

# Dream On

## The Test of Mere Success

April 12, 2026



We're putting ourselves in the shackles, to learn the lessons, of those in God's stories!



**Are you living the American dream?** Said another way: **Have you settled for an acceptable level of slavery?** Or are you *identifying and eradicating* whatever *master*, other than *Jesus*, and however *seemingly insignificant*, has *shackled* you to a *momentary, temporary, counterfeit joy*? Know what's *happening* in this *photo*? God is *transforming a conceited teen* into the symbol of the most *Christ-like Jew* in the *OT*. Know how we know? Because Joseph's father ...



[Jacob] *made* him a *robe* ... [and] [his brothers] *took* Joseph's *robe* and *slaughtered* a goat and *dipped* the *robe* in the *blood*. – Genesis 37:31 ESV



[And in Revelation, we're told that] ["The Son of God" and "One like the Son" (Rev 19:12; 1:13-14; 2:18)] was *clothed* with a *robe dipped* in *blood*, and His title was the *Word* of God. – Revelation 19:13 NLT



And the *Word* became *flesh* and *dwelt* among us – John 1:14 ESV

[And said] "These are the Scriptures that *testify about Me*" – John 5:39 NIV

The *brilliance* of God *conveying truth* through *story-telling* is *not only* in how it **personally relates to us, and speaks to us, and changes us – but in how it transcends age, sex, culture, and history**. And how **He's equipped us with a sense of story logic** that can *supersede language interpretation, grammatical analysis, and literary context*. For instance, we *read* that the *Ishmaelites* who *enslaved Joseph* were *luxury aromatic-resin traders*, not *slave traders*, and that *forced* us to *seek the motive* for their *hostility* – which we found in *another story*. Cuz *everything's* in there for a *reason*.

I used ChatGPT to *create* this *picture* for me, *based* on the *NAB* translation of Psalm 105:18:

They *shackled* his feet with *chains* – Psalm 105:18 NAB

And I *told* you that some *versions* say they *hurt* his feet with *fetters* (ankle-ties). And that's because **the word translated, "shackled" literally simply means humbled or afflicted. And the second word means fetters (ankle-ties)**. And *Carl VanderSar* comes up *after church* and *says*, "If the *Ishmaelites* weren't *slave traders*, *why'd* they have *slave shackles*?" *Great question!* This is why I *love serving* you. You're *my kind of believers*. **We ask questions, cuz we just want truth.**

For [we know that] we *know* in *part* – 1 Corinthians 13:9 NIV

And in *abundance* of *counselors* there is *victory*. – Proverbs 24:6 ESV

So I *read* it yet *again* and *noticed*, thanks to *Carl*, **an intentional, descriptive detail that I had ignored:** "Their *CAMELS* were *loaded* with *spices, balm* and *myrrh*". (Gen 37:25) **Why are camels mentioned?**



And I'm an *amateur camel wrangler*, thanks to our *live nativity scenes*; here's a picture of me trying to *sneak* it into our *upstairs apartment* for a *Christmas card photo*. So, I asked *Chat* if the *camels* would've *hobbled* (ankle-tied). And *Chat* said: Yes. When camels were used for hauling goods, **leather bands and braided rope was tied between their ankles, to allow them to walk but prevent them from running**. So I asked *Chat* to *recreate* the picture, with *Joseph's feet fettered* with a *period-correct camel hobble*. And *here's* what we got. So put *that* in your *mind's eye*. You see, **Joseph's enslavement allowed him to walk but not run**. Like the *rebellious*, who say:

We will walk according to our own plans, and we will every one obey the dictates of his evil [deceitful] heart. – Jeremiah 18:12 NKJ

For all people walk each in the name of his god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever. – Micah 4:5 NKJ

[In fact] We will run after You ... [And] We will be *glad* and *rejoice* in You. [Because] We will *remember* Your *love* more than *wine*. – Song 1:4 NKJ

*Especially* when we *drink* it in *remembrance* of Your *great love poured out* for us on the *cross*!

