

Genesis 37–41 — “The Lord Was with Joseph”

Come, Follow Me 2026 — March 16–22

Parallel Accounts: JST Genesis 37; 1 Nephi 5:14; 2 Nephi 3; Alma 46:24; D&C 127:2

Overview

Genesis 37–41 introduces one of the most beloved and theologically rich narratives in all of scripture: the story of Joseph, the eleventh son of Jacob. These chapters trace Joseph’s breathtaking descent from favored son to slave to prisoner — and then his equally breathtaking rise to become the most powerful man in Egypt after Pharaoh himself. The story is a masterclass in divine providence: how God works through the worst of human choices — jealousy, betrayal, false accusation, and imprisonment — to accomplish His purposes and prepare salvation for an entire family, nation, and world.

The Come Follow Me manual for this week emphasizes a single, repeated refrain that echoes throughout these chapters: “The Lord was with Joseph” (Genesis 39:2, 21, 23). This is the theological anchor of the entire Joseph cycle. Joseph is never rescued *from* his trials; rather, the Lord is present *with* him *in* them. He is sold into slavery — and the Lord is with him. He is falsely accused — and the Lord is with him. He is forgotten in prison — and the Lord is with him. The narrative invites us to ask not “Why do bad things happen?” but “Where is God when they do?” The answer Genesis gives is both simple and profound: He is right there, working all things together for a purpose we cannot yet see.

Dr. Lili De Hoyos Anderson, the Follow Him podcast scholar for this week, frames Joseph as a model of what she calls becoming “antifragile” — not merely surviving adversity but being *strengthened* by it. Joseph doesn’t just endure; he grows. Every trial refines his character and positions him for greater service. Anderson notes that Joseph’s story teaches us that God’s timing is not our timing, that blessings come in seasons we don’t expect, and that even the wicked prospering temporarily cannot frustrate the Lord’s ultimate plan.

Alfred Edersheim, the biblical scholar cited extensively by Emily Belle Freeman and David Butler (Don’t Miss This), captures the theological heart of the Joseph cycle in a striking formulation: “All parties... were allowed in the free exercise of their own choice to follow their course, ignorant that all the while they were only contributing their share towards the fulfillment of God’s purpose.” Providence, Edersheim insists, “always worketh wonders yet without seeming to work at all. Silently and unobserved by those who live and act, it pursues its course till in the end all things are seen to work together for the glory of God.” This principle — God working wonders without seeming to work — is the invisible architecture of every scene in Genesis 37–41.

The Old Testament Institute Manual (Religion 301) titles this section “Joseph: The Power of Preparation” and frames the entire narrative arc as a demonstration of Romans 8:28: “All things work together for good to [those] who loved God.” The manual emphasizes that Joseph “always seemed to do the right thing; but still, more importantly, he did it for the right reason.” Elder Hartman Rector Jr. summarized the principle: “This ability to turn everything into something good appears to be a godly characteristic. Our Heavenly Father always seems able to do this. Everything, no matter how dire, becomes a victory to the Lord.”

Two more voices now join the guide. Jordan Peterson (Biblical Series XV) reads Joseph as the culmination of Genesis’s “*successive approximations of the ideal person*”: the man whose coat of many colors symbolizes a “*differentiated mode of being that enables you to be competent and at home in the widest possible number of places*” — which is why no pit, slave-house, or prison can hold him. Mark Holt (Gospel Talktrine, S01E11) turns the whole block into a single question about the **meaning of suffering**: Joseph could only see the purpose of his thirteen years *in retrospect* — and so can we.

Key Concepts

1. *Ketonet Passim* (כֶּתֶנֶת פַּסִּים) — The Coat and Its Meaning

The famous “coat of many colors” is the Hebrew *ketonet passim*. The exact meaning of *passim* remains debated among scholars. The Septuagint (LXX) translated it as *chitōna poikilon* (“ornamented tunic”), giving rise to the “many colors” tradition. But *passim* may relate to *pas* (palm of the hand) and *pissah* (sole of the foot), suggesting a long-sleeved, full-length garment — the clothing of royalty, not a laborer. Other possibilities include “embroidered,” “striped,” or “fine wool.”

The Institute Manual draws on Keil and Delitzsch’s *Commentary* (1:1:335) to clarify that the Hebrew denotes “a long coat with sleeves... i.e. an upper coat reaching to the wrists and ankles, such as noblemen and kings’ daughters wore.” The same word *ketonet passim* appears only one other time in all of scripture: in 2 Samuel 13:18, where it describes the garment worn by Tamar, a “king’s daughter.” Joseph’s coat was thus a royal garment, and his brothers understood exactly what it symbolized. One scholar suggested it was “a tunic reaching to the palms of the hands and soles of the feet; the long tunic with sleeves worn by young men and maidens of the better class; in the case of Joseph, supposed by Bush... to have been the badge of the birthright which has been forfeited by Reuben and transferred to Joseph” (Wilson, *Old Testament Word Studies*, p. 82).

Jared Halverson (Unshaken) adds a fascinating layer from Jewish tradition: there is a rabbinic teaching suggesting this coat may be connected to the “coat of skins” (*kotnot or*) given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and passed down through the generations. If so, centuries of wear and patching would have created a garment of many different shades — the original “coat of many colors.” Whether or not one accepts this tradition literally, Halverson draws a powerful theological implication: the coat represents the *covenant mantle* passed from parent to child, carrying the mission to build Zion and

prepare for the Messiah. He offers a striking modern application: “Every hue of humanity is welcome in the kingdom of God. Can they find their color here? Their shade? Because it’s all part of the covenant coat.”

Latter-day Saint readers will recall Alma 46:24, where Captain Moroni invokes the remnant of Joseph’s coat as a symbol of covenant preservation. The Institute Manual confirms this connection: “Mormon recorded in the Book of Mormon that when Jacob saw that a remnant of the ‘coat of many colours’ (v. 32) had been preserved, he prophesied that so also would a remnant of Joseph’s seed be preserved (see Alma 46:24).” This becomes a type: just as a remnant of the coat was preserved, so would a remnant of Joseph’s seed be preserved by the Lord.

2. The Birthright Question — Why the Brothers’ Rage

The Institute Manual provides crucial context for understanding the intensity of the brothers’ hatred. The coat didn’t merely signal favoritism — it signaled the *birthright*, and that birthright was contested by multiple brothers. The manual identifies at least five sons who could have made a plausible claim:

Reuben — the literal firstborn of all Jacob’s sons, but he had “lost the right” through his transgression with Bilhah (Genesis 35:22; 1 Chronicles 5:1–3). **Simeon** — second son of Leah, next in line after Reuben, but disqualified along with Levi through the massacre at Shechem (Genesis 34). **Judah** — fourth son, who could argue that Reuben, Simeon, and Levi had all forfeited their claims. **Dan** — firstborn of Bilhah, Rachel’s handmaid. Since Bilhah was considered Rachel’s property, Dan could argue he was Rachel’s firstborn — not Joseph. **Gad** — firstborn of Zilpah, who could make a similar argument from Leah’s side.

Into this volatile mix, Jacob gives the royal coat to Joseph — the eleventh son, Rachel’s actual firstborn. Joseph’s dreams of rulership only intensified the resentment. The brothers weren’t merely jealous of a favorite child; they were watching the birthright — with all its spiritual authority and material inheritance — bypass every one of them.

