

# Genesis

## Chapter 39



**Michael Fronczak  
Bible Study Resource Center  
564 Schaeffer Dr.  
Coldwater, Michigan 49036**

**[Biblestudyresourcecenter.com](http://Biblestudyresourcecenter.com)**

**Copyright © 2005, 2007**

During the Middle Kingdom Age when Joseph went to Egypt, it was a powerful and unified land; a land of peace, effective government, and general prosperity. It was a confident, powerful people who welcomed the little Hebrew family to Egypt, their haven of safety.

### **Jewish Study Bible Introduction: Joseph in Potiphar's House:**

Genesis rejoins the story of Joseph after the digression of Chapter 38. The bulk of chapter 39 centers on the hero's resistance to seduction and the ensuing false accusation of the spurned matron. It shows remarkable similarities to an Egyptian tale, "The Story of Two Brothers." Although some dependence is likely, the biblical narrative adapts its prototype to characteristic Israelite theological and ethical convictions.<sup>1</sup>

### **McGee Introduction:**

We return to the story of Joseph after the interlude of chapter 38, which we classified as one of the worst chapters in the Bible because it certainly tells a sordid story of the man Judah.

We will discover that Joseph is altogether different from Judah. I have always felt that Joseph and Benjamin got a great deal of teaching, instruction, and personal attention that the other ten boys did not receive. These seemed to be the only two boys in whom Jacob was interested.

Because of the hatred and animosity of Joseph's brothers, he was sold into slavery and taken to the land of Egypt.

To be in a foreign land and sold into slavery is a very dreary prospect for a seventeen-year-old boy. There is certainly nothing in the outward aspect of things to bring any encouragement to his heart. Joseph seems to be more or less a hardluck boy. Even in the land of Egypt, just as things would begin to move smoothly for him, something else would happen. Of course, it always happened for a purpose, even though that was difficult for Joseph to see.

There is no person in the Old Testament in whose life the purpose of God is more clearly seen than Joseph. The providence of God is manifest in every detail of his life. The hand of God is upon him and the leading of the Lord evident, but Joseph is the one patriarch to whom God did not appear directly, according to the text of Scripture. God appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but not to Joseph. Yet the direction of God in his life is more clearly seen than in any other. He is the Old Testament example of Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Joseph himself expressed it in rather vivid language. At the death of their father, Joseph's brothers felt that Joseph might turn on them, and they came to him asking for mercy. He told them that he held no grudge against them at all and said, "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" (Gen. 50:20). Although everything seemed to go wrong for him and the outward aspect was dark—it looked *terrible*—each event was a step bringing to fruition God's purpose in this man's life.

My friend, in our own lives we need to reckon on the fact that "... whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb. 12:6). If we are

---

<sup>1</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

the children of God, in the will of God, we can have the assurance of God that nothing comes to us without His permission. God works all things together for good to them who love Him. Even our misfortunes, heartbreaks, and sufferings are for our good and His glory.

There is a hedge about every child of God, and nothing gets through it without the permission of God. You remember that, when Satan wanted to test Job, he said to God: "Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land" (Job 1:10). Satan asked God to let the hedge down. Even if Satan gets God's permission to test us, still all things will work for our good.

Dr. Torrey used to say that Romans 8:28 is the soft pillow for a tired heart. And someone else has put it like this: "God nothing does, nor suffers to be done, but what we would ourselves, if we but could see through all events of things as well as He."

There is another aspect of the life of Joseph which should be an encouragement to every child of God. None of God's children today have ever had a direct revelation from God. Some modern false prophets claim to the contrary, but God has not appeared directly to any person today. It is for our encouragement that God did not appear to Joseph directly because we can still know that He is leading and directing us.

Now let's follow this young man Joseph and see what is going to happen to him.<sup>2</sup>

### **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 Ishmeelites, which had brought him down thither.**

**[Joseph was brought down to Egypt]** Joseph's history resumed after the story of Judah in Genesis 38 which would follow Genesis 33 chronologically.

**Potiphar**—This name, Potiphar, signifies one "devoted to the sun," the local deity of On or Heliopolis, a circumstance which fixes the place of his residence in the Delta, the district of Egypt bordering on Canaan.<sup>3</sup>

**An officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard** literally, "prince of the Pharaoh"—that is, in the service of government.

The import of the original term has been variously interpreted, some considering it means "chief cook," others, "chief inspector of plantations"; but that which seems best founded is "chief of the executioners," the same as the captain of the watch, the *zabut* of modern Egypt [WILKINSON].

---

<sup>2</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:156). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>3</sup> JFB Commentary

*Pharaoh* was the general name for all the kings of Egypt. It was a title like “King” or “President” used to address the country’s leader. The Pharaohs in Genesis and Exodus were different men.

**[bought him]** The price is not known but it was probably much more than the \$50 paid for Joseph.

**bought him . . . of the Ishmaelites**—The age, appearance, and intelligence of the Hebrew slave would soon cause him to be picked up in the market. But the unseen, unfelt influence of the great Disposer drew the attention of Potiphar towards him, in order that in the house of one so closely connected with the court, he might receive that previous training which was necessary for the high office he was destined to fill, and in the school of adversity learn the lessons of practical wisdom that were to be of greatest utility and importance in his future career. Thus it is that when God has any important work to be done, He always prepares fitting agents to accomplish it.<sup>4</sup>

The date of Joseph’s arrival in Egypt is debatable. Many believe he arrived during the period of the Hyksos rulers, foreigners who came from the region of Canaan. They invaded Egypt and controlled the land for almost 150 years. If Joseph arrived during their rule, it is easy to see why he was rapidly promoted up the royal ladder. Because the Hyksos were foreigners themselves, they would not hold this brilliant young foreigner’s ancestry against him.

Ancient Egypt was a land of great contrasts. People were either rich beyond measure or poverty stricken. There wasn’t much middle ground. Joseph found himself serving Potiphar, an extremely rich officer in Pharaoh’s service. Rich families like Potiphar’s had elaborate homes two or three stories tall with beautiful gardens and balconies. They enjoyed live entertainment at home as they chose delicious fruit from expensive bowls. They surrounded themselves with alabaster vases, paintings, beautiful rugs, and hand-carved chairs. Dinner was served on golden tableware, and the rooms were lighted with gold lampstands. Servants, like Joseph, worked on the first floor, while the family occupied the upper stories.<sup>5</sup>

*Potiphar* was commanding officer of Pharaoh’s bodyguard. *officer*. Lit., eunuch, though not so here, where the term signifies a prominent court official. Though the reigning Pharaoh is not named, probably he was Sesostri III, who reigned 1878-1843 B.C. See 1 Kings 6:1 and Ex. 12:40, which place Joseph’s entrance into Egypt about 1875.<sup>6</sup>

**Torah Class:** This chapter begins with Joseph, down in Egypt, and Potiphar purchasing him as a house servant. The first verse says something that seems so obvious to us, that our eye almost skips over it, or we pay it no heed, but it’s this: “. . .Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh’s and captain of the guard, AN EGYPTIAN. . . .”. Here we are, in Egypt, and we have to be told that Potiphar is an Egyptian? What else would we have expected than

---

<sup>4</sup> JFB Commentary

<sup>5</sup> Life Application Notes

<sup>6</sup> The Ryrie Study Bible

for the 2<sup>nd</sup> in command over all of Egypt, but that he would have been an Egyptian? Yet, Moses, who wrote this down, made a point of it.

The answer lies in the fact that at one time, long before Israel became a sovereign nation, Egypt was conquered; and it found itself under the control of non-Egyptians. The thing is, it was only in later times that Egypt sought a position as a world power. Up to Joseph's time, Egypt had been a very highly developed civilization that had contact with the outer world, had sent emissaries and even developed trade with the outer world; but, the goal seems to have been only to make Egypt, within its own borders, a great nation; historically, up to the time of Joseph, there appears to have been no aggressive imperialistic designs.

However, as is the case since there has been nations, that goal turned out NOT to be a two-way street. They soon found out that simply being a peace-loving nation, trying to get along with its neighbors, did not immunize them from conflict or aggression. Egypt was attacked, and routed, by Bedouins.....Semites.... who had come from the area of Arabia and Syria! The war was not a result of any dispute between Egypt and these Semites, but simply because these Bedouins wanted what Egypt had. And, these Semite rulers controlled Egypt for around 2 centuries; that's right, Semites, sons of Shem, cousins of Israel, sat as Pharaoh on the throne of Egypt.....not Egyptians. The Egyptians called these foreign rulers of Egypt the Hyksos. Hyk means "king" and "sos" means shepherd...so these foreigners were known as the "Shepherd Kings". And, we don't know a lot about them, nor are we able to precisely place them in time, because the records from the Hyksos period are scant. This might seem strange in itself, for the Egyptians were tremendous writers of history, and great record keepers. But, on the other hand, as was typical of most ancient nations, the Egyptians did not record defeats and times of subjugation. What we know of this time generally comes from records from private Egyptian citizens who lived through that era.

But, even with some inherent historical inconsistencies and contradictory scientific findings, scholars generally agree that during the time of Joseph, and for perhaps 100 years or a little more after Joseph's death, it was the Semite Shepherd Kings that ruled Egypt. So, with Bedouins, Semites, in control at the time Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt, it explains why Moses thought it important to mention that Potiphar was NOT a Bedouin, he was an Egyptian. And, it also explains how, as we will soon discover, the Pharaoh seemed to have little trouble giving Joseph, a foreigner, a Hebrew, an Israelite, such an incredible amount of authority over Egyptians; for the best current evidence is that the Pharaoh was NOT an Egyptian; both he and Joseph were Semites. Now, with that as a background, let's continue.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

## **Genesis 39:2**

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

**he was in the house of his master**—Those slaves who had been war captives were generally sent to labor in the field and subjected to hard treatment under the "stick" of taskmasters. But those who were bought with money were employed in domestic purposes, were kindly treated, and enjoyed as much liberty as the same class does in modern Egypt.<sup>8</sup>

**Dake:** Eight Examples of Prosperity From God:

1. Joseph (Genesis 39:2-3,23; Genesis 41:40-44)
2. Joshua (Joshua 1:7; Joshua 12:1-24; Joshua 24:15)
3. David (2 Samuel 5:10; Psalm 30:6)
4. Solomon (1 Kings 3:13; 1 Kings 4:1-34; 1 Kings 10:7)
5. Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:5)
6. Hezekiah (2 Chron. 31:21; 2 Chron. 32:30)
7. Daniel (Daniel 6:28)
8. Messiah (Isaiah 53:10; Jeremiah 23:4)

**Dake:** Seven Laws of Prosperity:

1. God with man (Genesis 39:1-3,23; Jeremiah 20:11)
2. Obedience (Deut. 28:1-14; Deut. 29:9; 1 Kings 2:3; 1 Chron. 22:13)
3. Meditation (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2-3)
4. Faith (2 Chron. 20:20; Neh. 2:20)
5. Seeking God (2 Chron. 26:5; Jeremiah 10:21)
6. Goodness to Israel (Genesis 12:1-3; Psalm 122:6)
7. Hospitality (Luke 6:38; 2 Cor. 8:15)

**Dake:** Promises for Prosperity:

Genesis 24:40; Deut. 29:9; Psalm 1:3; Psalm 122:6; Isaiah 55:11; 3 John 1:2.

