sin against Elohim. We should note that Joseph presents these excuses in a manner that should touch even the heart of a person who does not fear Elohim. Clearly Joseph's hope is that his words will turn the heart of this woman back to faithfulness to her husband.

However, Joseph's words fall upon a hardened and determined heart. Potiphar's wife persists in her pursuit of Joseph. Finally, after all her words and invitations fail, she resorts to physical tactics, grabbing at Joseph's garment. The word used here is the Hebrew word *begeg* (*bet, gimmel, dalet*), which can refer to either an outer or inner garment. There is nothing to indicate that Joseph runs away naked, as is sometimes depicted. It is interesting to note that this is the second time that Joseph is stripped of his garment. It is also interesting to note how the master's wife changes her story concerning the garment. Twice in the story the Torah emphatically states that when Joseph leaves, his garment is in her hand.

Genesis 39:12 *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.*

Genesis 39:13 *And it came to pass, when she saw that he had **left his garment in her hand**, and was fled forth...*

However, when the woman tells her story to the other servants and her husband, note the subtle alteration.

Genesis 39:15 *And it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he **left his garment with me**, and fled, and got him out.*

Genesis 39:18 *And it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that **he left his garment with me**, and fled out.*

In both of her explanations the seductress is careful to say that Joseph leaves his garment with her, not in her hand. The reason for this subtle variation in the truth is to prove her innocence. If the garment is in her hand, then she is the aggressor taking the garment from Joseph. If, however, as she claims, Joseph is the aggressor, then it is he who removes his clothing and leaves it in his sudden departure when she screams. The fact that she screams is also important to her story.

Deuteronomy 22:22 *If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel.*

Deuteronomy 22:24 *Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, **because she cried not**, being in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you.*

Deuteronomy 22:25-27 *But if a man find a betrothed damsel in the field, and the man force her, and lie with her: then the man only that lay with her shall die:²⁶ but unto the damsel thou shalt do nothing; there is in the damsel no sin worthy of death: for as when a man riseth against his neighbour, and slayeth him, even so is this matter:²⁷ for he found her in the field, and the betrothed **damsel cried, and there was none to save her.***

Clearly in the ancient world adultery was punishable by death. Note, however, that if the woman lived in the city and did not scream, she was considered guilty of participation in the sin. In our story Potiphar's wife wisely declares that she raised her voice in protest as a sign of her innocence in the matter of infidelity.

Here again, Joseph is tested to believe beyond his circumstances that the Eternal One is righteous, good, merciful, just, and loving. From his position of power and status in the house of Potiphar, Joseph now finds himself stripped of his garment and thrown again into a pit. Once again, however, we witness that YHWH goes with him or is already there. Again, we must be sure to contemplate this lesson carefully, for surely as the great tribulation comes upon us, we will experience all manner of injustices from the world around us. We shall be victims of lies and hatred because of our righteousness. We must not lose faith; instead, we must remember that as Joseph goes from pit to prosperity to pit again, the Eternal One is with him, refining him, preparing him, and equipping him to fulfill the ultimate calling upon his life. We too must be prepared to accept whatever the Sovereign One wills for us. We must be completely surrendered to divine providence, trusting always in the goodness of YHWH.

Like Joseph, if we are to endure and pass the tests, temptations, and challenges that shall be thrown at us, we must be willing to live in our upper nature, regardless of how low our circumstances may be. We must trust that even in the times of greatest darkness, YHWH will give us grace to do what He has called us to do.

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