He gives *power* to the *weak* [the power of love] ... The *young men* shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the Lord shall *renew* their *strength* ... *mount up* with *wings* like *eagles* ... *run* and *not* be *weary* ... [and] walk [in His name] and *not faint*. – Isaiah 40:29-31 NKJ

Cuz **we won't settle for mere worldly success, cuz we wanna soar!** What do you think *happened* to those *Ishmaelites*? The *brothers* didn't *know* what became of *Joseph*, but those *Ishmaelites* sure *did*. He rose to *power* in the *city* where they'd *sold* him to *Pharaoh's Chief Executioner* (lit. *slaughterer*). And, during the *famine*, all *foreigners* had to *come* before *Joseph*. (Gen 42:57) And we're *told* he was given *power* to *imprison* even *princes*. (Ps 105:20-22) So, **I imagine they forfeited their royal connections and retired their lucrative aromatic-resin trade** for *fear* of being *found* and *slaughtered*! And likely *never stopped looking* over their *shoulder*. So in the *end*, **who'd they really hobble and enslave?** And now, *previously* on *Joseph's momentarily miserable life*:

[Potiphar] the captain of the [palace] guard, *bought* *Joseph* from the *Ishmaelites* who had *taken* him there. [Unaware they were God's Uber, to get little Joe on Potiphar's plantation! And] The Lord was *with* *Joseph* [cuz he *lived out* the *fruit* of the *Spirit*, *out* in those *fields*] and he *prospered*, [and overcame the *language, culture, business operation, and eyeliner*; and he *got along* well with *others*; and was *promoted* to *house-slave*] and he lived in the [slave quarters inside the *palatial*] *house* of his *Egyptian master*. – Genesis 39:1-2 NIV

*Joey's in da'house!* It's a *long way* in a *short time* to go from being *dumped* like *garbage* in a *pit*, to being *placed* in the most *powerful house* in the most *powerful city* in the most *powerful country*. *Potiphar* serves *Pharaoh* *directly*, with an *elite team* of *hand selected soldiers*. But, be *careful*, cuz **if the enemy can't stop us with adversity he'll try prosperity**. So, *keep in mind*, that:

"No one can serve *two* masters [with all their heart]. ... [For instance] You cannot serve both *God* [with all your heart] and *Money*." – Matthew 6:24 NIV

You see, **clout controls people**. And **cash controls things**. And *baby*, we love us some *control*. And *Potiphar* has *plenty to spare!* And *Joseph* has just *stepped into control central*. But **power can be used to control others or to bless others**. And we gotta choose which we'll use.

[Jesus said] "You are the *light of the world*. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people *light a lamp* and put it *under a bowl*. Instead they put it on its stand, and it *gives light to everyone in the house*. In the same way, let *your light shine before others*, that they may see your *good deeds* and *glorify your Father in heaven*." – Matthew 5:14-16 NIV

Because, **God's blessings don't come to fulfill a selfish desire of the blessee**. We're blessed to be a blessing to others who then, in turn, hopefully *bless our Father*. And **it begins by taking a stand and shinning our light for everyone in the house**. And *Joseph* is a *shining example of shining his light in the house*. And so, even though *Egyptians abhorred Hebrews* (for *sacrificing animals they worshiped* [Ex 8:26]) the *more Potiphar saw Joseph shine*, the *more he changed his mind*. And:

When his master saw  **firsthand** that the *Lord* was with him  **in word and deed and action and attitude** and that  **because of little Joe's love, joy, patience, kindness, and self-control** the *Lord* gave him *success* in everything he *did*, *Joseph* found *favor* in  **Potiphar's**  **Max-Factored** eyes and became his  **personal** attendant.  **And after proving himself more than capable** *Potiphar* put him in charge of his household  **slaves and schedules and day-to-day duties**, and  **eventually** *Potiphar* entrusted to  **Joseph's** care everything he owned.  **Because** From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the *Lord* blessed  **everyone and everything in** the household of the *Egyptian* because of  **the shining light of** *Joseph* ... both  **in the house** and  **out**  **in the field**. So he *left* in *Joseph's* care everything he *had*;  **because** with *Joseph* in charge, *Potiphar* did not  **need to** concern himself with anything except  **of course** the food he ate. – Genesis 39:3-6 NIV

Because the  **high and mighty** *Egyptians* could not eat food with the  **deplorable, hillbilly** *Hebrews*, for that is an *abomination* to the *Egyptians*. – Genesis 43:32 NKJ

