

## Genesis 39

The theme of the Bible is: The salvation of man through Jesus Christ to the glory of God. In order for God to bring Jesus into the world, He must have a family, a nation. In order to create that nation, God takes advantage of a famine over the whole Mediterranean world to draw the family of Jacob together into one place, the nation of Egypt, fed by the fertility of the Nile River. But, in order to have one of His men in position to take care of His family in Egypt during the famine, God takes advantage of Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery and ending up in Egypt. Joseph begins as a slave but God will bless Joseph, which chapter 39 makes quite clear, in order to eventually raise Joseph to the second in command of all of Egypt.

### TRANSLATION - 39:1-6:

**1** Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt and Potiphar bought him, the officer of Pharaoh, captain of the body guard, an Egyptian man from the hand of the Ishmaelites, who brought him there. **2** Now Jehovah was with Joseph and he was a man prospering and in the house of his master, the Egyptian. **3** And his master saw that Jehovah [was] with him and all which he was doing, Jehovah prospered in his hand. **4** So Joseph found grace in his eyes and he served him and he made him overseer over his house and all there was to him he gave into his hand.

**5** Then it was from then he appointed him over his house and over all which was to him and Jehovah blessed the house of the Egyptian on account of Joseph and the blessing of Jehovah was over all which there was to him, over the house and over the field. **6** So he left all which [was] to him in the hand of Joseph and he did not know of anything with him except the bread which he was eating and Joseph was handsome in form and handsome in appearance.

### WORDS:

"Prosper" (verses 2, 3, 23) means to "succeed, prosper, be successful." It is used 65 times. It was found four times in the account of Abraham's servant finding a wife for Isaac in chapter 24. It is used three times here. "Serve" (verse 4) is used 98 times, to mean "minister, serve, or attend to the service of God." This is its first appearance. "To oversee" means to "attend, pay attention to, take care of, visit" and is used 304 times. It is used twice in this chapter.

### ARCHAEOLOGY:

Egypt will be mentioned 682 times in the Bible while "Egyptian" will be mentioned 30 times. It was first found in 10:6, 13. Abraham went into Egypt in 12:10-11, 14. Ishmael will marry a woman from Egypt (21:21) and will live near Egypt (25:18). God stopped Isaac from migrating into Egypt (26:1). Now Joseph has been sold into Egyptian hands (cf. 37:25, 28, 36) and Egypt will take center stage in the life of the patriarchs for the next several hundred years, until Exodus 14.

"Potiphar" is shortened for "Potiphera," which means "Whom Ra has given," where Ra is the Egyptian sun-god. Joseph will marry a daughter of a man named Potiphera (41:45, 50; 46:20).

### COMMENTS:

Verse 1 summarizes what we have learned from chapter 37. After the brief interlude of chapter 38, Moses brings the reader up to date relative to how Joseph arrived in Egypt. The theme of the entire chapter, and of Joseph's entire life, is in verse 2: "Jehovah was with Joseph." That statement or a similar one is repeated in one way or other six times in the text, at the beginning (39:2-3, 5) and end (39:21, 23). The verb "to make prosper" is found three times in this text.

Potiphar was identified at 37:36 and 39:1 as a “eunuch” or officer of Pharaoh and the “prince” or captain of Pharaoh’s bodyguard. He may have been the chief steward, in which case he would be responsible for Pharaoh’s food or the chief of the bodyguard, in which case he would be responsible for Pharaoh against assassins.

It seems clear that Joseph had communicated with Potiphar his faith that Jehovah God was blessing Joseph as verse 3 states that Potiphar recognized that “Jehovah” (Israel’s unique name for God) was blessing Joseph. Through this blessing, which God had promised Abraham (12:3; see also 26:3; 28:15; 31:3), Potiphar himself was being blessed so that he gave all that he oversaw into the care of Joseph.

Verses 5-6 are emphatic that Potiphar put everything in his home into the care of Joseph and Joseph managed everything very well. The word “all” is used five times in verses 3-6. God was blessing Joseph, likely with wisdom, and Joseph brought prosperity to his master, who acknowledged that the blessings came from Joseph’s God, Jehovah.

The last part of verse 6 states that Joseph was “handsome in form” and “handsome in appearance,” just as his mother was (29:17). No other man in Scripture is described in this way. Moses records this fact because it serves an important role in the next scene of the account.