3. *Chalom* (חֶלֶם) — Dreams as Divine Communication

The Hebrew word *chalom* (dream) occurs more in Genesis 37–41 than in any other section of scripture. In Genesis 40 alone the word appears seventeen times. The root *ch-l-m* carries connotations of strength and vitality — dreams in the biblical world were not mere subconscious ramblings but powerful, consequential communications.

Joseph has two dreams of his own (chapter 37), interprets two dreams in prison (chapter 40), and interprets two of Pharaoh’s dreams (chapter 41). The doubling pattern is significant: Joseph tells Pharaoh, “The dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass” (Genesis 41:32). In Hebrew thought, repetition signaled certainty and divine establishment.

Halverson (Unshaken) draws a distinction between mere psychological dream interpretation and the genuinely prophetic gift Joseph possessed. When the butler and baker share their troubled dreams, Joseph's response is theocentric: "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me them, I pray you" (Genesis 40:8). Joseph's gift is not self-generated cleverness but a spiritual endowment — the same kind of revelatory gift described in Moroni 10:5 and available to every disciple through the Holy Ghost.

Kerry Muhlestein (The Scriptures Are Real) adds important historical context: professional dream interpreters were a standard part of Egyptian royal courts. Pharaoh's magicians (*chartummim*) were trained specialists. What makes Joseph remarkable is not that he interpreted dreams — that was a recognized profession — but that his interpretations were *accurate* where the professionals failed, because his source was divine rather than academic.

4. *Tsaphenath-Pa'neach* (צִפְנַת פַּעֲנַח) — He Who Reveals Hidden Things

When Pharaoh elevates Joseph, he gives him the Egyptian name *Tsaphenath-Pa'neach* (Genesis 41:45). The meaning is debated. Josephus (1st century CE) renders it "the revealer of secrets." Targum Onkelos gives "the man to whom hidden things are revealed." Modern Egyptologists suggest it may derive from an Egyptian phrase meaning "says the god: he will live."

The Hebrew roots are illuminating: *tsaphan* means "to hide, treasure, or store up" and *paneach* means "to decipher, decode, interpret." Joseph is literally "the one who deciphers what is hidden" — a fitting name for the dreamer who reveals Pharaoh's hidden future and then stores up grain against the hidden famine. The name captures Joseph's dual role as prophet and administrator.

5. Divine Providence and the God Who Prepares

The theological heart of the Joseph narrative is *providence* — God's active, purposeful governance of events that appear chaotic or even evil. Genesis never says God caused Joseph's suffering; it says God was *with* Joseph in it and worked through it. This is a crucial distinction. The brothers' sin is real. Potiphar's wife's accusation is real. The butler's forgetfulness is real. But God weaves these broken threads into a tapestry of salvation.

Joseph will articulate this theology explicitly in Genesis 50:20: "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." This is not fatalism or stoicism; it is covenant faith — the conviction that God's purposes cannot be frustrated, even by the worst of human choices.

Freeman and Butler (Don't Miss This) frame this as "the hiddenness of God in the middle." Joseph's story, they observe, stops in the most uncomfortable places — the pit, the prison, the two years of being forgotten — and the narrator simply insists that God is present even when Joseph cannot perceive it. Freeman poses the central question: "Who is the God of the middle moments?" The answer the text gives is that God is most actively at work precisely in those seasons when He seems most silent.

Muhlestein (The Scriptures Are Real) extends this insight with a principle about misinterpreting divine promptings: we often assume God places us in a situation for a specific outcome we envision, but God’s actual purpose may be entirely different. Joseph likely assumed his gift of dreams would lead to quick vindication. Instead, it led through thirteen years of preparation. The lesson, Muhlestein argues, is that God focuses on the *process* of our becoming rather than delivering the specific outcomes we expect — a principle President Dallin H. Oaks has taught as the gospel of “becoming.”

6. *Vay’hi* (וַיְהִי) — “And the Lord Was with Joseph”

The phrase “the Lord was with Joseph” (*vayhi YHWH et-Yosef*) is the literary and theological spine of these chapters. It appears in Genesis 39:2 (in Potiphar’s house), 39:21 (in prison), and 39:23 (the prison keeper trusts him). The narrator makes no effort to explain *how* the Lord was with Joseph — there are no miraculous deliverances, no parting seas, no angelic visitors. The Lord’s presence manifests simply as Joseph’s consistent character: his integrity, his competence, his refusal to sin, his patience, his trust. The Lord was with Joseph *through* Joseph’s own faithfulness — a partnership of grace and agency.

Freeman (Don’t Miss This) highlights a subtle but powerful narrative detail: in Genesis 39:3, “his master saw that the Lord was with him.” Others could *perceive* God’s presence in Joseph before Joseph himself could articulate it. Sometimes the evidence of God’s work in our lives is more visible to those around us than to ourselves.

Halverson (Unshaken) deepens this with the paradox of internal versus external freedom: Joseph in prison doesn’t “feel like a prisoner” because “my spirit is free, my conscience is clear.” He draws a parallel to Paul and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16) — when the earthquake breaks open the prison, the jailer assumes all prisoners escaped, but Paul says, “We’re still here.” Halverson concludes: “The prison is perception more than reality.” Joseph’s freedom was never in Pharaoh’s gift; it was in his own faithfulness to God.

Verse-by-Verse Commentary

Genesis 37:1-11: Joseph’s Dreams and His Brothers’ Hatred

“And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more.” (Genesis 37:5)

Hebrew Deep Dive

- שָׂנֵא (*sana*) — “to hate.” Used three times in verses 4–8 with increasing intensity. The brothers’ hatred progresses from irritation to murderous intent.
- חֲלוֹם (*chalom*) — “dream.” Joseph’s two dreams use agricultural (sheaves) and cosmic (sun, moon, stars) imagery, progressing from earthly authority to cosmic preeminence.
- מָשַׁל (*mashal*) — “to rule” (v. 8). The brothers ask, “Shall thou indeed *reign* over us?” The word is the same used for God’s delegated authority in Genesis 1:18.

Podcast Insights

Dr. Lili Anderson (Follow Him) observes that Joseph's reporting of his dreams was not necessarily arrogance. In the ancient Near East, dreams required communal interpretation. Joseph may have been following cultural convention. But the brothers hear it as a power claim, revealing their own insecurity and jealousy. Anderson emphasizes that the brothers' reaction tells us more about *them* than about Joseph.

Halverson (Unshaken) identifies the real threat behind the brothers' plot: "The evil beast of envy, the evil beast of pride, the evil beast of hatred and anger... the natural man welling up in each of them — and that is a demon that needs to be exercised." He notes a bitter irony in their plotting: "The very thing you're trying to avoid, you're propelling yourself into that exact future because of what you're doing here." By trying to prevent Joseph's dreams from coming true, the brothers set in motion the very chain of events that will fulfill them.

Muhlestein (The Scriptures Are Real) clarifies that the coat wasn't merely about preferential love — it was about being designated as the *birthright child*, a calling that carried responsibility to serve and care for the family, not merely personal advantage. Joseph's dreams, signifying future leadership, "clearly signified future leadership" and only compounded the brothers' resentment over the birthright transfer.

OT Institute Manual Insights

The manual notes that the coat's significance "seems to have been far more than its brightness and beauty" — it was the visible marker of the birthright, which had been forfeited by Reuben (1 Chronicles 5:1–3) and transferred to Joseph. The coat provoked "intense hostility and jealousy" among the brothers precisely because there were multiple firstborn sons who "could easily have thought that they should have had the birthright."