**Dake:** Three Reasons Some Do Not Prosper:

1. Rebellion against God (Deut. 28:29)
2. Covering sins (Proverbs 28:13)
3. Fighting God (Isaiah 54:17)<sup>9</sup>

**Chrysostom; “A man of means”**

“What is the meaning of “a man of means”? Everything went well for him, grace from on high preceded him everywhere, and the grace that flourished with regard to Joseph was so obvious as to become plain even to his master, the chief steward. Recall the text says, “His master realized that the Lord was with him, and whatever he did the Lord conducted successfully in his person. Joseph found favor with his master, who set him over his household and entrusted to him all his possessions.” Do you see what it means

---

<sup>8</sup> JFB Commentary

<sup>9</sup> Dake’s Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

to be helped by the right hand from above? I mean, behold, a young man, a Stanger, a captive slave, yet entrusted by his master with his whole household: “he entrusted everything to him,” the text says. Why? Because along with power from on high Joseph also contributed his own way of doing things. Recall the text states, “He gave him satisfaction”; that is to say, he did everything to his complete satisfaction. (*Homilies on Genesis 62:14*)<sup>10</sup>

### **Genesis 39:3**

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

Potiphar was captain of the guard for Pharaoh. This Pharaoh was probably Sesostriis II (1897-1879 B.C.).

**[saw that the LORD was with him]** He saw not only that Joseph could be trusted, but that the God of Joseph was the true God.

**his master saw that the Lord was with him**—Though changed in condition, Joseph was not changed in spirit; though stripped of the gaudy coat that had adorned his person, he had not lost the moral graces that distinguished his character; though separated from his father on earth, he still lived in communion with his Father in heaven; though in the house of an idolater, he continued a worshipper of the true God.<sup>11</sup>

**McGee:** Life is great up to this point. You’d like to add that they all lived happily ever after, but they didn’t. This is not a story; it is reality. The child of God is going to encounter temptation, trouble, and problems in this world. This is what is going to happen to Joseph.<sup>12</sup>

### **Genesis 39:4**

**And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand.**

**[He made him overseer]** *hiphkid*, from *pakad*, to visit, take care of, superintend; the same as overseer or bishop, among the Greeks.

---

<sup>10</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

<sup>11</sup> JFB Commentary

<sup>12</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:157). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

### **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 the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field.**

Both Joseph and Daniel rose to responsibility from their merit and character; both were the only two people (other than Christ) of whom no evil is spoken of.

**the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake, &c.**—It might be—it probably was—that a special, a miraculous blessing was poured out on a youth who so faithfully and zealously served God amid all the disadvantages of his place. But it may be useful to remark that such a blessing usually follows in the ordinary course of things; and the most worldly, unprincipled masters always admire and respect religion in a servant when they see that profession supported by conscientious principle and a consistent life.<sup>13</sup>

**made him overseer in his house**—We do not know in what capacity Joseph entered into the service of Potiphar; but the observant eye of his master soon discovered his superior qualities and made him his chief, his confidential servant (compare Ephes. 6:7; Col. 3:23). The advancement of domestic slaves is not uncommon, and it is considered a great disgrace not to raise one who has been a year or two in the family. But this extraordinary advancement of Joseph was the doing of the Lord, though on the part of Potiphar it was the consequence of observing the astonishing prosperity that attended him in all that he did.<sup>14</sup>

**(Colossians 3:22-23)** <sup>22</sup>*Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God:* <sup>23</sup>*And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;*

### **Genesis 39:6**

**And 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.**

**[left all that he had in Joseph's hand]** It was common for rich men to do this with a person that was trusted.

Joseph was handsome and had a good physique. The same Hebrew expressions used of him are also used of Rachel (note, \*Genesis 29:17). Persian poets and the twelfth chapter of the Koran speak of his beauty as perfect. Tradition says that Zuleekha, Potiphar's wife, was at first a virtuous woman, but when she saw Joseph she became a slave to her passion. On one occasion she supposedly invited forty of the most beautiful women of

---

<sup>13</sup> JFB Commentary

<sup>14</sup> JFB Commentary

Egypt to a dinner. When they saw Joseph, they were so moved with admiration that they exclaimed with one accord that he must be an angel.

His character stands out as one of the purest in history. He allowed no temptation to affect his high morality, no calamity to shake his implicit faith in God, no adversity to depress him, and no power or position to make him proud and haughty. In his father's house he had likely been pampered; in slavery he was falsely accused. In the palace as the ruler of what was then the greatest kingdom on earth he was always the same truthful, pure, just, merciful, kind and God-fearing man.<sup>15</sup>

**[Joseph was a goodly person, and well favored]** “*yepkeh thoaf vipheh mareh*”, beautiful in his person, and beautiful in his countenance. The same expressions are used relative to Rachel; see them explained Genesis 29:17. The beauty of Joseph is celebrated over all the East, and the Persian poets vie with each other in descriptions of his comeliness. Mohammed spends the twelfth chapter of the Koran entirely on Joseph, and represents him as a perfect beauty, and the most accomplished of mortals. From his account, the passion of Zuleekha (for so the Asiatics call Potiphar's wife) being known to the ladies of the court, they cast the severest reflections upon her: in order to excuse herself, she invited forty of them to dine with her, put knives in their hands, and gave them oranges to cut, and caused Joseph to attend. When they saw him they were struck with admiration, and so confounded, that instead of cutting their oranges they cut and hacked their own hands, crying out, “O God! this is not a human being, this is none other than a glorious angel!”—Surat xii., verse 32.

Two of the finest poems in the Persian language were written by the poets Jamy and Nizamy on the subject of Joseph and his mistress; they are both entitled Yusuf we Zuleekha. These poems represent Joseph as the most beautiful and pious of men; and Zuleekha the most chaste, virtuous, and excellent of women, previous to her having seen Joseph; but they state that when she saw him she was so deeply affected by his beauty that she lost all self-government, and became a slave to her passion. Hafiz expresses this, and apologizes for her conduct in the following elegant couplet:—

“I understand, from the daily increasing beauty  
which Joseph possessed, How love tore away the  
veil of chastity from Zuleekha.”

The Persian poets and eastern historians, however, contrive to carry on a sort of guiltless passion between them till the death of Potiphar, when Zuleekha, grown old, is restored to youth and beauty by the power of God, and becomes the wife of Joseph. What traditions they had beside the Mosaic text for what they say on this subject, are now unknown; but the whole story, with innumerable embellishments, is so generally current in the East that I thought it not amiss to take this notice of it. The twelfth chapter of the Koran, which celebrates the beauty, piety, and acts of this patriarch, is allowed to be one of the finest specimens of Arabic composition ever formed; and the history itself, as told by Moses, is one of the most simple, natural, affecting, and well-told narratives ever published. It is a master-piece of composition, and never fails of producing its intended effect on the mind of a careful reader. The Arab lawgiver saw and felt the

---

<sup>15</sup> Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

beauties and excellences of his model; and he certainly put forth all the strength of his own language, and all the energy of his mind, in order to rival it.<sup>16</sup>

As in chapter 37, which speaks of Jacob's preference for Joseph (vv. 3-4) so here the latter is the beneficiary of a mysterious favor, this time from the Lord. One senses that, unbeknownst to all at the time, Jacob's favoritism for the son of his old age had been the medium for a higher purpose. Like Laban (30:27-30), Potiphar benefits mightily from association with this descendant of Abraham.<sup>17</sup>

**Stewardship, Management**—Joseph's role as manager-steward for Potiphar illustrates the biblical concept of stewardship. The master/owner entrusted the steward to manage the household. In the Old and New Testaments, steward denotes the management role God has assigned us. As trustees for God, we act in responsible freedom—free to make decisions, yet accountable for those decisions. We respond to God either in rejection or in love, but we are always accountable for how we respond. Every steward is to be faithful in all matters.<sup>18</sup>

**Chromatius:** "The soul masters the flesh." This holy Joseph, about whom your charity has heard in this reading, was beautiful in his body but even more beautiful in his soul, because he was chaste in his body and had a chaste soul. The beauty of his body shone in him, but that of his character even more so. Therefore, even though for many people the beauty of the body is usually an obstacle to salvation, it could do no harm to our saint, because the beauty of his character ruled that of his body. So the soul must subdue the flesh, and not the flesh the soul, because the soul is the master of the flesh, and the flesh is the servant of the soul. Woe to the soul that is dominated by flesh and is changed from master to servant by neglecting the faith in the Lord and by submitting to the slavery of sin. But the soul of the patriarch Joseph securely preserved its power, and the flesh could not dominate it at all. (*Sermon 24.2*)<sup>19</sup>

### **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.**

**[master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph]** Egyptian women were not entirely secluded as Syrian women were.

**his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph**—Egyptian women were not kept in the same secluded manner as females are in most Oriental countries now. They were treated in a manner more worthy of a civilized people—in fact, enjoyed much freedom both at home and abroad. Hence Potiphar's wife had constant opportunity of meeting Joseph. But

---

<sup>16</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

<sup>17</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

<sup>18</sup> Disciple's Study Bible

<sup>19</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

the ancient women of Egypt were very loose in their morals. Intrigues and intemperance were vices very prevalent among them, as the monuments too plainly attest [WILKINSON]. Potiphar's wife was probably not worse than many of the same rank, and her infamous advances made to Joseph arose from her superiority of station.<sup>20</sup>

Good looks are often a sign of divine favor in the Tanakh (e.g., 1 Sam 9:2; 16:12), but here they set the one who bears them up for a potentially catastrophic temptation. A Midrash, finding it difficult to believe that Joseph was altogether innocent, likens him to one “who would stand in the market place, put make-up around his eyes, straighten up his hair and swing his heels.” Mrs. Potiphar's proposition was thus a punishment for his narcissism and machismo (Gen. Rab. 87:3).<sup>21</sup>

**McGee:** Potiphar had given him the full run of his home, and Joseph had charge of everything. While Joseph was busy, Potiphar's wife was also busy. She was busy scheming. Joseph was a handsome young man. It may be that Potiphar was an old man because it was generally the custom in that day for an older man to have a young wife. She sees Joseph, and she attempts to entice him.<sup>22</sup>

### **Genesis 39:8**

**But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand;**

**My master wotteth not**—Knoweth not, from the old Anglo-Saxon, *witan*, to know; hence, wit, intellect, understanding, wisdom, prudence.<sup>23</sup>

**Chrysostom;** “The servant counsels the mistress.” “Afterwards,” it says. What is meant by “afterwards”? After Joseph had been entrusted with control of the whole household and after his being shown such esteem by his master, “his master's wife set her eye on Joseph.” See the shamelessness of this wanton woman. It was not because she considered herself to be mistress of the house that she took this into her head; it was not because he was a servant. Instead, under the spell of Joseph's charm and aflame with satanic desire, she endeavored at this point to assail the young man. With this evil intent fixed in her mind, she looked for a suitable moment of privacy for putting into effect this illicit endeavor. “But he refused,” the text says. He did not submit, nor did he accept the invitation. Joseph realized you see the great ruin it would bring him. Instead of thinking of himself, he was greatly concerned as well to deliver her from this folly and improper desire, as far as was possible. He offered her advice calculated to awaken her to a sense of shame and make her realize what was for her good. (*Homilies on Genesis 62:17*)<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> JFB Commentary

<sup>21</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

<sup>22</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:158). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>23</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

<sup>24</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

## **Genesis 39:9**

***There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?***

All sin against man is primarily against God.