#### APPLICATION:

*Contemporaries in the text* - The powerful emphasis at the beginning of this chapter is that God was with Joseph and made him prosper in what he set his hand to do. Perhaps Joseph reflected on the two dreams God had given him and wondered if this prosperity was God fulfilling those dreams. Joseph’s mother, Rachel, was described in similar terms relative to her physical beauty (29:17); they are the only two in the Bible who are described in these double terms.

*Contemporaries of Moses* - It was important for Moses’ audience to understand that God could make them prosper, if they were faithful, regardless where they were located, whether in Egypt, the wilderness, or the Promised Land.

*Later Hebrew writers* - It would also be important for subsequent generations of Israelites to understand that God can make them prosper, if they remain dedicated to Him, regardless whether they are dominated by the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, or Romans. It is possible to remain faithful to God even under harsh political conditions.

*NT writers* - It might be that Jesus had Joseph in mind when He told his parable about the faithful servant (Luke 12:35-46).

#### TRANSLATION - 39:7-15:

**7** Then it was after these things that the wife of his master lifted up her eyes on Joseph and she said, “Sleep with me.” **8** But he refused and said to the wife of his master, “Behold, my master does not know anything with me what [is] in the house and all which there is to him, he gave in my hand. **9** There is not to him one greater in this house than me and he has not withheld from me anything except you who are his wife and how will I do this great evil and I will sin against God?”

**10** Then it was when she spoke to Joseph day [by] day and he did not listen to her to sleep with her, to be with her. **11** And it was one day that he came to her house to do his work and there was not a man from the men of the house there in the house **12** that she caught him by the garment, saying, “Lie with me!” But he left his garment in her hand and he fled and went out outside.

**13** Then it was when she saw that he left his garment in her hand and fled outside **14** that she called to the men of her house and said to them, saying, “See, the one coming to us, a man, a Hebrew, to mock at us! He came to me to sleep with me and I called in a loud voice! **15** And it was when he heard that I raised my voice and I called, that he left his garment near me and he ran and he went outside!”

### WORDS:

“To refuse” (verse 8) is found 41 times. “To catch” (verse 12) is used 65 times, meaning “to lay hold of, seize, capture, grasp.” This is its only use in Genesis; it suggests a violent grabbing. “To mock” (verse 14) is the verb “to laugh” which is related to the name “Isaac.” For other translations of the verb, see 17:17; 18:12-13, 15; 19:14; 21:6, 9 (denoting an insulting behavior); 26:8 (denoting sexual intimacy).

### COMMENTS:

Joseph’s physical features were noted in verse 6 because they attract the eyes of his master’s wife. She says simply, “Sleep with me.” It is easy for us to imagine how tempting that would be. Joseph is in a different country, far from his dad, his family, his own culture and way of life. He is surrounded by pagans and their gods. Aside from the physical exhilaration of the sexual experience, it would be tempting to sleep with his master’s wife as well as an opportunity to “move up the social ladder.”

But Joseph does not try to rationalize anything in the account. Joseph acknowledges, first, his responsibility to his master who has given everything into his hand. Joseph needs to be faithful to his master’s trust. Second, Joseph states that the one “thing” which is withheld from Joseph is his master’s own wife. That makes her special, too special for Joseph to “touch.” Third, Joseph acknowledges that adultery is a “great sin,” just as Abimelech recognized (20:9). Fourth, this act would be a sin “against God.” Joseph could not sin against his God, the One who was blessing Joseph in visible ways.

Potiphar’s wife was persistent but Joseph was even more persistent. He would not sleep with her nor “be with her.” He would not even be alone with her, if he had the choice. Yet, circumstances happened such that, in verse 11, Joseph found himself in the house, alone with the seductress. Moses emphasized that no one was in the house except Joseph and his master’s wife. So, Mrs. Potiphar, seeing her opportunity, grabbed Joseph by the garment to practically force him into bed with her. We do not know what type of garment this was; the term is too generic.

But, Joseph left the garment behind and fled outside. Thinking quickly, the woman fabricated a lie to the other servants in her household, accusing Joseph of trying to attack *her* and rape *her*. She identifies Joseph as the “Hebrew,” perhaps suggesting some type of inferior race. She accuses Joseph of “mocking” the Egyptians, or at least her. That term could imply sexual advances (see 26:8) but it is ambiguous enough to simply mean “mocking” (see 21:9).

### APPLICATION:

*Contemporaries in the text* - We marvel at Joseph’s spiritual strength, in the environment in which he was in, that he had the mental and spiritual self-control to do the right thing. Yet, he will pay the price for it, in the short-term, as Mrs. Potiphar decides to accuse *him* of attempted rape.