Gospel Talktrine (Holt) sharpens the point: Reuben, Dan, and Gad *each* had a colorable claim to the birthright (firstborn overall, firstborn of Rachel's handmaid, firstborn of Leah's handmaid) — so the coat wasn't just favoritism, it was a public settling of a live succession dispute against several brothers at once. Holt also notes the coat may have been "*an heirloom that may have had spiritual significance in the lineage of Adam*" — connecting to the garment-of-dominion tradition traced through Noah and Nimrod in the earlier guides. And it is at Joseph that **the birthright and the Messianic lineage split**: Joseph receives the birthright, but the promise that Christ would come through the line passes to Judah — which is why the covenant formula "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" never extends to a fourth name.

Jordan Peterson — The Favorite, the Snitch, and the Coat (Biblical Series XV)

Peterson refuses to sentimentalize the setup. Joseph at seventeen brings his father "their evil report" — "*he's been set up more or less as a snitch*" — and Peterson calls it a **conspiratorial problem**: "*Is that Joseph's problem or Jacob's problem? It's the parents at fault, but so is the child who agrees to do that — they've got a little*

cabal going.” And on Jacob’s open favoritism: “It isn’t obvious that you do them any favors by overtly making them your favorite... you definitely set up a Cain and Abel scenario in the household.” The brothers’ murderous envy is the Cain-and-Abel pattern that runs through all of Genesis: the resentful response to unfair-seeming distribution of rewards, which “has plenty to object to” — and only ever makes things worse.

The coat itself, in Peterson’s reading, is the story’s thesis about who Joseph is: a “*differentiated mode of being*” — many-colored, multi-dimensional competence — “*that enables you to be competent and at home in the widest possible number of places.*” The rest of the narrative tests exactly that: strip the coat off him, and the differentiation remains.

Doctrinal Connections

- **1 Nephi 5:14–15:** Lehi discovers through the brass plates that he is a descendant of Joseph. Joseph’s story is thus *our* story as Latter-day Saints — the story of our covenant ancestor.
- **2 Nephi 3:4–15:** The Lord tells Joseph in Egypt about a future seer named Joseph (Joseph Smith) who will be raised up from his lineage. The dreams of Genesis 37 foreshadow not only Joseph’s Egyptian rulership but the Restoration itself.
- **D&C 127:2:** Joseph Smith writes from hiding, “As for the perils which I am called to pass through, they seem but a small thing to me, as the envy and wrath of man have been my common lot all the days of my life.” The parallel between the two Josephs — both hated by their brothers, both sold/betrayed, both instruments of salvation — is unmistakable.

Come Follow Me Connection

The manual invites us to reflect on how we respond when God’s plans for us differ from what others expect. Joseph’s dreams were true, but they cost him everything — his family, his freedom, his homeland. Following the Lord’s vision for our lives may not always earn us applause.

Genesis 37:12–36: Joseph Is Sold into Egypt

“Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content.” (Genesis 37:27)

Hebrew Deep Dive

- **בֹּרַ (bor)** — “pit, cistern.” The brothers cast Joseph into a *bor* — an empty cistern with no water (v. 24). The image is potent: a dry cistern is a place of death. Jeremiah will later be thrown into a similar pit (Jeremiah 38:6). The pit becomes a symbol of the depths from which God delivers.
- **עֶשְׂרִים כֶּסֶף (esrim keseph)** — “twenty pieces of silver.” The Institute Manual provides the legal context: this was “the same price specified later in the Mosaic law for a slave between the ages of five and twenty (see Leviticus 27:5). Typically, the price for a slave was thirty pieces of silver (see Exodus 21:32).” Joseph, sold at

seventeen, fetched exactly the statutory rate for a youth his age. Compare with the thirty pieces of silver for which Jesus was betrayed (Matthew 26:15, quoting Zechariah 11:12) — the price had inflated to the rate of an adult slave.

- **שַׁחַט** (*shachat*) — “to slaughter.” The brothers slaughter a goat (*se’ir izzim*) and dip Joseph’s coat in the blood to deceive Jacob (v. 31). The goat’s blood foreshadows the sacrificial system and the Atonement — innocent blood covering the evidence of sin.

Podcast Insights

Dr. Anderson (Follow Him) highlights the irony of Judah’s role. It is Judah who proposes selling Joseph instead of killing him (v. 26–27). Judah’s name means “praise” (*yehudah*), yet here he participates in an act of profound betrayal. This same Judah will later undergo one of the most dramatic character transformations in Genesis, offering himself in place of Benjamin in chapter 44. The Joseph cycle is also the Judah cycle — a story of how broken people can change.

Halverson (Unshaken) notes that after the brothers dip the coat in the kid’s blood, it becomes “a mantle of sacrifice” — blood-stained fabric bearing witness to the cost of covenant bearing. He also observes that Reuben attempted to save Joseph by suggesting the pit, possibly showing spiritual maturation after his earlier transgression with Bilhah. But Judah’s counter-proposal to sell Joseph represents “a compromise that brings profit but moral compromise” — the kind of half-measure that haunts families for generations.

Freeman and Butler (Don’t Miss This) connect Judah’s willingness to sell Joseph into slavery with his later abandonment of Tamar (Genesis 38). In both cases, Judah avoids direct responsibility while still inflicting harm. The “twenty pieces of silver” becomes a measure of his moral compromise — the price at which he values his own brother.

Doctrinal Connections

- **Alma 46:24:** Captain Moroni cites a tradition that Jacob, upon seeing Joseph’s bloodied coat, prophesied that “even as this remnant of the garment of my son hath been preserved, so shall a remnant of the seed of my son be preserved by the hand of God.”
- **Moses 7:36:** Enoch weeps over the wickedness of humanity. The brothers’ betrayal of Joseph mirrors the broader pattern: humanity choosing self-interest over covenant love. Yet God’s plan moves forward.

Come Follow Me Connection

The manual asks: “When have you felt betrayed or abandoned? How did you experience the Lord’s presence even in that dark time?” Joseph’s story validates the reality of suffering while insisting that God does not abandon His children.

Genesis 38 interrupts the Joseph narrative with the story of Judah and Tamar — a detour that puzzled ancient readers but is now widely recognized as a deliberate literary device. The chapter serves as a *foil* for Joseph’s story in Genesis 39, creating a devastating contrast between two responses to sexual temptation: Judah seeks it; Joseph flees it.

Why This Chapter Matters

Freeman and Butler (Don’t Miss This) suggest the Tamar interlude teaches a lesson Joseph himself needs: “God can fix what seems unfixable.” Both Tamar and Joseph face impossible situations created by the injustice of others. Both appear abandoned. And in both cases, God’s hidden providence works through the mess to accomplish covenantal purposes.

Muhlestein (The Scriptures Are Real) confirms the literary intentionality: Genesis 38 is placed here *on purpose*. Judah’s moral failure with Tamar and Joseph’s moral triumph with Potiphar’s wife are meant to be read side by side. The contrast drives home the theme of faithfulness — Judah compromises; Joseph refuses.

Hebrew Insights from Halverson (Unshaken)

Halverson traces Hebrew symbolism through Judah’s three sons:

- **Er** (עֵר) — “to awake” or “watcher.” Am I awake to the consequences of my decisions?
- **Onan** (אוֹנָן) — “trouble” or “mourner.” Will my decisions be a source of trouble or mourning?
- **Shelah** (שֵׁלָה) — “request” or “petition.” A son born as a petition to restore the broken line.