**Sin, Responsibility**—Joseph recognized his responsibility to refuse the advances of Potiphar’s wife. Political or business expediency never justifies sinful action. Individuals are responsible for their own acts of sin and must accept the responsibility or refrain from sin. To refrain from sin does not guarantee immediate success in earthly ventures. It may lead to greater hardship, as in Joseph’s case.<sup>25</sup>

God tested Joseph with Potiphar’s wife to see if he was obedient. When she tempted handsome Joseph, he refused to go to bed with her for that would be a sin against both God and his master. If one is to fulfill God’s plan, he cannot sin against the God who will bring it about.<sup>26</sup>

**[How then]** *veeik*, and how? Joseph gives two most powerful reasons for his noncompliance with the wishes of his mistress:

1. Gratitude to his master, to whom he owed all that he had.
2. His fear of God, in whose sight it would be a heinous offense, and who would not fail to punish him for it.

With the kindness of his master and the displeasure of God before his eyes, how could he be capable of committing an act of transgression, which would at once have distinguished him as the most ungrateful and the most worthless of men?<sup>27</sup>

Potiphar’s wife failed to seduce Joseph, who resisted this temptation by saying it would be a sin against God. Joseph didn’t say, “I’d be hurting you,” or “I’d be sinning against Potiphar,” or “I’d be sinning against myself.” Under pressure, such excuses are easily rationalized away. Remember that sexual sin is not just between two consenting adults. It is an act of disobedience against God.

Joseph’s pointed deference to his master stands in striking contrast with his dreams of dominance in 37:5-11. One senses that the brash and unreflective teenager of chapter 37 has matured into a more responsible man, with the appropriate humility. Joseph’s mention of God is the first. No one mentioned the deity in the previous two chapters.<sup>28</sup>

Joseph dealt with temptation and testing according to divine direction (James 4:7).

**(James 4:7)** *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

---

<sup>25</sup> Disciple’s Study Bible

<sup>26</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

<sup>27</sup> Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

<sup>28</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

**Ramban:** “and I shall sin against God.” The Sons of Noah were commanded concerning forbidden relations. This is Rashi’s language.

This is correct. It is only due to the feminine lack of knowledge that he first told her that the act would constitute a betrayal of his master who trusted him, and following that he added that it also involves a sin against God.

It is possible to further explain the verse, and I shall sin against God, by this betrayal, since “it would be a matter of great evil consequence which would be accounted to me as a sin against God since His eyes are upon the faithful of the land, and no traitor dare come before Him.” Joseph spoke the truth. However he did not mention the prohibition of the illicit relation because he spoke in language suitable to women.<sup>29</sup>

### **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.**

**[day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her]** Daily temptation didn't weaken him. He shunned her when possible and fled when he couldn't avoid her (Genesis 39:13).

**McGee:** This man, Potiphar, as an officer of Pharaoh, would be away from home a great deal. Maybe he was away from home too much. This woman didn't tempt Joseph only one time, but again and again and again. It was a constant temptation to him, yet this young man did not yield. You can imagine that there begins to well up in her a boiling resentment against Joseph. The old bromide has it, “Hell hath no fury like that of a woman scorned.” Believe me, she is going to take revenge on Joseph.<sup>30</sup>

### **Genesis 39:11**

**And it came to pass about this time, that *Joseph* went into the house to do his business; and *there was none of the men of the house there within.***

### **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.**

**[caught him by his garment]** The second time his troubles involved his garment (Genesis 37:3-4,23,31-32). The first time his brothers used his coat to cover their sins; here his master's wife used his garment to accuse him of sin.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

<sup>30</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:158). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>31</sup> Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

The garment left in her hand (also in v.13) contrasts with Potiphar's placing "in his hands all that he owned" v.4). The use of a garment as fraudulent evidence recalls Joseph's brothers' displaying the bloodstained tunic to their father (37:31-33) and contrast with Tamar's truthful presentation to Judah of his "seal and cord and staff" (38:25-26). Note the telling contrast between the woman who attempts to dishonor her marriage without success (Mrs. Potiphar) and the woman who, also acting boldly and seductively succeeds in implementing the law and thus ensures the survival of her family (Tamar).<sup>32</sup>

Beauty either in men or women, often proves a snare both to themselves and others. This forbids pride in it, and requires constant watchfulness against the temptation that attends it. We have great need to make a covenant with our eyes, lest the eyes infect the heart. When lust has got power, decency, and reputation, and conscience, are all sacrificed. Potiphar's wife showed that her heart was fully set to do evil. Satan, when he found he could not overcome Joseph with the troubles and the frowns of the world, for in them he still held fast his principle, assaulted him with pleasures, which have ruined more than the former. But Joseph, by the grace of God, was enabled to resist and overcome this temptation; and his escape was as great an instance of the Divine power, as the deliverance of the three children out of the fiery furnace. This sin was one which might most easily beset him. The tempter was his mistress, one whose favour would help him forward; and it was at his utmost peril if he slighted her, and made her his enemy. The time and place favoured the temptation. To all this was added frequent, constant urging. The almighty grace of God enabled Joseph to overcome this assault of the enemy. He urges what he owed both to God and his master. We are bound in honour, as well as justice and gratitude, not in any thing to wrong those who place trust in us, how secretly soever it may be done. He would not offend his God. Three arguments Joseph urges upon himself. 1. He considers who he was that was tempted. One in covenant with God, who professed religion and relation to him. 2. What the sin was to which he was tempted. Others might look upon it as a small matter; but Joseph did not so think of it. Call sin by its own name, and never lessen it. Let sins of this nature always be looked upon as great wickedness, as exceedingly sinful. 3. Against whom he was tempted to sin, against God. Sin is against God, against his nature and his dominion, against his love and his design. Those that love God, for this reason hate sin. The grace of God enabled Joseph to overcome the temptation, by avoiding the tempter. He would not stay to parley with the temptation, but fled from it, as escaping for his life. If we mean not to do iniquity, let us flee as a bird from the snare, and as a roe from the hunter.<sup>33</sup>

### **Genesis 39:13**

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

**[when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand]** Her lust turned to jealousy; she now sought vengeance for his spurning of her love (Song 8:6).

---

<sup>32</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

<sup>33</sup> Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible

**(Song of Songs 8:6)** *Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.*

### **Genesis 39:14**

**That 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:**

[**mock us**] Hebrew: tsachaq, disgrace us. She used her advantage to show Joseph he couldn't spurn her and escape. Her husband believed the lie and Joseph suffered in silence with uninterrupted faith (Genesis 39:19-23). She was an unscrupulous woman whose kind is described in Proverbs:

1. Strange woman (Proverbs 2:16; Proverbs 6:24; Proverbs 7:5; Proverbs 20:16; Proverbs 23:27; Proverbs 27:13)
2. Evil woman (Proverbs 6:24)
3. Whorish woman (Proverbs 6:26)
4. Foolish woman (Proverbs 9:13)
5. Fair woman without discretion (Proverbs 11:22)
6. Adulterous woman (Proverbs 30:20)
7. Odious woman (Proverbs 30:23)<sup>34</sup>

[**He hath brought in a Hebrew unto us**] Potiphar's wife affects to throw great blame on her husband, whom we may reasonably suppose she did not greatly love. He hath brought in—he hath raised this person to all his dignity and eminence, to give him the greater opportunity to mock us. *letsachek*, here translated to mock, is the same word used in Genesis 26:8, relative to Isaac and Rebekah; and is certainly used by Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39:17, to signify some kind of familiar intercourse not allowable but between man and wife.<sup>35</sup>

**(Genesis 26:8)** *And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife.*

**(Genesis 21:9)** *And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.*

Her clever phrasing suggests a hope to profit from her staff's resentment of a foreigner and perhaps of their boss as well (he had to bring us a Hebrew). Here she sides with her servants (bring us), whereas in v. 17 she sides with her husband ("whom you brought into

---

<sup>34</sup> Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

<sup>35</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

our house”), although in both cases she blames him for introducing Joseph into the household.<sup>36</sup>

**he has brought:** She insulted her husband in front of other slaves. The term **Hebrew** is used only four times in the Book of Genesis (see 14:13; 39:17; 41:12). Here it is a racial slur. **to mock:** The verb suggests racial hatred. The Hamitic Egyptians scorned the Semitic peoples of Canaan (see 43:32). The Egyptian slaves must have envied Joseph’s success. Potiphar’s wife must have found ready ears among these men to believe her lies. She had not **cried out**, of course. But the charge of rape was as serious then as it is in our day. The attempted rape of a master’s wife by a foreign slave would have been an exceptional outrage.<sup>37</sup>

**Ramban:** “see, he hath brought in a Hebrew unto us.” The meaning thereof is that the Hebrews were hated by the Egyptians. They did not eat with them, this being a matter of abhorrence to them. They did not purchase them as servants except as vinedressers and plowmen, but they would not permit them to come into their homes. This is why she said: “Behold, the master has done us evil by bringing a Hebrew into our home, and he has further appointed him as overseer and ruler, and now he has fittingly seen to mock us.” [The point of her statement] is similar to that which is said in the verse, *He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child shall have him become a master at the last*. This is the meaning of her saying, *Whom thou hast brought unto us*, as his being brought into their house was in itself embarrassing to them.

