

# Church of God Sunday School

## JOSEPH, THE PRISONER

Genesis 39:1 — 40:23

At the age of seventeen, far from home and family, Joseph arrived in Egypt as a slave. (Can you imagine how lonely and scared Joseph must have been? Would God be with him in Egypt?)

Jacob had twelve sons, but Joseph was his favorite. This favoritism as well as the two dreams Joseph had about ruling over his brothers and his parents caused his older brothers to hate him. When they had an opportunity, they sold Joseph to merchants who were traveling to Egypt.

In Egypt the merchants sold Joseph to Potiphar (*POT-uh-fahr*), an officer of Pharaoh. "And the LORD was with Joseph." God did not forsake him. Soon Potiphar saw that everything Joseph did was successful. Potiphar made Joseph "overseer [steward] over his house." God continued to bless the house of Potiphar because of Joseph.

Joseph did such a good job that once Potiphar made him overseer, "he hadn't a worry in the world . . . except to decide what he wanted to eat!" (*The Living Bible*). Potiphar trusted Joseph with all that he had. All, that is, except his wife.

Potiphar's wife noticed that Joseph was a very handsome young man. She began to go after him, even though she was married. Joseph told her that she was his master's wife and that he would not sin against God. "But she kept on with her suggestions day after day, even though he refused to listen, and kept out of her way as much as possible" (*The Living Bible*).

One day when Potiphar was away from home and while no other men were around, Joseph was attending to some business in the house. Potiphar's wife grabbed hold of Joseph's coat and tried to get him to listen to her again. But Joseph ran away, leaving his garment behind in her hands.

This must have angered Potiphar's wife. When she saw Joseph's coat in her hands, she called for the men of the house. She lied and said that Joseph had come in



to abuse and mock her. She told them that Joseph fled because she had cried loudly for help.

When Potiphar came home and heard what his wife said, he was very angry! Although Joseph was wrongly accused, Potiphar put him in the prison where the king's prisoners were kept.

Joseph had obeyed God and had done what was right. So why was he put in prison? It might have seemed like God had forgotten about Joseph. Did God care about Joseph? Yes, He did! "The LORD was with Joseph, and showed him mercy."

In prison Joseph was favored by the keeper of the prison. He was soon put in charge of the other prisoners, and whatever Joseph did there prospered, because the Lord was with him.

Sometime after that, the chief butler and the chief baker were thrown into prison, because they had offended Pharaoh in some way. They were both placed in the part of the prison where Joseph was. The captain of the guard (Potiphar) ordered Joseph to serve them.

The butler and baker had been in prison for a while when, in the same night, they both had dreams that upset them. The next morning Joseph saw their troubled faces and asked them what was wrong. They said that they had dreamed dreams but did not know what they meant.

Joseph told them God could interpret dreams. The butler then told his dream to Joseph. In the dream he saw a vine that had three branches which budded and blossomed into ripe grapes. The butler picked the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup and gave the cup to Pharaoh.



*Joseph, the Prisoner*

Joseph told the butler that the three branches were three days. In three days he would return to his work of serving Pharaoh, as before. Joseph asked the butler to please mention him to Pharaoh when he got back so that he could be released from prison. He told him how he had been stolen away from his own land and that he had done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon.

When the baker heard the butler's good news, he wanted Joseph to interpret his dream too. In the baker's dream, he had three baskets on his head. In the top basket were baked goods, and the birds were eating the pastries from the basket.

Joseph told the baker that the three baskets also meant three days. But, unlike the butler's dream, on the third day the baker would be hanged instead of being restored to his work, and the birds would eat his flesh. What an awful interpretation!

In three days it was Pharaoh's birthday, and everything happened just as Joseph had said. The baker was hanged, and the butler was restored to his

position of serving Pharaoh. Sadly, although Joseph had asked the butler to mention him to Pharaoh, the butler forgot all about him.

Joseph remained in prison. Do you think Joseph might have gotten discouraged? Joseph's own brothers had sold him as a slave, Potiphar's wife had told a terrible lie about him, he was thrown in prison, and now the butler had forgotten him. It must have looked like he would never get out of prison!

But God was with Joseph through every one of his trials. It was God's will that Joseph had gone to Egypt (Genesis 45:8); now God was testing Joseph (Psalm 105:17-19). He was preparing him. Soon God would use Joseph to save the lives of many, many people.

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**MEMORY VERSE:**

*"And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him."*

—Acts 7:9  
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