Tamar (תָּמָר) means “palm tree” — a symbol of sustenance and life-giving provision. Halverson notes that Judah’s choice to marry outside the covenant (unlike his grandfather Abraham, who sent a servant across the ancient Near East to find a covenantal wife for Isaac) represents a spiritual compromise that weakens the birthright line.

Tamar’s Righteousness

Joanne Skelton (cited by Freeman and Butler) argues that “Tamar reveals that this was not an act of inappropriate behavior at all... through her careful, clever plotting she maneuvered Judah into keeping an important promise while she also prevented him from committing a grave sin.” The Torah never condemns Tamar’s actions. Judah himself declares, “She hath been more righteous than I” (Genesis 38:26) — his first moment of genuine moral self-awareness in the entire narrative.

Muhlestein adds that Tamar, a Canaanite woman — literally outside the covenant family — proves more faithful to covenant law (the levirate obligation) than the men of Judah’s own household. He sees the levirate marriage institution as itself a type of Christ: “Just as the levirate husband provides for those who cannot provide for themselves, Christ provides for us spiritually and materially.” Tamar’s twins,

Perez and Zerah, become ancestors in Jesus's genealogy (Matthew 1:3) — a stunning redemption of a story that seemed irredeemable.

Gospel Talktrine (Holt) adds a shrewd observation on the foil: Tamar's plan only works because *“she had to know a lot about the personality of Judah... that he would be the man that would make this choice. And anybody knowing Joseph would know that he would never fall subject to such a ploy.”* Our character becomes predictable — for good or ill — to everyone who knows us; Judah's reputation invited the trap, Joseph's reputation made the same trap unthinkable. Holt also notes that though the Ten Commandments were still centuries away, Joseph's *“How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”* proves the law of chastity was already fully understood — and that Joseph's phrasing anticipates King Benjamin's logic in reverse: if serving your fellow beings is serving God, then sinning against your fellow beings (Potiphar, his wife, their marriage) is sinning against God.

Genesis 39:1-20: Joseph in Potiphar's House — Integrity Under Pressure

“And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand.”

(Genesis 39:3)

Hebrew Deep Dive

- **מַצְלִיחַ** (*matsliach*) — “to prosper, cause to succeed.” This word is used four times in chapter 39 (vv. 2, 3, 23). It comes from the root *ts-l-ch*, which carries the sense of “breaking through” — success that pushes through obstacles. Joseph's prosperity is not worldly ease but divine momentum.
- **וַיִּמָּאֵן** (*vay'ma'en*) — “and he refused” (v. 8). This single word captures Joseph's moral backbone. In the face of daily temptation from Potiphar's wife, Joseph *refused*. The word implies firm, deliberate, repeated refusal — not a momentary impulse but a settled posture.
- **חָטָא** (*chata*) — “to sin, miss the mark.” Joseph frames Potiphar's wife's proposition not merely as a social wrong but as a sin “against God” (v. 9). His moral framework is theocentric, not merely social.
- **סָרִיס** (*saris*) — “officer” or “eunuch.” Muhlestein (The Scriptures Are Real) notes that the Hebrew word used to describe Potiphar is *saris*, which literally means “eunuch” — a castrated male. Eunuchs held trusted positions in ancient courts because they could not produce offspring and posed no dynastic threat. This detail creates dramatic irony: Potiphar's wife's pursuit of Joseph becomes more understandable (though not justifiable) in this historical context.

Podcast Insights

Anderson (Follow Him) emphasizes that Joseph's refusal was not a single heroic moment but the culmination of daily choices. She notes that integrity is built in private, long before the public test arrives. Joseph had already decided who he was before Potiphar's wife ever made her advance. Anderson introduces the concept of “antifragility” — the idea that Joseph was not merely resilient

(bouncing back to baseline) but antifragile (becoming *stronger* through adversity). Each trial refined his character rather than diminishing it.

Halverson (Unshaken) connects Joseph's refusal to Job's discipline: "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?" (Job 31:1). Joseph had made a prior decision — a self-covenant — about where his eyes and heart would go. Halverson observes: "Once you've made a covenant, once you've promised your eye, just stick with it. Once you wrap your heart around virtue and have made the decision, you don't have to remake the decision every single day." The decision had been made long before the temptation arrived.

When Potiphar's wife grabs Joseph's garment, Halverson draws a powerful application from his response: "If there's a part of me that the adversary has a hold on, then I'll just leave it with him and get out of here." Joseph would rather lose his cloak than his integrity. Halverson also notes the ironic pattern: "What is it with my coats? Why is everybody trying to take my coats?" Joseph loses his coat of many colors to his brothers, then his servant's robe to Potiphar's wife — both moments of physical stripping that become moments of spiritual freedom.

OT Institute Manual Insights

The Institute Manual notes that Potiphar's title — "captain of the guard" — literally means "chief of the butchers" or "chief of the executioners," indicating he was the commanding officer of Pharaoh's royal bodyguard. The manual also suggests that Potiphar may have suspected the truth about his wife's accusation: rather than executing Joseph (which would have been the standard penalty for a slave who assaulted his master's wife), Potiphar merely imprisoned him. This restraint hints that Potiphar knew Joseph's character and doubted his wife's story.

Chiastic Structure of Chapter 39

Joseph's experience in Potiphar's house can be read as a chiasm:

- A: Joseph enters Potiphar's house (vv. 1–2)
 - B: The Lord is with Joseph; everything prospers (vv. 2–6a)
 - C: Temptation and refusal (vv. 6b–12)
 - B': Joseph is accused; everything is lost (vv. 13–20)
- A': Joseph enters the prison (vv. 20–23)

The center of the chiasm — Joseph's refusal — is the moral pivot of the chapter. Everything turns on that moment of integrity.

Doctrinal Connections

- **Alma 39:5:** Alma teaches Corianton that sexual sin is "an abomination in the sight of the Lord; yea, most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood." Joseph understood the gravity of this sin instinctively.

- **D&C 121:45:** “Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God.” Joseph’s refusal is a lived demonstration of this principle.

Come Follow Me Connection

The manual highlights that Joseph’s integrity cost him — he lost his position, his freedom, and his reputation. Doing the right thing doesn’t always produce immediate rewards. But the narrator insists: “The Lord was with Joseph” — even in the prison that his righteousness earned him.

Muhlestein (The Scriptures Are Real) frames this as a recurring pattern in Joseph’s life: “At every turn, obedience leads to temporary punishment.” Joseph reports his dreams faithfully and is sold into slavery. He resists sin faithfully and is thrown into prison. The pattern teaches that faithfulness is not measured by immediate outcomes but by the character it produces — a principle President Oaks has called the gospel of “becoming.”

Genesis 39:21–40:23: Joseph in Prison — Forgotten but Not Forsaken

“But the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.”
(Genesis 39:21)

Hebrew Deep Dive

- **חֶסֶד** (*chesed*) — “lovingkindness, covenant loyalty.” The Lord showed Joseph *chesed* even in prison (v. 21). This is the great covenant word of the Old Testament — God’s unfailing, loyal love that endures regardless of circumstances. Joseph is in the lowest place of his life, and God meets him with the highest word of love.
- **פָּתַר** (*patar*) — “to interpret.” When the butler and baker share their dreams, Joseph asks, “Do not interpretations (*pitronim*) belong to God?” (40:8). The word *patar* means “to open, loosen, release” — dream interpretation is an *opening* or *unlocking* of divine communication.