In the verse before us, the expression, *He has brought us*, refers to her husband. She does not mention him by name out of respect, or perhaps because such is the ethical way for women to speak, or perhaps because it is known who brought Joseph into the house. Similarly, in many places in the book of Job it speaks of Almighty God anonymously because the conversants know that they are speaking of Him. Similarly, in the verse, *And he said to Abner, Why has thou gone in unto my father’s concubine?* The name of the speaker is not mentioned, and no reference is made to him at all in the above verse because it is known that he was Ish-bosheth.<sup>38</sup>

**Ambrose;** “She revealed what she should have concealed.” Indeed, Joseph went out of doors while she spread the news of the temptation that arose from her own adultery; she said in a loud voice that the Hebrew had fled and left his garment behind. This she revealed what she should have concealed, so as to do harm to an innocent man by inventing a crime. But the just man Joseph did not know how to make accusation, and so the impure woman accomplished this with impunity. Therefore I might say that she was the one who had really been stripped, although she was keeping the clothing of another. She had lost all the coverings of chastity, whereas he was sufficiently provided for and protected; his voice was not heard, and yet his blamelessness spoke for itself. (*On Joseph 5.26*)<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

<sup>37</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

<sup>38</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

<sup>39</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

**Chrysostom;** “Attributes its faults to virtue.” But despite such a victory, despite such wonderful fortitude for which Joseph ought to have been rewarded, for which he ought to have been extolled, once more he endures countless troubles as though a guilty party. You see, the Egyptian woman did not take kindly at that stage to her shame and insult brought on herself by attempting the impossible. First she summoned those in the household and accused the young man and tried to mislead them all by claiming that the commands given by her in her frenzy had been uttered by him. This, in fact, is the way with wickedness that it endeavors to attribute its own faults to the virtue that is under attack. That is exactly what she did in this case, portraying the young man as incontinent and giving herself the guise of chastity, saying that was the reason he had abandoned his clothes and she was left with them. (*Homilies on Genesis 62:20*)<sup>40</sup>

### **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.**

Joseph avoided Potiphar’s wife as much as possible. He refused her advances and finally *ran* from her. Sometimes merely trying to avoid temptation is not enough. We must turn and run, especially when the temptations seem very strong, as is often the case in sexual temptations.

### **Genesis 39:16**

**And she laid up his garment by her, until his lord came home.**

**keeping the cloak.** Besides the interesting parallel to Joseph’s brothers’ taking his cloak, it should be noted that here again the cloak is to serve to identify Joseph. Garments often contained indications of status, rank or office and therefore could be used in such ways. Similar also to the story where Tamar took items that would identify Judah beyond any doubt.

### **Genesis 39:17**

**And 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:**

**[mock me]** Disgrace me (note, \*Genesis 39:14).

---

<sup>40</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

### **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.**

This was the second time Joseph's clothing was used to bring a false report about him (cf. 37:31-33). In both cases he had been serving faithfully; but in both cases Joseph ended up in bondage.<sup>41</sup>

Now she blames Joseph primarily and her husband only indirectly. Note that here (as in v. 15) she describes the garment that was left "in her hand" (v. 12) as with me, instead, subtly disguising her true involvement.<sup>42</sup>

### **Genesis 39:19**

**And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, saying, After this manner did thy servant to me; that his wrath was kindled.**

### **Genesis 39:20**

**And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison.**

The circumstantial evidence was strongly incriminating. Potiphar was enraged. However, in spite of the seriousness of the charge, he evidently had some question in his mind about Joseph's guilt, for he did not kill him. Instead, he hurried him off to the prison (the "Round House"). This prison was probably a famous round tower or dungeon where prisoners connected with official life were housed. The Hebrew *sohar*, prison, may be an attempt to translate an Egyptian word.<sup>43</sup>

**[took him]** Full justice is often prevented by a jealous, untruthful accuser.

**[put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound]** Potiphar is to be commended for even showing some justice under the circumstances. God's hand is seen in all these events. The large state prison under him was still a part of Potiphar's house (cp. Genesis 40:3 with Genesis 37:36). He was chief executioner and captain of the body guard of Pharaoh. The justice manifest in this story indicates a high degree of legal civilization at that time. In a despotic government they all would have perished at the first show of their superior's anger.

**[Put him into the prison]** *beith sohar*, literally the round house; in such a form the prison was probably built.

---

<sup>41</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

<sup>42</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

<sup>43</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

**imprisoned with the king's prisoners.** One indication of Potiphar's understanding of the affair between Joseph and his wife may be in the choice of prison. Rather than being executed for rape (as dictated in, for instance, the Middle Assyrian laws), Joseph was put into a royal prison holding political prisoners. This may have been a bit more comfortable (as prisons go), but more importantly it will put him in contact with members of Pharaoh's court (Genesis 40:1-23).<sup>44</sup>

**Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison**—the roundhouse, from the form of its construction, usually attached to the dwelling of such an officer as Potiphar. It was partly a subterranean dungeon (Genesis 41:14), though the brick-built walls rose considerably above the surface of the ground, and were surmounted by a vaulted roof somewhat in the form of an inverted bowl. Into such a dungeon Potiphar, in the first ebullition of rage, threw Joseph and ordered him to be subjected further to as great harshness of treatment (Psalm 105:18) as he dared; for the power of masters over their slaves was very properly restrained by law, and the murder of a slave was a capital crime.<sup>45</sup>

**(Psalm 105:15-22)**

- <sup>15</sup> *Saying*, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.  
<sup>16</sup> Moreover he called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread.  
<sup>17</sup> He sent a man before them, *even* Joseph, *who* was sold for a servant:  
<sup>18</sup> Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron:  
<sup>19</sup> Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him.  
<sup>20</sup> The king sent and loosed him; *even* the ruler of the people, and let him go free.  
<sup>21</sup> He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance:  
<sup>22</sup> To bind his princes at his pleasure; and teach his senators wisdom.

Prisons were grim places with vile conditions. They were used to house forced laborers or, like Joseph, the accused who were awaiting trial. Prisoners were guilty until proven innocent, and there was no right to a speedy trial. Many prisoners never made it to court, because trials were held at the whim of the ruler. Joseph was in prison two years until he appeared before Pharaoh, and then he was called out to interpret a dream, not to stand trial.<sup>46</sup>

Joseph received a term in prison because he was falsely accused, an injustice eventually turned to good by the providence of God. Through the contacts he made during his imprisonment he had the opportunity to come before Pharaoh. After rising to power in Egypt, he became the deliverer of Israel in a time of famine. As God determined to preserve Israel, so He also planned meticulously for Pharaoh to serve as His instrument in the plans He had for Joseph, his family, and his nation. The fortunes of life for the believer cannot be explained except by the providential hand of God (45:5). Had Joseph's

---

<sup>44</sup> Bible Background Commentary

<sup>45</sup> JFB Commentary

<sup>46</sup> Life Application Notes

ill-fortune made him bitter, refusing to accept cheerfully the providences of God, he could have missed this remarkable display of God's infinite wisdom, power, and mercy.<sup>47</sup>

**into the prison:** Surprisingly, Potiphar did not simply kill Joseph outright. Is it possible that Joseph had so impressed Potiphar during the considerable time he had been in his service that Potiphar found himself not fully believing the story his wife told him? Is it possible that Potiphar determined to throw Joseph into the royal prison, over which he had command (39:1; 40:3; 41:9–11) in order to spare Joseph's life? In any case, Joseph wound up in prison for something he had steadfastly refused to do.<sup>48</sup>

**Ramban:** Linguists explain *sohar* as an arched chamber, similar in expression to, *agan hasohar* (a round goblet). In my opinion it is an underground house having a small opening above ground, through which the prisoners are lowered and from which they have light. The word *sohar* is thus derived from the word *sihara* (light) in Aramaic, just as in Hebrew, Scripture says; A transparency (*tzohar*) shalt thou make to the ark, the word *tzohar* being derived from *tzaharayim* (mid-day – when the light reaches its zenith). The difference between *tzohar* and *sohar* is that *tzohar* connotes an abundance of light, while *sohar* connotes minimal light.<sup>49</sup>

**Quodvultdeus;** “Under the veil of Allegory” Joseph was imprisoned. Our Joseph, that is, Christ, as Isaiah says, “was numbered with the transgressors.” The innocent man is led among the guilty by the wisdom of God, who “went down with him” – as was written – “into the pit, and did not leave him in bonds.” This Joseph of ours, Christ, claims, “I became as a man without help, free among the dead.” What followed had to happen, that is, the fact that Joseph found in the commander of the prison the grace of which he was full and that all the keys and the entire surveillance were given to him. This occurred in order that to the one before whom heaven prostrated in the figure of the sun, the moon and the stars, and the earth in that of its crops, also the subterranean creatures of the prison might submit. And therefore before our Joseph, that is, Christ, “every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.” I also think that the fact that two eunuchs of Pharaoh were imprisoned together with him is not incompatible with the mystery of the passion. In fact, it was completed in this manner by the number of the three crucified, of whom our Joseph, that is, Christ, by unveiling the mysteries, had to punish one with a deserved chastisement and had to save the other with a free grace. These holy actions were accomplished then under the veil of allegory, so that their full revelation might be reserved to us. (*Book of Promises and predictions of God 1.28.40.*<sup>50</sup>)

---

<sup>47</sup> Believer's Study Bible

<sup>48</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

<sup>49</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

<sup>50</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

## **Genesis 39:21**

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

**[LORD was with Joseph]** The Lord was the one friend Joseph had left who could do anything for him. He later raised up another friend close to the time when Joseph was to be delivered and exalted in Egypt (Genesis 39:21-23).