For us, it's like saying, as *much* as *Joseph* was *beloved* by his *master*, he still wasn't *allowed* to *drink* from the same *water fountain* ... or even to *touch* it. *Potiphar's world*, like *ours*, is full of *incomplete counterfeits* to all that *God* has *promised*. Question is:  **will you settle for a comfortable level of slavery?** *Joseph* is given *unprecedented authority*. And the *enemy* just *lusts* for him and you and me to *accept* a *shallow substitute* from a *world system* that *finds* our *faith detestable*. Because  **there's no such thing as being partly enslaved**. Sure you can *walk*. But you can't *run*. Let alone *soar!* But for the *moment*, *lil' J's* *livin' the dream!*  **Joseph is now an enslaved slave master!** Every *servant*, *Egyptian* or *otherwise*, must *bow* to *Joseph!* "Thank You, *Lord!* What an *answer to prayer!* What a *fulfillment of my dreams!*" But ...  **this is a test**. This is *only* a *test*.

[*Joseph*] was *sold* as a *slave*. ... [And] *until* what he had said  **that the Lord had showed him and told him** came to pass, the Word of the Lord tested him. – Psalm 105:17-19 ESV

And in this *season* of his *life*,  **his faith will be stretched as it strains to survive mere success**, as the *Lord* *prepares* him for *imprisonment* in the *lowest point* of his *life* before he *gets* to *soar* to the *highest office* in *Egypt*. *Joseph's* *inside the house* and *in charge* of the *crew*, but  **God's far more concerned with what's inside and in charge of you**. Cuz he's very *angry* and *bitter* inside.

Cuz he's got a lot of *unresolved family issues*. And they don't get resolved till the end of his story. Turns out, **he's not living the dream, he's living the distraction**. Because the enemy doesn't limit his tempting to sin – **he tempts with substitutes to our created purpose and eternal best**.



Because, turns out, **God doesn't heal by pretending**. Just like **Jesus doesn't redeem by denial**. Because *They* won't bless in a way that prevents true healing from happening. So, lil' J is in da'house, but he's still in bondage. Which means **he's living the dream ... of a slave, not the promise of God**. You see, **we can be in the place God promised, without being in the promise**. Just as his brothers were *living in the Promised Land*; but *not in the promise*. In the same way, **we can be married without the joyful intimacy** that requires serving the Lord with *all our heart*. **We can worship without the closeness Christ wants to share**. And we can be *healthy and wealthy, and completely successful in this world's eyes, and yet still have those haunting resentments hiding inside and enslaving*. So don't settle for any level of the *brutal sin-confess-sin-confess cycle of bondage*, because **the Lord limits His offer to only total freedom**. And when we settle for *living the dream devoid of the promise*, it becomes a *nightmare*.

And here's a great, Carl-type question: **What keeps Joseph from writing home?** I mean, he's got the means to send word, but it seems he lacks the desire. He doesn't even send a spy to see if he's still alive. But, *why would he want to return to the goat-farm where he's far more despised by his people than by the people who despise his people!* Or worse yet, what if they showed up! "Oh Lord, don't let those hillbillies ruin this good thing!" So instead of dealing with the dysfunction, or just facing his own emotions, **he locks it in a dark closet in his heart and just forgets his troubles**. And tells himself it's what God wants. Know how we know? Twelve years later:

Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh [lit. **Forgets**] and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." – Genesis 41:51 NIV

But we know, from reading ahead that that's not true. You sure God healed those wounds? "Yep! All healed!" And how'd He heal 'em? "Made me forget 'em!" Not only is that *not how God works*, in five years an *emotional tornado's* gonna rip the door off that closet, so God can clear it out and light it up. And, as a reminder, one of Israel's tribes (*Manasseh*) will ironically forever be remembered as: *He Forgets*. So, **what have you named "Manasseh" in your life?** In His mercy, **the Lord won't allow forgetting to substitute for healing**. No matter how successful you are at putting the past out of mind. **Don't settle for Pseudo blessings or you'll compromise your created purpose**. True blessings always come to impact and benefit and heal and bless others ... **especially those who've hurt you the most**. Cuz that's how God works.

Because, **God won't bless a plan that prevents His healing from taking place**. That's how the enemy and our deceitful heart work! **They offer to help us hide our hurts**, and to bring us satisfaction, success, and fulfillment without serving our loving Father with *all of our heart*. The Lord always and only offers total freedom, in a place where the God-given dreams, that we dare to dream, really do come true. So, **are you living the dream ... or the promise?** Let's choose to live the promise, wait on the Lord, and let the dream work itself out.