Podcast Insights

Anderson (Follow Him) makes a powerful observation about Genesis 40:23: “Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.” Joseph interprets the butler’s dream correctly, saves the man’s life, and asks only to be remembered. And the butler forgets. For *two full years* (41:1). Anderson says this is one of the most painful verses in Genesis — the moment when the one human hope Joseph had simply evaporates. And yet the Lord was with Joseph. The forgetting was not purposeless; it was preparation. Joseph needed to be in that prison at the exact moment Pharaoh’s dreams arrived.

Halverson (Unshaken) explores the Paschal symbolism embedded in the butler and baker’s dreams: bread, wine, life, death, and “three days.” He draws the connection: “If we ever hope to rise to the king’s court, then we too need to understand clearly the significance of those symbols... What do we see behind the bread and the wine? Do we understand life and death and which ultimately overcomes?”

The prison dreams become a quiet foreshadowing of Passover and the Atonement — Christ joining us in our chains.

Halverson extends this with a powerful Atonement connection: Joseph's willingness to serve his fellow prisoners, interpreting their dreams with no benefit to himself, foreshadows "Christ's willingness to join us in our chains... the atonement — that Christ would condescend to join us in jail to be a fellow prisoner." Joseph doesn't merely endure prison; he *ministers* in it.

Freeman (Don't Miss This) highlights the unfinished nature of Joseph's story at this point: "We leave off right here in the middle of the story — it's unresolved... so many of us are in the middle, and who is the God of the middle moments?" Her question reframes the waiting as itself a theological statement: God's silence is not God's absence.

OT Institute Manual Insights

The manual provides a timeline that intensifies the weight of Joseph's waiting: he was sold into slavery at age seventeen (Genesis 37:2) and stood before Pharaoh as vice-regent at age thirty (Genesis 41:46). That means thirteen years of slavery and imprisonment — including at least three years in prison (two years after interpreting the butler's dream, plus the time before). The manual emphasizes that "people like this cannot be defeated, because they will not give up."

"He's Actually Not Imprisoned" (Jordan Peterson, Biblical Series XV)

Peterson's central observation about the prison years: *"Even when they put him in prison, he's actually not imprisoned — he just figures out how to make the prison work way better, and then he's in control of the prison."* The coat of many colors was never the point; the differentiated character it symbolized is, and no external circumstance can strip that. Peterson's application comes through his dishwashing story: there is no such thing as a menial job, only menial ways of doing a job — *"there are ways of doing it really badly, resentfully, and horribly, and ways of doing it really well. And as soon as you do it really well, it's not a menial job anymore... that's also a good way out of resentment."* Joseph in Potiphar's house, Joseph in prison, Joseph in Pharaoh's court: the same man doing whatever is in front of him as well as it can be done. That is the behavioral meaning of "the Lord was with Joseph."

The Meaning of Suffering Is Known Only Backward (Gospel Talktrine, S01E11)

Holt turns the butler's forgetfulness into the block's deepest lesson. Trace the chain: Joseph obeys his father → sold into slavery. Resists Potiphar's wife → prison. Serves his fellow prisoners → forgotten for two more years. *At every point he could have said: God, I did what you asked, and here I am still suffering.* The meaning — that the whole chain positioned him to save Egypt, his family, and the covenant — *"looking back on it is the only way you can know the meaning. There was no possible way he could have figured that out beforehand."*

Then Holt’s philosophical turn: the very experience of suffering is itself evidence for God. “Once you’ve given meaning to something, you’ve admitted that you believe there’s a value system of good and evil... there must be someone outside of you that’s deciding what good is and what evil is. Once you’ve done all of that, you already know that God exists.” He anchors it in Moses 6:63 — “all things are created and made to bear record of me” — even suffering bears record, because calling it suffering presupposes the divine standard it violates. The question Holt leaves: “Are you going to decide that your life has meaning and that your suffering has meaning?” Joseph would have been justified either way; he chose meaning.

Holt also reads Potiphar’s behavior as quiet vindication: a man whose title may mean *chief of the executioners* does not merely imprison his wife’s alleged rapist — unless he doubts the accusation. “From Joseph, all I’ve ever seen is trustworthy behavior... I’m going to take this accusation with a grain of salt.” Even Joseph’s punishment was mercy in disguise.

Doctrinal Connections

- **Mosiah 24:14–15:** The Lord tells Alma’s people in bondage, “I will ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders... And this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses for me hereafter.” Like Joseph, Alma’s people are not immediately delivered — but the Lord is with them in their affliction.
- **D&C 121:1–8:** Joseph Smith’s cry from Liberty Jail — “O God, where art thou?” — mirrors Joseph in Egypt’s experience of feeling forgotten. The Lord’s answer to both Josephs is the same: “My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment.”

Come Follow Me Connection

The manual invites us to consider the “two years” of waiting. What are the periods in our lives when we feel forgotten — by friends, by employers, perhaps even by God? The Joseph narrative insists that God’s silence is not God’s absence.

Genesis 41:1–36: Pharaoh’s Dreams — The Moment of Preparation

“And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.” (Genesis 41:16)

Hebrew Deep Dive

- **פָּרוֹת** (*parot*) — “cows.” Pharaoh’s dream features seven fat cows and seven lean cows emerging from the Nile. In Egyptian religion, the cow goddess Hathor was associated with fertility and the Nile. Pharaoh’s dream speaks in his own cultural language — God communicates in forms the listener can understand.
- **שִׁבְבֹלִים** (*shibbolim*) — “ears of grain.” The second dream mirrors the first with agricultural imagery. The doubling confirms divine certainty (v. 32).
- **נָבוֹן וְחָכָם** (*navon v’chakham*) — “discerning and wise” (v. 33). Joseph advises Pharaoh to find such a man to manage the famine response. Pharaoh recognizes these qualities in Joseph himself (v. 39). *Navon* implies

practical discernment; *chakham* implies deep wisdom — Joseph embodies both.

- **בִּלְעָדִי** (*bil'aday*) — “apart from me, not through my own power” (v. 16). Anderson notes that Joseph’s response to Pharaoh is emphatic: this Hebrew construction insists the gift is wholly God’s. After thirteen years in slavery and prison, Joseph’s first instinct when opportunity finally arrives is to give credit to God.

Podcast Insights

Anderson (Follow Him) notes that Joseph’s response to Pharaoh in 41:16 is remarkable. Pharaoh says, “I have heard say of thee, that thou canst understand a dream to interpret it.” Joseph could have seized the moment for self-promotion. Instead, he immediately redirects: “It is not in me.” Joseph has spent thirteen years in slavery and prison, and his first instinct when opportunity finally arrives is to give credit to God.

Halverson (Unshaken) connects Pharaoh’s dream to modern prophetic counsel. In 1998, President Gordon B. Hinckley said: “I cannot stop thinking about this dream” — referencing the principle of famine and economic preparation. Halverson notes: “When a prophet can’t stop thinking about something, even if he says ‘I’m not prophesying,’ we should probably recognize God is doing more than dropping hints.” The seven-year famine counsel — store in times of plenty — applies to both economic wisdom and spiritual preparation: “Laying up store in faith requires the same discipline as storing grain.”

Muhlestein (The Scriptures Are Real) provides Egyptian geographical context that enriches the famine narrative. He discusses the Fayum region and the canal system traditionally associated with Joseph’s name (*Bar Youssef* — “Joseph’s Canal”). The Fayum’s extremely fertile land depended entirely on access to water irrigation; without sophisticated canal systems, fertile areas would revert to desert during famine. While Muhlestein doesn’t claim Joseph literally built the canal, the Fayum’s agricultural infrastructure makes it historically plausible that Joseph’s grain-storage administration could have developed such systems.