**[favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison]**

**Joseph—Favor and Disfavor - Dake**

Four Times Joseph Gained Favor:

1. With Jacob (Genesis 37:3)
2. With Potiphar (Genesis 39:4)
3. With Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39:7)
4. With Pharaoh (Genesis 41:37-44)

Three Times when Joseph Suffered Disfavor:

1. With his own brothers (Genesis 37:4-11)
2. With Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39:14-18)
3. With Potiphar himself (Genesis 39:19-20)

The **LORD** continued to be **with Joseph**—even in prison (see Ps. 139:7–12). **Mercy** can be translated *loyal love* (see Ps. 13:5). Here in a Egyptian prison, Joseph experienced God's loyal love. God faithfully kept His promises by staying with His people—even in rough circumstances (for God's promises to be with Abraham's descendants, see 12:1–3; 50:24). **the keeper of the prison:** This was the warden who was under the “captain of the guard” (40:3), namely, Potiphar (see 39:1).<sup>51</sup>

## **Genesis 39:22**

**And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it.**

**[committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it]** This was the second success of Joseph in Egypt. The world would call it good fortune, but Scripture attributes it to the God of Israel (Genesis 39:21). Joseph had absolute power over his new realm, including all the prisoners and all that was done in the prison.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

<sup>52</sup> Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

### **Genesis 39:23**

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

**The Lord . . . gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison, &c.**—It is highly probable, from the situation of this prison (Genesis 40:3), that the keeper might have been previously acquainted with Joseph and have had access to know his innocence of the crime laid to his charge, as well as with all the high integrity of his character. That may partly account for his showing so much kindness and confidence to his prisoner. But there was a higher influence at work; for "the Lord was with Joseph, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper."<sup>53</sup>

As a prisoner and slave, Joseph could have seen his situation as hopeless. Instead, he did his best with each small task given him. His diligence and positive attitude were soon noticed by the warden, who promoted him to prison administrator. Are you facing a seemingly hopeless predicament? At work, at home, or at school, follow Joseph's example by taking each small task and doing your best. Remember how God turned Joseph's situation around. He will see your efforts and can reverse even overwhelming odds.<sup>54</sup>

The tale ends where it began (v. 2), with an affirmation of God's presence in Joseph's affairs and the success it brings. Even in prison, the young man who had been second in rank in his family (37:3) and second in rank in the chief steward's household (vv. 4-6) achieves the same status, when the warden puts him in charge of the other prisoners.<sup>55</sup>

This chapter shows that Joseph was a faithful servant of God. With the dreams of prosperity in his memory he remained loyal to God rather than yield to temptation at the first glimpse of his rise to power. Wise rulers recognize that allegiance to God is the first requirement of an ideal king. Israel too would learn that she should remain faithful to the Lord in spite of the consequences, which included the suffering of the righteous.

This story is similar to the advice given frequently in Proverbs by King Solomon. It is folly to yield to the temptations of a flattering woman or man and ruin all prospects of a life of service to God. The way of wisdom is to consider the cost of sin. Joseph did not yield to temptation because he was convinced God had something marvelous for him to do. Joseph would not throw away God's blessings for the pleasures of sin. Nor was he troubled because he suffered for his faithfulness. God would ultimately honor him as He had promised. *But he would have to wait 13 years...*<sup>56</sup>

**Torah Class:** Joseph is a very good-looking young man, and Potiphar's wife is quite taken with him. He also, in some way, which we're not told, became prosperous; so apparently he was able to do more than simply serve Potiphar. All we know is that God was with Joseph and he did well for himself and for Potiphar. We're going to find this

---

<sup>53</sup> JFB Commentary

<sup>54</sup> Life Application Notes

<sup>55</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

<sup>56</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

statement that God was with Joseph 4 times in this chapter; and obviously it is to make the point that even though Joseph was abandoned by his family, and placed into a strange land with strange gods, the God of Israel was still with him.....protecting, controlling, and guiding events. Bad circumstances don't mean God has turned His back on you. Even the fact that the Semite Hyksos were in power was Divine Providence.....though, of course, Joseph was oblivious to it all.

Well, Potiphar's wife was infatuated with Joseph and constantly after him. He refuses all of her advances. It happens again; and again and again. One day, Mrs. Potiphar tires of being rebuffed by a purchased house servant, and grabs Joseph. He runs for his life, but in the doing, she grabs a piece of his garment. Then she decides to take revenge for being scorned: she claims that Joseph tried to rape her, tells her husband, and Joseph is thrown into prison. Notice also that she declares in V14 that this Hebrew was brought in by her husband to make fools of her household. This is another indication of the hatred the Egyptians had for any Semite, and this due to their current condition of being subjugated by Semite people...even though this particular group of Semites were not Hebrews.

And, within no time, Joseph is made a supervisor over all the prisoners. By the way: although the concept of prison is one that has always been part of our society, it was not part of every society in Joseph's day. Prison didn't exist among most of the Canaanite societies, and it didn't exist among the Hebrews. God protected Joseph even though he was locked up. Interestingly, we're going to find out in the next chapter, Joseph was not kept with the other prisoners. He was being kept in the home of the prison captain, though it was a dungeon or basement of some kind, and not the normal household living space. But, just as important was that without his knowing it; Joseph was proving his trustworthiness to the very man who had locked him up, and undoubtedly all who came into contact with him. This was about to serve him well, as God was about to do something astonishing. God's Governing Dynamic #2, Divine Providence, is a central theme of Joseph's life.<sup>57</sup>

#### **Adam Clarke Summary:**

**The Lord was with Joseph**—It is but of little consequence where the lot of a servant of God may be cast; like Joseph he is ever employed for his master, and God honors him and prospers his work.

1. HE who acknowledges God in all his ways, has the promise that God shall direct all his steps. Joseph's captivity shall promote God's glory; and to this end God works in him, for him, by him. Even the irreligious can see when the Most High distinguishes his followers. Joseph's master saw that Jehovah was with him; and from this we may learn that the knowledge of the true God was in Egypt, even before the time of Joseph, though his worship was neither established nor even tolerated there. Both Abraham and Isaac had been in Egypt, and they had left a savor of true godliness behind them.
2. Joseph's virtue in resisting the solicitations of his mistress was truly exemplary. Had he reasoned after the manner of men, he might have soon found that the proposed intrigue might be carried on with the utmost secrecy and greatly to his secular advantage. But he chose to risk all rather than injure a kind benefactor,

---

<sup>57</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

defile his conscience, and sin against God. Such conduct is so exceedingly rare that his example has stood on the records of time as almost without a parallel, admired by all, applauded by most, and in similar circumstances, I am afraid, imitated by few. The fable of the brave and virtuous Bellerophon and Sthenobaea, wife of Proetus, king of the Argives, was probably founded on this history.

3. Joseph fled and got him out. To know when to fight and when to fly are of great importance in the Christian life. Some temptations must be manfully met, resisted, and thus overcome; from others we must fly. He who stands to contend or reason, especially in such a case as that mentioned here, is infallibly ruined.

*Principiis obsta*, “resist the first overtures of sin,” is a good maxim. After-remedies come too late.

4. A woman of the spirit of Potiphar’s wife is capable of any species of evil. When she could not get her wicked ends answered, she began to accuse. This is precisely Satan’s custom: he first tempts men to sin, and then accuses them as having committed it, even where the temptation has been faithfully and perseveringly resisted! By this means he can trouble a tender conscience, and weaken faith by bringing confusion into the mind. Thus the inexperienced especially are often distracted and cast down; hence Satan is properly called the accuser of the brethren, Revelation 12:10.

Very useful lessons may be drawn from every part of the relation in this chapter, but detailing the facts and reasoning upon them would be more likely to produce than prevent the evil. An account of this kind cannot be touched with too gentle a hand. Others have been profuse here; I chose to be parsimonious, for reasons which the intelligent reader will feel as well as myself. Let this remark be applied to what has been said on the sin of Onan, Genesis 38.<sup>58</sup>

**God, Grace**—God’s grace was with Joseph in the disaster of his being sold into slavery and his imprisonment on false charges. In this instance God changed disastrous circumstances into a blessing for Joseph. In the following chapters Joseph rose to a place of prominence, second only to Pharaoh in all of Egypt. A gracious and sovereign God can use any or all circumstances to further His cause or bless His people. God does not cause all things that happen. In His grace God can use calamities to work out blessing and victory. God uses what we view as evil to work out His purpose in the lives of His people.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

<sup>59</sup> Disciple’s Study Bible

**Dake:** Twenty-two Facts About Joseph:

1. The eleventh of Jacob's twelve sons but the first by his favorite wife (Genesis 30:22-26)
2. His father's favorite child (Genesis 37:2-3)
3. Had an unimpeachable character (Genesis 37:2,14; Genesis 39:7-20; Genesis 50:15-21)
4. Had the divine gift of interpreting dreams (Genesis 37:5-10; Genesis 40:7-23; Genesis 41:1-44)
5. Had a flawless record of faithfulness and trust in God and man (Genesis 37:2,13; Genesis 39:1-23; Genesis 40:1-23; Genesis 41:14-50:21)
6. Was hated and rejected by his brethren (Genesis 37:4-33)
7. Was sold into foreign slavery (Genesis 37:28-36; Genesis 39:1)
8. Adjusted his life perfectly in favor or disfavor, slavery or freedom, as a servant or master (Genesis 37:2-41:57)
9. Prospered by God in all places of trust (Genesis 39:2-3,23; Genesis 40:1-23; Genesis 41:14-57)
10. Was content and happy in adversity or success (Genesis 39:3-23; Genesis 40:1-23)
11. Was an outstanding witness for God (Genesis 39:3-6; Genesis 40:8; Genesis 41:8-36)
12. Found grace in the eyes of all except his brethren (Genesis 39:3-13,21-23; Genesis 41:14-44)
13. Served with distinction in every place of responsibility (Genesis 37:2; Genesis 39:3-41:57)
14. Was put in the highest places of trust in private and governmental affairs (Genesis 39:3-41:57)
15. God blessed private industry and the whole nation of Egypt because of him (Genesis 39:4-41:57)
16. Was handsome and perfect in body (Genesis 39:6)
17. Maintained moral purity in face of severe and daily temptation (Genesis 39:7-13)
18. Suffered for righteousness (Genesis 39:14-23)
19. Suffered the depths of humiliation and rose to the highest exaltation (Genesis 39:14-41:57)
20. Was father of two of the greatest tribes of Israel (Genesis 41:50-52; Genesis 48:15-22)
21. Showed forgiveness to his enemies (Genesis 42:1-45:20; Genesis 50:15-21)
22. Saved Israel from death, thus preserving the line through whom the Messiah was to come (Genesis 45:21-47:31; Genesis 50:20; Matthew 1)<sup>60</sup>

**Egyptian tale of two brothers.** The Nineteenth Dynasty (c. 1225 B.C.) Egyptian tale of Anubis and Bata has many similarities to the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. In both cases a younger man is seduced by his master's wife and then falsely accused of rape when he refuses to give in to her desires. What may have made this Egyptian story so popular (the surviving papyrus is written in a cursive style [hieratic] rather than the more formal hieroglyphic characters) is the common tale of rivalry between brothers (like

---

<sup>60</sup> Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

Jacob and Esau), the high suspense and the use of folklore techniques (talking animals, intervention of the gods). Aside from the common general setting, the Joseph story has little else in common with this Egyptian tale.<sup>61</sup>

**Bible Knowledge Commentary:** This chapter shows that Joseph was a faithful servant of God. With the dreams of prosperity in his memory (37:6-7, 9) he remained loyal to God rather than yield to temptation at the first glimpse of his rise to power. Wise rulers recognize that allegiance to God is the first requirement of an ideal king. Israel too would learn that she should remain faithful to the Lord in spite of the consequences, which included the suffering of the righteous.