*Contemporaries of Moses* - Sexual temptations will have a major role throughout the history of the Israelite nation. They would have done well to have learned the importance of Joseph’s example of self-control.

*Later Hebrew writers* - The writer of Proverbs will warn extensively about the seduction of adulteresses (Prov. 5, 6, 7). Adulterers are just as guilty and just as vile in the eyes of the holy God. Delilah would tempt and entice Samson with the same type of persistence as Potiphar’s wife with Joseph (Judges 16:16-17; 14:17).

*NT writers* - Paul will simply command Christians to “flee immorality” in 1 Corinthians 6:18, which is exactly what Joseph did. Paul will say simply in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 that a steward must be found faithful.

### TRANSLATION - 39:16-20:

**16** Then she laid his garment beside her until he came, the master, to his house. **17** And she spoke to him these words saying, “He came to me, the servant, the Hebrew whom you

brought to us, to mock me. **18** And it was when I lifted up my voice and I called that he left his garment beside me and he fled outside.” **19** And it was when his master heard the words of his wife which she spoke to him, saying these words he did, your servant, that he burned with anger.

**20** Then he took, the master, Joseph, him, and he gave him to the house of the prison a place for the prisoners of the king, prisoners, and he was there in the house of the prison.

#### WORDS:

“Prison” (verse 20) is found almost exclusively in this text (6 times) but also twice in 40:3, 5. “Prisoner” is found ten times, only here in Genesis. It is found 14 times in the OT. The verb “to imprison, bind, tie” is used 73 times.

#### ARCHAEOLOGY:

The word “prison” is found exclusively here and at this point in time, it is exclusively an Egyptian phenomenon. No other ANE culture had prisons.

#### COMMENTS:

Potiphar’s wife decided to punish Joseph for his refusal to sleep with her. She leaves his garment beside her until the master comes home. She repeats her speech to him which she had given to her household slaves except she leaves out the reference to Joseph trying to sleep with her. She implies it, but she does not state it.

Potiphar is angry, burns with anger, but the text does not say against whom his anger is directed. We wonder if it is directed at his wife because Potiphar could have killed Joseph for his attempted rape or adultery with his wife, but instead, he chooses to throw him into prison. The “prison” serves a key role in the Joseph story in this and the next few chapters.

#### APPLICATION:

*Contemporaries in the text* - We cannot “get into the head” of biblical characters unless the inspired writer does so for us. Perhaps Potiphar’s wife thought that Joseph would be thrown in jail and that experience might weaken him to her advances.

#### TRANSLATION - 39:21-23:

**21** Jehovah was with Joseph and showed to him loving loyalty and gave grace in the eyes of the prince over the house of the prison. **22** So the prince gave the house of the prison into the hand of Joseph with all the prisoners which [were] in the house of the prison and all which [he] was doing there, he was doing. **23** The prince was not over the house of the prison, seeing all, anything in his hand just as Jehovah [was] with him and which he was doing, Joseph prospered.

#### WORDS:

“Loving loyalty” (verse 21) is the key term referring to God’s dedication to a covenant relationship with His human creation.

#### COMMENTS:

In these last three verses, Moses returns to the theme of the chapter in verses 1-5: Jehovah God blessed Joseph. This time, the blessing is concentrated on Joseph while he was in incarceration. It does not matter where Joseph is, God will bless him and the work of his hands.

Because it was visible that Jehovah was blessing Joseph, the captain of the bodyguard actually gave the prison itself into the hands of Joseph. Since all the prisoners were given into the hands of Joseph for protection, he will now have opportunity to interpret the dreams of the baker and butler. Chapter 40 will present that interaction. As with the household of Potiphar, anything Joseph touched in the prison become gold; Joseph was being blessed by God.

Again, as with Potiphar's house, there was nothing left to give into the care and oversight of Joseph.

APPLICATION:

*Contemporaries in the text* - Joseph does not verbalize his faith in God at this point but eventually he will (50:20). God was working through Joseph's tragedy in order to raise Joseph to a role in which Joseph was able to save his own people, as well as others, from the tragedy of the coming famine.

*Later Hebrew writers* - The psalmist will refer to Joseph in prison, stating that he was bound in shackles and fetters (Psa. 105:17-18).

*NT writers* - Stephen will briefly review the life of Joseph in Acts 7, pointing out that Joseph's brothers sold him into Egypt, motivated by jealousy, but "God was with him" (Acts 7:9-10).