Muhlestein also places Joseph in the Second Intermediate Period of Egyptian history — a time of political fragmentation when Egypt was divided into multiple smaller kingdoms rather than unified under one pharaoh. This context may explain both how a foreign Hebrew could rise to such prominence and how Joseph may have been instrumental in helping the Hyksos (a foreign group) gain control of Egypt during this politically unstable period.

Freeman (Don’t Miss This) highlights a theological reframing in Joseph’s interpretation: he tells Pharaoh not that the dreams are a *threat* but that “God has showed Pharaoh what he is about to do” (Genesis 41:25, 28). The dreams are divine preparation and kindness — a warning given in love. Freeman asks: “Does allowing God to be part of those trials give us an increase of the spirit of God?” Pharaoh’s own recognition — “Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the spirit of God is?” (41:38) — suggests that Joseph’s trials had increased his spiritual capacity in ways that innocence alone could not.

Doctrinal Connections

- **Daniel 2:27–28:** Daniel mirrors Joseph’s humility before Nebuchadnezzar: “The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men... shew unto the king; But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets.” Joseph and Daniel stand as bookend figures — both dream interpreters, both exiles, both faithful in foreign courts.
- **Moroni 10:5:** “And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.” Joseph’s gift of interpretation is a spiritual gift — the same kind available to all disciples.

Come Follow Me Connection

The manual highlights Joseph’s thirteen years of preparation — from age seventeen (sold into slavery) to age thirty (elevated by Pharaoh). Those years felt wasted. They were not. Every skill Joseph developed — managing Potiphar’s house, running the prison — prepared him for managing all of Egypt. God wastes nothing.

Genesis 41:37-57: Joseph Elevated — From Prisoner to Prince

“And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt.” (Genesis 41:41)

Hebrew Deep Dive

- **צִפְנָת פַּעֲנִיחַ** (*Tsaphenath-Pa’neach*) — The Egyptian name Pharaoh gives Joseph (v. 45). Targum Onkelos translates it as “the man to whom hidden things are revealed.” Josephus renders it “the revealer of secrets.” The Hebrew roots suggest “he who deciphers what is hidden” — a name that captures both Joseph’s prophetic gift and his administrative genius.
- **אֲסֵנַת** (*Asenat*) — Joseph’s wife, daughter of Potiphera, priest of On (Heliopolis). Her name likely derives from the Egyptian *Ns-Nt*, “belonging to [the goddess] Neith.” Joseph’s marriage into Egyptian priestly aristocracy signals his complete integration into Egyptian society — yet the narrative insists his identity remains rooted in the God of his fathers.
- **חֲמֵשׁ** (*chamesh*) — “a fifth” (v. 34). Joseph’s economic plan: collect one-fifth of all produce during the seven years of plenty. This 20% tax rate represents both shrewd administration and covenantal echoes — the tithe principle extended into national survival.

Podcast Insights

Halverson (Unshaken) catalogs the symbols of Joseph’s elevation with theological precision. When Pharaoh elevates Joseph, he receives: Pharaoh’s signet ring (authority and identity), fine linen garments (a new coat, replacing the stripped-away mantle), a gold chain (no longer chains of slavery or prison), and a chariot ride (elevation to second-in-command). Each gift reverses a previous loss. The brothers stripped Joseph’s coat; Pharaoh clothes him in royal linen. The brothers sold him for silver; he now wears Pharaoh’s gold. He was bound in prison chains; he now wears a chain of honor. The narrative is

saturated with reversal — the pit was meant to be Joseph’s grave; the prison was meant to be his end. Both become stepping stones.

Halverson also distinguishes between the spiritual and political dimensions of the birthright: from 1 Chronicles, Judah received *political* power (“the chief ruler came from him”), but Joseph received the *birthright* itself — “spiritual power... bearing the mantle of the Abrahamic covenant.” The elevation in Egypt fulfills the political dimension of Joseph’s dreams, but the deeper significance is the covenant faithfulness that qualified him for the birthright.

Doctrinal Connections

- **Abraham 3:22–23:** “And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers.” Joseph, foreordained and prepared through suffering, embodies the principle of premortal calling refined through mortal trial.
- **D&C 64:33–34:** “Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work.” Joseph’s thirteen years of patient faithfulness laid the foundation for saving nations.

Come Follow Me Connection

The manual observes that Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh (41:46) — the same age at which priests began their service (Numbers 4:3) and the age at which Jesus began His ministry (Luke 3:23). Thirty seems to be a biblical threshold: old enough to have been tested, young enough to serve.

The Structure of Genesis 37–41 — Literary Analysis

The Joseph narrative is widely recognized as one of the most masterfully crafted literary compositions in the Hebrew Bible. Several key structural features shape chapters 37–41:

The Descent-Ascent Pattern: Joseph’s journey follows a clear downward arc (favored son → pit → slavery → prison) followed by a dramatic upward arc (prison → Pharaoh’s court → ruler of Egypt). This pattern mirrors the greater biblical narrative of fall and redemption, exile and return, death and resurrection.

The Three-Fold Ascension (Halverson, Unshaken): Joseph demonstrates a pattern of “rising to power from a place of absolute nothingness” in three distinct phases — in Potiphar’s house, in prison, and in Pharaoh’s court. Each represents what Halverson calls “finding beauty out of ashes.” The pattern reveals something essential about Joseph’s character: it wasn’t circumstance that made him great but an internal quality that manifested regardless of circumstance.

The Doubling Motif: Events occur in pairs throughout: Joseph has two dreams (ch. 37), interprets two dreams in prison (ch. 40), and interprets Pharaoh’s two dreams (ch. 41). The doubling signals divine

certainty and establishes a structural rhythm. Even Joseph’s two sons (Manasseh and Ephraim, 41:51–52) continue the pattern.

The “Lord Was With” Refrain: The phrase “the Lord was with Joseph” recurs as a narrative chorus (39:2, 21, 23), creating a theological anchor amid the chaos. Each time Joseph’s circumstances change for the worse, the narrator reassures the reader: God has not left.

The Judah-Joseph Foil (Genesis 38–39): The placement of Judah’s moral failure with Tamar immediately before Joseph’s moral triumph with Potiphar’s wife is a deliberate literary contrast. Muhlestein confirms: “The placement of Genesis 38 within Genesis 37–39 is deliberately intentional, not accidental.” It serves to develop character contrasts and thematic depth, with Judah functioning as a foil for both Joseph (immoral vs. moral) and for his own future self (showing the starting point of his journey toward repentance).

Irony and Reversal: The narrative is saturated with irony. The brothers strip Joseph of his robe, and Pharaoh will later clothe him in royal linen (41:42). The brothers sell Joseph for silver, and Joseph will later sell grain for silver to the whole world. The pit was meant to be Joseph’s grave; the prison was meant to be his end. Both become stepping stones.

The Coat Motif (Halverson, Unshaken): Joseph’s garments are stripped from him twice — by his brothers (ch. 37) and by Potiphar’s wife (ch. 39). Both strippings represent attempts to destroy his identity. But both are reversed: Pharaoh clothes him in royal linen. Halverson notes the ironic pattern: “What is it with my coats?” Each loss of a garment becomes a gateway to deeper freedom.