This story is similar to the advice given frequently in Proverbs by King Solomon. It is folly to yield to the temptations of a flattering woman or man and ruin all prospects of a life of service to God. The way of wisdom is to consider the cost of sin. Joseph did not yield to temptation because he was convinced God had something marvelous for him to do. Joseph would not throw away God's blessings for the pleasures of sin. Nor was he troubled because he suffered for his faithfulness. God would ultimately honor him as He had promised.<sup>62</sup>

### **Pink; Gleanings in Genesis:**

Genesis 39 is more than a continuation of what has been before us in Gen. 37, being separated, as it is, from that chapter by what is recorded in 38. Genesis in 39 is really *a new beginning* in the type, taking us back to the Incarnation, and tracing the experiences of the Lord Jesus from another angle. Continuing our enumeration (see previous article), we may observe:

### **26. Joseph Becomes a Servant**

“And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, brought him out of the hands of the Ishmaelites, which had brought him down thither” (39:1). What a contrast from being the beloved son in his father's house to the degradation of slavery in Egypt! But this was as nothing compared with the voluntary self humiliation of the Lord Jesus. He who was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant (Phil. 2:6, 7). “Bondslave” expresses the force of the original better than “servant.” It is to this the prophetic language of Psalm 40 refers. There we hear the Lord Jesus saying, “Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire; *Mine ears hast Thou digged*; burnt offering and sin offering hast Thou not required. Then said I, lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of Me. I delight to do Thy will, O My God.” These words carry us back to Exod. 21:5, 6: “And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free. Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and *his master shall bore his ear through with an awl*, and he shall serve him for ever.” The Lord Jesus was the Speaker of that prophecy in Psalm 40, and the fulfiller of this type in Exod. 21. He was the One who took the Servant place, and voluntarily entered into the degradation of slavery. And it is this which Joseph here so strikingly typified.

---

<sup>61</sup> Bible Background Commentary

<sup>62</sup> Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament

## 27. Joseph Was a Prosperous Servant

“And the Lord was with Joseph, and *he was a prosperous man*, and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand” (39:2, 3). Observe, particularly, it is here said, the Lord made all that Joseph did “to *prosper* in his hand.” How these words remind us of two prophetic scriptures which speak of the perfect Servant of Jehovah. The first is the opening Psalm, which brings before us the “Blessed Man,” the Sian who walked not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of the scornful; the Man whose delight was in the Law of the Lord, and in whose Law He did meditate day and night; the Man of whom God said, “And He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth His fruit in His Season; His leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever He doeth shall *prosper*” (Ps. 1:3). Manifestly, this spoke, specifically, of the Lord Jesus, in whom, alone, the terms of the opening verses of this Psalm were fully realized. The second scripture is found in that matchless fifty-third of Isa. (every sentence of which referred to the Son of God incarnate, and to Him, expressly, as Jehovah’s “*Servant*,” see 52:13), we read, “The pleasure of the Lord shall *prosper* in His hand.” How marvelously accurate the type! Of Joseph it is recorded, “*The Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand*” (Gen. 39:3). Of Christ it is said, “*The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand*” (Isa. 53:10).

## 28. Joseph’s Master Was Well Pleased with Him

“And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand” (39:4). How could it be otherwise? Joseph was entirely different from any other servant that Potiphar ever had. The fear of God was upon him; the Lord was with him, prospering him; and he served his master faithfully. So it was with the One whom Joseph foreshadowed. The Lord Jesus was entirely different from any other servant God ever had. The fear of the Lord was upon Him (see Isa. 11:2). And so faithfully did He serve God, He could say, “I do *always* those things that please Him” (John 8:29).

## 29. Joseph, the Servant, Was Made a Blessing to Others

“And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house and in the field” (34:5). So, too, the Father entrusted to the Son all the interests of the Godhead—the manifestation of the Divine character, the glorifying of God’s name, and the vindication of His throne. And what has been the outcome of the Beloved of the Father taking the Servant place, and assuming and discharging these onerous responsibilities? Has not the Lord “blessed” the antitypical “Egyptian’s house,” for the sake of that One whom Joseph foreshadowed? Clearly, the “Egyptian’s house” symbolized the *world*, and how bountifully has the world been blessed for Christ’s sake!

## 30. Joseph Was a Goodly Person

“And Joseph was a goodly person, and well favored” (39:6). How carefully has the Holy Spirit here guarded the type! We must always distinguish between the person and the place which he occupies. Joseph had entered into the degradation of slavery. He was no longer at his own disposal, but subject to the will of another. He was no longer dwelling in his father’s house in Canaan, but instead, was a bond slave in an Egyptian’s house. Such was his *position*. But concerning his *person* we are told, “Joseph was a

*goodly* person, and well favored.” So, too, the Son of God took a lowly place, the place of humiliation and shame, the place of submission and servitude. Yet, how zealously did the Father see to it that the glory of His person was guarded! No sooner was He laid in the manger (the *place* He took), than God sent the angels to announce to the Bethlehem shepherds that the One born (the *person*) was none other than “Christ, the Lord.” A little later, the wise men from the East prostrate themselves before the young child in worship. As soon as He comes forth to enter (the place of) His public ministry—serving others, instead of being served—God causes one to go before Him and testify that he was not worthy to stoop down and unloose the shoe-latchet of the (person) of the Lamb of God. So, too, on the Cross, where, supremely, God’s Servant was seen in the place of shame, God caused Him to be owned as “the Son of God” (Matt. 27:54)! Truly, was *He* a “goodly person, and well favored.”

### **31. Joseph Was Sorely Tempted, Yet Sinned Not**

“And it came to pass after these things, that his master’s wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. 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. There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back anything from me but thee, because thou art his wife; how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? 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. And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within. 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” (39:7–12).

It is surely not without design that the Holy Spirit has placed in juxtaposition the account of the unchastity of Judah in Gen. 38 with the chastity of Joseph here in Gen. 39. And how significant that the unfaithfulness of the one is placed *before* the faithfulness of the other! Joseph’s temptation foreshadowed the temptation of the Lord Jesus, the last Adam, and His faithfulness in refusing the evil solicitations of Satan, which was in marked contrast from the failure of the first Adam, before Him. The marvelous accuracy of our type may be further seen by observing that Joseph’s temptation is here divided into *three* distinct parts (as was that of our Lord), see verses 7, 10, 12. So, again, it should be remarked, that Joseph was tempted not in Canaan, by his brethren, but in Egypt (symbol of the world), by the wife of a captain of Pharaoh’s guard. And the temptation suffered by the Lord Jesus emanated, not from His brethren according to the flesh, but from Satan, “the prince of this world.”

Beautiful is it to mark how Joseph resisted the repeated temptation—“How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” This is the more striking if we link up this utterance of Joseph’s with Ps. 105:19, “The *Word* of the Lord tried him.” So it was by the same Word that the Saviour repulsed the Enemy. But notice here one point in *contrast*: “And he (Joseph) left his garment in her hand, *and fled*, and got him out” (39:12). So, the Apostle Paul, writing to Timothy, enjoined him to “*flee* youthful lusts” (2 Tim. 2:22). How different with the Perfect One! He said, “Get thee hence, Satan” (Matt. 4:10), and we read, “Then the Devil *leaveth* Him.” In all things *He has the preeminence*.

### **32. Joseph Was Falsely Accused**

“And she laid up his garment by her, until his lord came home. And she spake unto him according to these words, The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto

us, came in unto me to mock me. And it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out” (39:16–18). There was no ground whatever for a *true* charge to be brought against Joseph, so an *an just* one was preferred. So it was, too, with Him who was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” His enemies “the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put Him to death. *But found none.*” Yet, at the last, “came two *false witnesses*” (Matt. 26:59, 60), who bore untruthful testimony against Him.

### **33. Joseph Attempted No Defense**

“And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, saying, After this manner did thy servant to me: that his wrath was kindled” (39:19), though notice, it does not add, “against Joseph.” In Gen. 37, we beheld Joseph’s passive submission to the wrong done him by his heartless brethren. So here, when falsely and foully accused by this Egyptian woman, he attempts no self vindication; not a word of appeal is made; nor is there any murmuring against the cruel injustice done him, as he is cast into prison. There was no recrimination; nothing but a quiet enduring of the wrong. When Joseph was reviled, like the Saviour, he reviled not again. And how all this reminds us of what we read in Isa. 53:7, with its recorded fulfillment in the Gospels, “He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, *yet He opened not His mouth*; He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth!”

### **34. Joseph Was Cast into Prison**

“And Joseph’s master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners were bound; and he was there in the prison” (39:20).

“Taking the garment that Joseph had left behind him in his flight, she used it as a proof of his guilt, and first to the servants, and then to her husband. She made out a case against the Hebrew slave. The way she spoke of her husband to the servants (verse 14) shows the true character of the woman, and perhaps also the terms of her married life; while the fact that Potiphar only placed Joseph in prison instead of commanding him to be put to death is another indication of the state of affairs. For appearance’ sake Potiphar must take some action, but the precise action taken tells its own tale. He evidently did not credit her story” (Dr. G. Thomas).

Just as Joseph, though completely innocent, was unrighteously cast into prison, so our Lord was unjustly sentenced to death by one who owned repeatedly, “I find no fault in Him.” And how striking is the parallel between the acts of Potiphar and Pilate. It is evident that Potiphar did not believe the accusation which his wife brought against Joseph—had he really done so, as has been pointed out, he would have ordered his Hebrew slave put to death. But to save appearances he had Joseph cast into prison. Now mark the close parallel in Pilate. He, too, it is evident, did not believe in the guilt of our Lord or why have been so reluctant to give his consent for Him to be crucified? He, too, knew the character of those who accused the Saviour. But, for the sake of appearances—as an officer of the Roman Empire against the One who was charged with being a rebel against Csesar, for political expediency—he passed sentence.

### **35. Joseph Thus Suffered at the Hands of the Gentiles**

Not only was Joseph envied and hated by his own brethren, and sold by them into the hands of the Gentiles, but he was also treated unfairly by the Gentiles too, and unjustly cast into prison. So it was with his Antitype, “The kings of the earth stood up, and the

rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed both Herod and Pontius Pilate, *with the Gentiles*, and the people of Israel were gathered together” (Acts 4:26, 27).

### **36. Joseph, the Innocent One, Suffered Severely**

In Stephen’s speech we find a statement which bears this out. Said he, “And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt,” and then, referring to his experiences after he had become a slave, he adds, “but God was with him, and delivered him out of *all his afflictions*” (Acts 7:9, 10). How much, we wonder, is covered by these words! What indignities, trials and pains, was he called on to suffer? In Ps. 105 there is another word more specific, “He (God) sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: *whose feet they hurt with fetters*; he was laid in iron” (verses 17, 18). How these references remind us of that Blessed One, who was mocked and spat upon, scourged and crowned with thorns, and nailed to the cruel tree!

### **37. Joseph Won the Respect of His Jailer**

“But the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison” (39:21). Is not the antitype of this found in the fact that the Roman centurion, the one who had charge of the crucifixion of the Saviour, cried, “Certainly this was a Righteous Man” (Luke 23:47). Thus did God give His Son favor in the sight of this Roman who corresponded with Joseph’s jailor.<sup>63</sup>

#### **Book of Jasher: Chapter 44**

1 And the sons of Ishmael who had bought Joseph from the Midianites, who had bought him from his brethren, went to Egypt with Joseph, and they came upon the borders of Egypt, and when they came near unto Egypt, they met four men of the sons of Medan the son of Abraham, who had gone forth from the land of Egypt on their journey. 2 And the Ishmaelites said unto them, Do you desire to purchase this slave from us? and they said, Deliver him over to us, and they delivered Joseph over to them, and they beheld him, that he was a very comely youth and they purchased him for twenty shekels. 3 And the Ishmaelites continued their journey to Egypt and the Medanim also returned that day to Egypt, and the Medanim said to each other, Behold we have heard that Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, seeketh a good servant who shall stand before him to attend him, and to make him overseer over his house and all belonging to him. 4 Now therefore come let us sell him to him for what we may desire, if he be able to give unto us that which we shall require for him. 5 And these Medanim went and came to the house of Potiphar, and said unto him, We have heard that thou seekest a good servant to attend thee, behold we have a servant that will please thee, if thou canst give unto us that which we may desire, and we will sell him unto thee. 6 And Potiphar said, Bring him before me, and I will see him, and if he please me I will give unto you that which you may require for him. 7 And the Medanim went and brought Joseph and placed him before Potiphar, and he saw him, and he pleased him exceedingly, and Potiphar said unto them, Tell me what you require for this youth? 8 And they said, Four hundred pieces of silver we desire for him, and Potiphar said, I will give it you if you bring me the record of his sale to you, and will tell me his history, for perhaps he may be stolen, for this youth is neither a slave, nor the son of a slave, but I observe in him the appearance of a goodly and handsome person. 9 And the Medanim went and brought unto him the Ishmaelites

---

<sup>63</sup>Pink, A. W. (2005). *Gleanings in Genesis* (363). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

who had sold him to them, and they told him, saying, He is a slave and we sold him to them. 10 And Potiphar heard the words of the Ishmaelites in his giving the silver unto the Medanim, and the Medanim took the silver and went on their journey, and the Ishmaelites also returned home. 11 And Potiphar took Joseph and brought him to his house that he might serve him, and Joseph found favor in the sight of Potiphar, and he placed confidence in him, and made him overseer over his house, and all that belonged to him he delivered over into his hand. 12 And the Lord was with Joseph and he became a prosperous man, and the Lord blessed the house of Potiphar for the sake of Joseph. 13 And Potiphar left all that he had in the hand of Joseph, and Joseph was one that caused things to come in and go out, and everything was regulated by his wish in the house of Potiphar. 14 And Joseph was eighteen years old, a youth with beautiful eyes and of comely appearance, and like unto him was not in the whole land of Egypt. 15 At that time whilst he was in his master's house, going in and out of the house and attending his master, Zelicah, his master's wife, lifted up her eyes toward Joseph and she looked at him, and behold he was a youth comely and well favored. 16 And she coveted his beauty in her heart, and her soul was fixed upon Joseph, and she enticed him day after day, and Zelicah persuaded Joseph daily, but Joseph did not lift up his eyes to behold his master's wife. 17 And Zelicah said unto him, How goodly are thy appearance and form, truly I have looked at all the slaves, and have not seen so beautiful a slave as thou art; and Joseph said unto her, Surely he who created me in my mother's womb created all mankind. 18 And she said unto him, How beautiful are thine eyes, with which thou hast dazzled all the inhabitants of Egypt, men and women; and he said unto her, How beautiful they are whilst we are alive, but shouldst thou behold them in the grave, surely thou wouldst move away from them. 19 And she said unto him, How beautiful and pleasing are all thy words; take now, I pray thee, the harp which is in the house, and play with thy hands and let us hear thy words. 20 And he said unto her, How beautiful and pleasing are my words when I speak the praise of my God and his glory; and she said unto him, How very beautiful is the hair of thy head, behold the golden comb which is in the house, take it I pray thee, and curl the hair of thy head. 21 And he said unto her, How long wilt thou speak these words? cease to utter these words to me, and rise and attend to thy domestic affairs. 22 And she said unto him, There is no one in my house, and there is nothing to attend to but to thy words and to thy wish; yet notwithstanding all this, she could not bring Joseph unto her, neither did he place his eye upon her, but directed his eyes below to the ground.

23 And Zelicah desired Joseph in her heart, that he should lie with her, and at the time that Joseph was sitting in the house doing his work, Zelicah came and sat before him, and she enticed him daily with her discourse to lie with her, or ever to look at her, but Joseph would not hearken to her. 24 And she said unto him, If thou wilt not do according to my words, I will chastise thee with the punishment of death, and put an iron yoke upon thee. 25 And Joseph said unto her, Surely God who created man looseth the fetters of prisoners, and it is he who will deliver me from thy prison and from thy judgment. 26 And when she could not prevail over him, to persuade him, and her soul being still fixed upon him, her desire threw her into a grievous sickness. 27 And all the women of Egypt came to visit her, and they said unto her, Why art thou in this declining state? thou that lackest nothing; surely thy husband is a great and esteemed prince in the sight of the king, shouldst thou lack anything of what thy heart desireth? 28 And Zelicah answered

them, saying, This day it shall be made known to you, whence this disorder springs in which you see me, and she commanded her maid servants to prepare food for all the women, and she made a banquet for them, and all the women ate in the house of Zelicah. 29 And she gave them knives to peel the citrons to eat them, and she commanded that they should dress Joseph in costly garments, and that he should appear before them, and Joseph came before their eyes and all the women looked on Joseph, and could not take their eyes from off him, and they all cut their hands with the knives that they had in their hands, and all the citrons that were in their hands were filled with blood. 30 And they knew not what they had done but they continued to look at the beauty of Joseph, and did not turn their eyelids from him. 31 And Zelicah saw what they had done, and she said unto them, What is this work that you have done? behold I gave you citrons to eat and you have all cut your hands. 32 And all the women saw their hands, and behold they were full of blood, and their blood flowed down upon their garments, and they said unto her, this slave in your house has overcome us, and we could not turn our eyelids from him on account of his beauty. 33 And she said unto them, Surely this happened to you in the moment that you looked at him, and you could not contain yourselves from him; how then can I refrain when he is constantly in my house, and I see him day after day going in and out of my house? how then can I keep from declining or even from perishing on account of this? 34 And they said unto her, the words are true, for who can see this beautiful form in the house and refrain from him, and is he not thy slave and attendant in thy house, and why dost thou not tell him that which is in thy heart, and sufferest thy soul to perish through this matter? 35 And she said unto them, I am daily endeavoring to persuade him, and he will not consent to my wishes, and I promised him everything that is good, and yet I could meet with no return from him; I am therefore in a declining state as you see. 36 And Zelicah became very ill on account of her desire toward Joseph, and she was desperately lovesick on account of him, and all the people of the house of Zelicah and her husband knew nothing of this matter, that Zelicah was ill on account of her love to Joseph. 37 And all the people of her house asked her, saying, Why art thou ill and declining, and lackest nothing? and she said unto them, I know not this thing which is daily increasing upon me. 38 And all the women and her friends came daily to see her, and they spoke with her, and she said unto them, This can only be through the love of Joseph; and they said unto her, Entice him and seize him secretly, perhaps he may hearken to thee, and put off this death from thee. 39 And Zelicah became worse from her love to Joseph, and she continued to decline, till she had scarce strength to stand. 40 And on a certain day Joseph was doing his master's work in the house, and Zelicah came secretly and fell suddenly upon him, and Joseph rose up against her, and he was more powerful than she, and he brought her down to the ground. 41 And Zelicah wept on account of the desire of her heart toward him, and she supplicated him with weeping, and her tears flowed down her cheeks, and she spoke unto him in a voice of supplication and in bitterness of soul, saying, 42 Hast thou ever heard, seen or known of so beautiful a woman as I am, or better than myself, who speak daily unto thee, fall into a decline through love for thee, confer all this honor upon thee, and still thou wilt not hearken to my voice? 43 And if it be through fear of thy master lest he punish thee, as the king liveth no harm shall come to thee from thy master through this thing; now, therefore pray listen to me, and consent for the sake of the honor which I have conferred upon thee, and put off this death from me, and why should I die for thy sake? and she ceased to speak.

44 And Joseph answered her, saying, Refrain from me, and leave this matter to my master; behold my master knoweth not what there is with me in the house, for all that belongeth to him he has delivered into my hand, and how shall I do these things in my master's house? 45 For he hath also greatly honored me in his house, and he hath also made me overseer over his house, and he hath exalted me, and there is no one greater in this house than I am, and my master hath refrained nothing from me, excepting thee who art his wife, how then canst thou speak these words unto me, and how can I do this great evil and sin to God and to thy husband? 46 Now therefore refrain from me, and speak no more such words as these, for I will not hearken to thy words. But Zelicah would not hearken to Joseph when he spoke these words unto her, but she daily enticed him to listen to her. 47 And it was after this that the brook of Egypt was filled above all its sides, and all the inhabitants of Egypt went forth, and also the king and princes went forth with timbrels and dances, for it was a great rejoicing in Egypt, and a holiday at the time of the inundation of the sea Sihor, and they went there to rejoice all the day. 48 And when the Egyptians went out to the river to rejoice, as was their custom, all the people of the house of Potiphar went with them, but Zelicah would not go with them, for she said, I am indisposed, and she remained alone in the house, and no other person was with her in the house. 49 And she rose up and ascended to her temple in the house, and dressed herself in princely garments, and she placed upon her head precious stones of onyx stones, inlaid with silver and gold, and she beautified her face and skin with all sorts of women's purifying liquids, and she perfumed the temple and the house with cassia and frankincense, and she spread myrrh and aloes, and she afterward sat in the entrance of the temple, in the passage of the house, through which Joseph passed to do his work, and behold Joseph came from the field, and entered the house to do his master's work. 50 And he came to the place through which he had to pass, and he saw all the work of Zelicah, and he turned back. 51 And Zelicah saw Joseph turning back from her, and she called out to him, saying What aileth thee Joseph? come to thy work, and behold I will make room for thee until thou shalt have passed to thy seat. 52 And Joseph returned and came to the house, and passed from thence to the place of his seat, and he sat down to do his master's work as usual and behold Zelicah came to him and stood before him in princely garments, and the scent from her clothes was spread to a distance. 53 And she hastened and caught hold of Joseph and his garments, and she said unto him, As the king liveth if thou wilt not perform my request thou shalt die this day, and she hastened and stretched forth her other hand and drew a sword from beneath her garments, and she placed it upon Joseph's neck, and she said, Rise and perform my request, and if not thou diest this day. 54 And Joseph was afraid of her at her doing this thing, and he rose up to flee from her, and she seized the front of his garments, and in the terror of his flight the garment which Zelicah seized was torn, and Joseph left the garment in the hand of Zelicah, and he fled and got out, for he was in fear. 55 And when Zelicah saw that Joseph's garment was torn, and that he had left it in her hand, and had fled, she was afraid of her life, lest the report should spread concerning her, and she rose up and acted with cunning, and put off the garments in which she was dressed, and she put on her other garments. 56 And she took Joseph's garment, and she laid it beside her, and she went and seated herself in the place where she had sat in her illness, before the people of her house had gone out to the river, and she called a young lad who was then in the house, and she ordered him to call the people of the house to her. 57 And when she saw them she said unto them with a loud