Comparing Accounts

Joseph as a Type of Christ

The early Latter-day Saint tradition, following patristic and medieval Christian readings, identified Joseph as one of the most complete types of Christ in the Old Testament:

Joseph	Christ
Beloved of his father (37:3)	“This is my beloved Son” (Matthew 3:17)
Sent by father to brothers (37:13)	Sent by Father to His people (John 3:16)
Hated by his brothers (37:4)	“He came unto his own, and his own received him not” (John 1:11)
Stripped of his garment (37:23)	Soldiers divided His garments (John 19:23–24)

Joseph	Christ
Sold for silver (37:28)	Betrayed for silver (Matthew 26:15)
Cast into a pit (37:24)	Descended below all things (D&C 88:6)
Falsely accused (39:14–18)	False witnesses (Matthew 26:59–60)
Between two prisoners, one saved, one lost (40:1–22)	Between two thieves (Luke 23:39–43)
Elevated to right hand of Pharaoh (41:40)	Seated at the right hand of God (Mark 16:19)
Savior of the world in famine (41:57)	Bread of Life (John 6:35)
30 years old at beginning of ministry (41:46)	30 years old at beginning of ministry (Luke 3:23)
Provides bread for those who betrayed him	Provides the Sacrament bread for sinners

Muhlestein (The Scriptures Are Real) adds that the levirate marriage theme running through the Judah-Tamar interlude reinforces the Christological typology: just as the levirate husband provides for those who cannot provide for themselves and ensures the continuation of the family line, Christ provides for us and grants eternal increase through the Atonement. David descends from two levirate marriages (Judah and Tamar, Ruth and Boaz), as does Christ — deliberate symbolism showing Christ fulfills the role of ultimate provider and preserver.

Insights from Podcasts and Sources

Follow Him Podcast — Dr. Lili De Hoyos Anderson

Dr. Anderson brings a background in psychology and family science to the text. Her key contributions include:

- **Antifragility:** Joseph is a model of becoming *stronger* through adversity, not merely surviving it. Anderson distinguishes between fragile (breaks under stress), resilient (bounces back to baseline), and antifragile (grows through stress). Joseph is antifragile because he allows each trial to deepen his faith, sharpen his skills, and refine his character.
- **The Timing of Blessings:** Anderson emphasizes that blessings don't always come on our schedule. Joseph waited thirteen years. The butler forgot for two full years. But God's timing was precise — Joseph needed to be in that prison on the exact day Pharaoh needed a dream interpreter.
- **The Wicked Prospering:** Anderson acknowledges the painful reality that sometimes the wicked seem to prosper (Potiphar's wife faces no consequences) while the righteous suffer. She frames this as a temporary condition that will be resolved through the Atonement.

Unshaken — Jared Halverson

Halverson brings theological depth, Hebrew analysis, and modern application to every section:

- **The Covenant Coat:** The coat of many colors as a symbol of the Abrahamic covenant mantle, possibly connected to Adam and Eve's coats of skins, representing inclusive belonging — “every hue of humanity is welcome in the kingdom of God.”
- **The Self-Covenant of the Eyes:** Joseph's refusal of Potiphar's wife was not a momentary decision but the expression of a prior covenant, echoing Job 31:1. “Once you wrap your heart around virtue, you don't have to remake the decision every single day.”
- **Strategic Abandonment:** “If there's a part of me that the adversary has a hold on, I'll just leave it with him and get out of here.” Joseph would rather lose his cloak than his integrity.
- **Prison as Perception:** “The prison is perception more than reality.” Internal freedom — a clear conscience, a settled identity — cannot be taken by external circumstances. Parallel to Paul and the Philippian jailer.
- **Atonement in Chains:** Joseph ministering to fellow prisoners as a type of Christ joining us in our suffering — “the atonement is that Christ would condescend to join us in jail.”
- **Pharaoh's Dream and Modern Prophecy:** President Hinckley's 1998 counsel about economic preparation echoes the seven-year famine principle — “laying up store in faith requires the same discipline as storing grain.”
- **Ironical Self-Fulfillment:** The brothers' plot to prevent Joseph's dreams only propels them toward the very future they're trying to avoid.

Don't Miss This — Emily Belle Freeman & David Butler

Freeman and Butler emphasize the emotional and pastoral dimensions of the text:

- **Edersheim's Principle:** God's providence “always worketh wonders yet without seeming to work at all” — the invisible architecture of the Joseph narrative.
- **The God of the Middle Moments:** Who is God when the story is unresolved? The Joseph narrative stops in the most uncomfortable places and insists God is present.
- **Tamar's Interlude as Teaching Moment:** Genesis 38 interrupts Joseph's story to teach that “God can fix what seems unfixable” — preparing the reader for the same truth in Joseph's life.
- **Others See God First:** In Genesis 39:3, Potiphar perceives God's presence in Joseph before Joseph can articulate it himself — sometimes others see God's work in us before we do.
- **The Unfinished Story Principle:** “So many of us are in the middle” — God's work continues even when resolution isn't visible. Faith means trusting the Author while the story is still being written.

The Scriptures Are Real — Kerry Muhlestein

Muhlestein brings Egyptological expertise and historical depth:

- **Second Intermediate Period Context:** Joseph likely lived during a time of Egyptian political fragmentation, which explains how a foreign Hebrew could rise to prominence. The Hyksos connection provides

historical plausibility.

- **Bar Yousef (Joseph's Canal):** The Fayum canal system traditionally associated with Joseph's name, demonstrating the agricultural infrastructure that Joseph's administration may have developed.
- **Potiphar as *Saris* (Eunuch):** The Hebrew word for Potiphar's title literally means eunuch — trusted in royal courts because they posed no dynastic threat. This adds historical context to the Potiphar's wife narrative.
- **Levirate Marriage as Christological Type:** The levirate institution foreshadows Christ as ultimate provider and preserver of the family line, with David and Christ descending from two levirate marriages.
- **Process Over Outcome:** Following President Oaks, the gospel focuses on *becoming* rather than immediate outcomes. God may place us in situations for entirely different reasons than we envision.

OT Institute Manual — Religion 301

The manual provides foundational historical and doctrinal context:

- **The Coat as Birthright Badge:** Keil and Delitzsch identify the coat as “a long coat with sleeves... such as noblemen and kings' daughters wore” — the visible marker of the birthright forfeited by Reuben.
- **Five Birthright Claimants:** Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Dan, and Gad each had plausible grounds to claim the birthright, explaining the intensity of their resentment when Jacob gave the coat to the eleventh son.
- **Twenty Pieces of Silver:** The Levitical price for a male slave between ages five and twenty (Leviticus 27:5), precisely Joseph's age bracket.
- **Potiphar's Restraint:** As “chief of the executioners,” Potiphar had both the authority and legal grounds to execute Joseph for the alleged offense. His choice to merely imprison him suggests he doubted his wife's accusation.
- **Thirteen Years of Preparation:** Sold at seventeen, elevated at thirty — every skill developed in slavery and prison prepared Joseph for managing all of Egypt.
- **Elder Hartman Rector Jr.:** “This ability to turn everything into something good appears to be a godly characteristic. Our Heavenly Father always seems able to do this. Everything, no matter how dire, becomes a victory to the Lord.”

Scripture Central

Scripture Central's resources on Genesis 37–41 highlight the historical context of the Joseph narrative: the Hyksos period of Egyptian history (when Semitic rulers controlled parts of Egypt) may explain why a Hebrew slave could rise to such prominence. They also provide valuable background on dream interpretation in the ancient Near East, where professional dream interpreters were part of the royal court — making Joseph's gift genuinely remarkable in its cultural context.

Jordan Peterson — Biblical Series XV: Joseph and the Coat of Many Colors

Full transcript. The final lecture of Peterson's Biblical Series reads Joseph as Genesis's answer to its own opening question — what is the *right* way to engage a world full of suffering and malevolence? Cain models the wrong way (bitter, resentful, fratricidal); Joseph models the right way. Key contributions woven into the commentary above: the **conspiratorial “cabal”** of Jacob's favoritism and Joseph's

snitching; the coat as differentiated, multi-dimensional character; and “he’s actually not imprisoned” — the dishwashing principle that doing anything as well as it can be done transforms both the work and the worker, and is “*a good way out of resentment.*” Peterson also notes the stories’ refusal to sugarcoat (famine, tyranny, betrayal from the very first patriarch onward) as evidence against reading religion as mere wish-fulfillment.

Gospel Talktrine — Mark Holt (S01E11: “How Can I Do This Great Wickedness”)

Full transcript. Holt covers Genesis 37–40 with the meaning-of-suffering as the through-line: the retrospective-only meaning of Joseph’s chain of faithful choices that each led *downward*; suffering itself as evidence of God (Moses 6:63); the multi-claimant birthright dispute behind the coat; the **birthright/Messiah-lineage split** at Joseph and Judah; the Tamar foil (character is predictable — Judah’s reputation invited the trap Joseph’s made unthinkable); Joseph’s pre-Sinai law of chastity; and Potiphar-as-executioner’s imprisonment of Joseph as tacit disbelief of his wife.

Personal Application & Discussion Questions

1. Ben, think about a “pit” experience in your life — a time when circumstances seemed hopeless. Looking back, can you see how God was preparing something through that experience? How does Joseph’s story reshape your understanding of those dark seasons?
2. The narrator repeats “the Lord was with Joseph” without explaining *how*. In what ways do you experience God’s presence without dramatic miracles? How do you recognize the quiet, steady “with-ness” of the Lord in daily life?
3. Joseph refused Potiphar’s wife not because of social convention but because it would be a sin “against God.” How does framing moral choices in terms of our relationship with God (rather than social consequences) change the way we make decisions?
4. The butler forgot Joseph for two full years. Have you experienced seasons of being “forgotten” — waiting for a call, an answer, or a door to open? How do you maintain faith when hope seems to evaporate?
5. Joseph told Pharaoh, “It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer.” When opportunities come after long periods of trial, how do we stay humble and give credit to God rather than seizing the moment for self-promotion?
6. Dr. Anderson describes Joseph as “antifragile” — becoming *stronger* through adversity rather than merely surviving it. What spiritual practices help you grow through trials rather than just endure them?
7. Halverson says Joseph’s prior “self-covenant of the eyes” meant he didn’t have to remake the decision in the moment of temptation. What prior commitments or covenants have you made that serve as anchors when you face pressure?

8. Freeman asks, “Who is the God of the middle moments?” — when your story is unresolved and you can’t see the ending. How do you relate to God in the *middle* of your trials, not just after they’re resolved?
 9. Joseph’s thirteen years of preparation (slave, steward, prisoner) gave him the exact skills he needed to manage all of Egypt. What unexpected “preparation” has God been doing in your life through experiences that seemed pointless at the time?
 10. Muhlestein observes that we often misinterpret why God places us in certain situations, assuming a specific outcome. When has God’s actual purpose turned out to be completely different from what you expected?
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Key Quotes

“All parties... were allowed in the free exercise of their own choice to follow their course, ignorant that all the while they were only contributing their share towards the fulfillment of God’s purpose. It always worketh wonders yet without seeming to work at all.”

— Alfred Edersheim, cited by Don’t Miss This

“This ability to turn everything into something good appears to be a godly characteristic. Our Heavenly Father always seems able to do this. Everything, no matter how dire, becomes a victory to the Lord.”

— Elder Hartman Rector Jr., *Ensign*, January 1973 (cited in OT Institute Manual)

“When we walk in the Lord’s path of righteousness, we do not need to fear. When we trust in the Lord with all our hearts, He can help us through our tribulations.”

— Elder David A. Bednar

“God uses broken things. It takes broken soil to produce a crop, broken clouds to give rain, broken grain to give bread, broken bread to give strength. It is the broken alabaster box that gives forth perfume.”

— Attributed to Vance Havner, often quoted in Latter-day Saint circles

“Some blessings come soon, some come late, and some don’t come until heaven; but for those who embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ, they come.”

— Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

“The Lord compensates the faithful for every loss. That which is taken away from those who love the Lord will be added unto them in His own way. While it may not come at the time we desire, the faithful will know that every tear today will eventually be returned a hundredfold with tears of rejoicing and gratitude.”

— President Joseph Fielding Smith

“Once you’ve made a covenant, once you’ve promised your eye, just stick with it. Once you wrap your heart around virtue and have made the decision, you don’t have to remake the decision every single day.”

— Jared Halverson, Unshaken

“The prison is perception more than reality.”

— Jared Halverson, Unshaken

“Even when they put him in prison, he’s actually not imprisoned — he just figures out how to make the prison work way better, and then he’s in control of the prison.”

— Jordan Peterson, Biblical Series XV

“As soon as you do it really well, it’s not a menial job anymore. That’s also a good way out of resentment.”

— Jordan Peterson, Biblical Series XV

“Looking back on it is the only way you can know the meaning. There was no possible way he could have figured that out beforehand.”

— Mark Holt on Joseph’s suffering, Gospel Talktrine S01E11

“Once you’ve given meaning to something, you’ve admitted that you believe there’s a value system of good and evil... Once you’ve done all of that, you already know that God exists.”

— Mark Holt, Gospel Talktrine S01E11

Links to Existing Notes in This Vault

- Abraham
- Jacob / Israel
- Joseph Smith
- Forgiveness
- Atonement
- Agency
- Trust
- God Who Sees Me
- Circumstances
- Paul’s Story About Forgiveness
- Genesis 28–33: Surely the Lord Is in This Place
- Genesis 24–27: The Covenant Is Renewed
- Unshaken — Genesis 37–41
- Don’t Miss This — Genesis 37–41
- The Scriptures Are Real — S5 E20: Genesis 37–41

Source Links & Further Reading

Podcasts

- Follow Him Podcast — Genesis 37–41 with Dr. Lili De Hoyos Anderson (Part 1) [↗](#)
- Follow Him Podcast — Genesis 37–41 with Dr. Lili De Hoyos Anderson (Part 2) [↗](#)
- Follow Him Show Notes PDF [↗](#)
- Don't Miss This Study — dontmissthisstudy.com [↗](#)

Church Resources

- Come, Follow Me 2026: Genesis 37–41 [↗](#)
- Genesis 37 — KJV Text [↗](#)
- Old Testament Seminary Manual 2026: Genesis 37–41 [↗](#)
- Old Testament Student Manual: Genesis 37–50 [↗](#)
- OT Institute Manual (Religion 301) — Chapter 8: Genesis 37–50

Scholarly

- Scripture Central — Genesis 37–41 Resources [↗](#)
- BibleHub — Strong's Hebrew 2472: Chalom (Dream) [↗](#)
- Zaphenath-Paneah — Wikipedia (etymology) [↗](#)
- Ketonet Passim — Coat of Many Colors (Wikipedia) [↗](#)
- Chaim Bentorah — Word Study: Joseph Dreamed a Dream [↗](#)
- FAIR Latter-day Saints — Genesis 37–41 Commentary [↗](#)

Next Chapter

→ Genesis 42–50: God Meant It unto Good