voice and lamentation, See what a Hebrew your master has brought to me in the house, for he came this day to lie with me. 58 For when you had gone out he came to the house, and seeing that there was no person in the house, he came unto me, and caught hold of me, with intent to lie with me. 59 And I seized his garments and tore them and called out against him with a loud voice, and when I had lifted up my voice he was afraid of his life and left his garment before me, and fled. 60 And the people of her house spoke nothing, but their wrath was very much kindled against Joseph, and they went to his master and told him the words of his wile. 61 And Potiphar came home enraged, and his wife cried out to him, saying, What is this thing that thou hast done unto me in bringing a Hebrew servant into my house, for he came unto me this day to sport with me; thus did he do unto me this day. 62 And Potiphar heard the words of his wife, and he ordered Joseph to be punished with severe stripes, and they did so to him. 63 And whilst they were smiting him, Joseph called out with a loud voice, and he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and he said, O Lord God, thou knowest that I am innocent of all these things, and why shall I die this day through falsehood, by the hand of these uncircumcised wicked men, whom thou knowest?

64 And whilst Potiphar's men were beating Joseph, he continued to cry out and weep, and there was a child there eleven months old, and the Lord opened the mouth of the child, and he spake these words before Potiphar's men, who were smiting Joseph, saying, 65 What do you want of this man, and why do you do this evil unto him? my mother speaketh falsely and uttereth lies; thus was the transaction. 66 And the child told them accurately all that happened, and all the words of Zelicah to Joseph day after day did he declare unto them. 67 And all the men heard the words of the child and they wondered greatly at the child's words, and the child ceased to speak and became still. 68 And Potiphar was very much ashamed at the words of his son, and he commanded his men not to beat Joseph any more, and the men ceased beating Joseph. 69 And Potiphar took Joseph and ordered him to be brought to justice before the priests, who were judges belonging to the king, in order to judge him concerning this affair. 70 And Potiphar and Joseph came before the priests who were the king's judges, and he said unto them, Decide I pray you, what judgment is due to a servant, for thus has he done. 71 And the priests said unto Joseph, Why didst thou do this thing to thy master? and Joseph answered them, saying, Not so my lords, thus was the matter; and Potiphar said unto Joseph, Surely I entrusted in thy hands all that belonged to me, and I withheld nothing from thee but my wife, and how couldst thou do this evil? 72 And Joseph answered saying, Not so my lord, as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, my lord, the word which thou didst hear from thy wife is untrue, for thus was the affair this day. 73 A year has elapsed to me since I have been in thy house; hast thou seen any iniquity in me, or any thing which might cause thee to demand my life? 74 And the priests said unto Potiphar, Send, we pray thee, and let them bring before us Joseph's torn garment, and let us see the tear in it, and if it shall be that the tear is in front of the garment, then his face must have been opposite to her and she must have caught hold of him, to come to her, and with deceit did thy wife do all that she has spoken. 75 And they brought Joseph's garment before the priests who were judges, and they saw and behold the tear was in front of Joseph, and all the judging priests knew that she had pressed him, and they said, The judgment of death is not due to this slave for he has done nothing, but his judgment is, that he be placed in the prison house on account of the report, which through him has gone forth against thy

wife. 76 And Potiphar heard their words, and he placed him in the prison house, the place where the king's prisoners are confined, and Joseph was in the house of confinement twelve years. 77 And notwithstanding this, his master's wife did not turn from him, and she did not cease from speaking to him day after day to hearken to her, and at the end of three months Zelicah continued going to Joseph to the house of confinement day by day, and she enticed him to hearken to her, and Zelicah said unto Joseph, How long wilt thou remain in this house? but hearken now to my voice, and I will bring thee out of this house. 78 And Joseph answered her, saying, It is better for me to remain in this house than to hearken to thy words, to sin against God; and she said unto him, If thou wilt not perform my wish, I will pluck out thine eyes, add fetters to thy feet, and will deliver thee into the hands of them whom thou didst not know before. 79 And Joseph answered her and said, Behold the God of the whole earth is able to deliver me from all that thou canst do unto me, for he openeth the eyes of the blind, and looseth those that are bound, and preserveth all strangers who are unacquainted with the land. 80 And when Zelicah was unable to persuade Joseph to hearken to her, she left off going to entice him; and Joseph was still confined in the house of confinement. And Jacob the father of Joseph, and all his brethren who were in the land of Canaan still mourned and wept in those days on account of Joseph, for Jacob refused to be comforted for his son Joseph, and Jacob cried aloud, and wept and mourned all those days.<sup>64</sup>

**Edersheim:** Potiphar's office at the court of Pharaoh was that of "chief of the executioners," most probably (as it is rendered in our Authorized Version) captain of the king's body-guard. In the house of Potiphar it went with Joseph as formerly in his own home. For it is not in the power of circumstances, prosperous or adverse, to alter our characters. He that is faithful in little shall also be faithful in much; and from him who knoweth not how to employ what is committed to his charge, shall be taken even that he hath. Joseph was faithful, honest, upright, and conscientious, because in his earthly, he served a heavenly Master, Whose presence he always realized. Accordingly "Jehovah was with him," and "Jehovah made all that he did to prosper in his hand." His master was not long in observing this. From an ordinary domestic slave he promoted him to be "overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand." The confidence was not misplaced. Jehovah's blessing henceforth rested upon Potiphar's substance, and he "left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought that he had, save the bread which he did eat." The sculptures and paintings of the ancient Egyptian tombs bring vividly before us the daily life and duties of Joseph. "The property of great men is shown to have been managed by scribes, who exercised a most methodical and minute supervision over all the operations of agriculture, gardening, the keeping of live stock, and fishing. Every product was carefully registered, to check the dishonesty of the laborers, who in Egypt have always been famous in this respect. Probably in no country was farming ever more systematic. Joseph's previous knowledge of tending flocks, and perhaps of husbandry, and his truthful character, exactly fitted him for the post of overseer. How long he filled it we are not told."\*

\* R. S. Poole, as above.

---

<sup>64</sup> The Book of Jasher, Faithfully Translated 1840, Hebrew to English, J.H.Perry & Co, Salt Lake City UT

It is a common mistake to suppose that earnest religion and uprightness must necessarily be attended by success, even in this world. It is, indeed, true that God will not withhold any good thing from those whose Sun and Shield He is; but then success may not always be a good thing for them. Besides, God often tries the faith and patience of His people - and that is the meaning of many trials. Still oftener are they needed for discipline and training, or that they may learn to glorify God in their sufferings. In the case of Joseph it was both a temptation and a trial by which he was prepared, outwardly and inwardly, for the position he was to occupy. The beauty which Joseph had inherited from his mother exposed him to wicked suggestions on the part of his master's wife, which will surprise those least who are best acquainted with the state of ancient Egyptian society. Joseph stood quite alone in a heathen land and house. He was surrounded only by what would blunt his moral sense, and render the temptation all the more powerful. He had also, as compared with us, a very imperfect knowledge of the law of God in its height and depth. Moreover, what he had seen of his older brothers would not have elevated his views. Still, he firmly resisted evil, alike from a sense of integrity towards his master, and, above all, from dread "of this great wickedness and sin against God." Yet it seemed only to fare the worse with him for his principles. As so often, the violent passion of the woman turned into equally violent hatred, and she maliciously concocted a false charge against him.\* We have reason to believe that Potiphar could not in every respect have credited the story of his wife. For the punishment awarded in Egypt to the crime of which she accused him, was far more severe than that which Joseph received. Potiphar consigned him to the king's prison, of which, in his capacity as chief of the body-guard, he was the superintendent. How bitterly it fared there with him at the first, we learn from these words of Psalm 105:17,18 -

*"He sent before them a man: Sold for a slave was Joseph, They afflicted with fetters his feet, The iron entered into his soul." \*\**

\* Quite a similar Egyptian story exists, entitled "The Two Brothers," which has lately been translated. It resembles so closely the Biblical account that we are disposed to regard it as at least founded upon the trial of Joseph. Differing in this from Mr. Poole, we hold that the weight of evidence is in favor of the supposition.

\*\* This is the literal translation.

The contrast could scarcely be greater than between his former prophetic dreams and his present condition. But even so Joseph remained steadfast. And, as if to set before us the other contrast between sight and faith, the sacred text expressly states it: "But" - a word on which our faith should often lay emphasis - "Jehovah was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison." By-and-by, as his integrity more and more appeared, the charge of the prisoners was committed unto him; and as "what he did Jehovah made to prosper," the whole management of the prison ultimately passed into Joseph's hands. Thus, here also Jehovah proved Himself a faithful covenant-God. A silver streak was lining the dark cloud. But still must "patience have her perfect work." <sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> Alfred Edersheim, Bible History, Old Testament, studylight.org

## Chronology from Solomon Back to Joseph

Years (B.C.)	Events
971	Beginning of Solomon's reign
<u>- 4</u>	
967	Fourth year of Solomon's reign
<u>- 1</u>	Year to adjust for the fact that the fourth year of Solomon's reign was actually the fourth full year of his reign (but into the fifth year calendarwise)
966	Year the temple construction began
<u>+480</u>	Year from the Exodus to Solomon's beginning to build the temple (1 Kings 6:1)
1446	Year of the Exodus from Egypt
<u>+430</u>	Year the Israelites were in Egypt
1876	Year Jacob and his family moved to Egypt (after 2 years of famine; Gen. 45:6)
<u>+ 2</u>	Portion of the seven-year famine before Jacob moved to Egypt (Gen. 45:6)
1878	Year the seven-year famine began
<u>+ 7</u>	Years of abundance
1885	Year Joseph was taken out of prison and made second-in-command (at age 30; Gen. 41:47)
<u>+ 13</u>	Years Joseph was at Potiphar's house and in prison
1898	Year Joseph was sold to Egypt (at age 17; Gen. 37:2, 28)