GENESIS

Chapter 39

*Joseph and Potiphar’s Wife*

**Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there. 2 The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. 3 When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, 4 Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. 5 From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. 6 So he left in Joseph’s care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, 7 and after a while his master’s wife took notice of Joseph and said, “Come to bed with me!” 8 But he refused. “With me in charge,” he told her, “my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. 9 No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” 10 And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. 11 One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. 12 She caught him by his cloak and said, “Come to bed with me!” But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. 13 When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, 14 she called her household servants. “Look,” she said to them, “this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. 15 When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.” 16 She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. 17 Then she told him this story: “That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. 18 But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.” 19 When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, “This is how your slave treated me,” he burned with anger. 20 Joseph’s master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in the prison, 21 the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. 22 So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. 23 The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph’s care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.**

**39:1** *Joseph*. Potiphar’s servant. Potiphar’s wife likely had her own personal servants, but Joseph, as a slave in the house, was subject to her as well. (TLSB)

See 37:36. *taken down to Egypt.* Joseph’s experiences in Egypt, as well as those of his youth in Canaan (see note on 37:23–24), are similar to Israel’s national experiences in Egypt. Initially, because of God’s blessing, Joseph attains a position of honor (in Potiphar’s house); he is then unjustly thrown into prison, his only crime being his attractiveness and moral integrity; and finally he is raised up among the Egyptians as the one who, because God is with him, holds their lives in his hands. Similarly Israel was first received with honor in Egypt (because of Joseph); then she was subjected to cruel bondage, her only crime being God’s evident blessings upon her; and finally God raised her up in the eyes of the Egyptians (through the ministry of Moses) as they came fearfully to recognize that these people and their God did indeed hold their lives in their hands. The author of Genesis knew the events of the exodus and shows how the history of God and the patriarchs moved forward to and foreshadowed that event (see also 15:13–16; 48:21–22; 50:24–25). (CSB)

 *Ishmaelites.* See note on 37:25. (CSB)

**39:2–6** See vv. 20–23. Though Joseph’s situation changed drastically, God’s relationship to him remained the same. (CSB)

**39:2** *The Lord was with Joseph.* See note on 26:3. This fact, mentioned several times here (vv. 3, 21, 23), is stressed also by Stephen (Ac 7:9). (CSB)

According to His special, gracious presence. God directed all that Joseph did and gave him success. (TLSB)

**39:3** *His master saw that the Lord* *was with him*. Potiphar saw Joseph’s good qualities, such as his trustworthiness and success. There is no reason to think that Potiphar feared the Lord. (TLSB)

**39:6** *left in Joseph’s care everything he had.* Joseph had full responsibility for the welfare of Potiphar’s house, as later he would have full responsibility in prison (vv. 22–23) and later still in all Egypt (41:41). Always this Israelite came to hold the welfare of his “world” in his hands—but always by the blessing and overruling of God, never by his own wits, as his father Jacob had so long attempted. In the role that he played in Israel’s history and in the manner in which he lived it, Joseph was a true representative of Israel. (CSB)

The only thing in the household not under Joseph’s direction was the food. Apparently Egyptians did not entrust these matters to foreigners and would not eat with them (43:32). (TLSB)

**39:7** *took notice of.* Looked with desire at. The phrase is used in the same sense in Akkadian in Section 25 of the Code of Hammurapi. (CSB)

With longing, desire. (TLSB)

 *Lie with me*. Having failed to break Joseph’s faith in 10 years of trials, the devil now comes from a new angle, tempting Joseph with lust and pleasure. Luther: “Through the working of the Holy Spirit [Joseph] listened to and retained the teaching of his father with the greatest faithfulness and diligence. Accordingly, there shines in him the most ardent faith when in his early, blooming youth he is assailed not only by the worst misfortunes but also by the greatest allurements of pleasure. Yet he cannot be subdued or overcome. Young people should set this example before themselves” (AE 7:54). (TLSB)

**39:8** Joseph did not want to fall short of his master’s trust. As a slave, Joseph’s predicament was difficult, because he also had to worry about offending his master’s wife. (TLSB)

**39:9** *He is not greater in this house than I am*. Although Potiphar was the master in charge of his household, he had complete confidence in Joseph’s management. (TLSB)

 *sin against God.* All sin is against God, first and foremost (see Ps 51:4). (CSB)

Joseph’s argument for resisting the temptation goes from the lesser to the greater motivation. After saying he did not want to offend his master, Joseph showed he did not want to offend God, who strictly forbids adultery. (TLSB)

**39:10** *though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused.* Samson twice succumbed under similar pressure (Jdg 14:17; 16:16–17). (CSB)

**39:11** *men of the house*. Either Potiphar’s wife arranged for the other male servants to be gone, or she waited for an opportune time. Luther: “This temptation is one of the most violent of all on account of the excellent and completely safe occasion and opportunity for sinning.… Indeed, you should know that he who holds himself aloof from such a woman can control his way of living” (AE 7:76). (TLSB)

**39:12** *garment*. Loose outer garment. (TLSB)

**39:13–14** Humiliated and angered by Joseph’s rebuff, the wife now had material evidence, his garment, that she could use to get revenge. (TLSB)

**39:14** *this Hebrew.* See v. 17; see also note on 14:13. (CSB)

 *he has brought* … *to laugh at us*. She blames her husband for bringing Joseph into the house in order to mock and seduce her. Cf v 17. (TLSB)

**39:19** *his anger was kindled*. At Joseph. Or, perhaps he suspected his wife was lying and was upset about having to let go his gifted servant. (TLSB)

**39:20–23** See note on vv. 2–6. (CSB)

**39:20** *the place where the king’s prisoners were confined.* Though understandably angry (see v. 19), Potiphar put Joseph in the “house of the captain of the guard” (40:3)—certainly not the worst prison available. (CSB)

**39:20** *prison* … *the king’s prisoners*. The punishment could have been much worse—execution. No trial was involved. It was the wife’s word against Joseph’s. (TLSB)

**39:21** *keeper of the prison*. Warden or prison governor. (TLSB)

**39:23** *paid no attention*. Joseph was trustworthy. (TLSB)

 **Ch 39** With steadfast faith, Joseph resists the temptation of Potiphar’s wife. Yet in return for his godly life, Joseph loses his job and is thrown into prison. Today, pursue chastity and flee fornication, as Joseph did. Mark and avoid the bad example of Potiphar’s wife, who slandered Joseph. And take comfort: whenever the Lord places the cross and suffering on His people, He also gives consolation and help, as He gave Joseph in Potiphar’s house and in prison. • Lord Jesus Christ, You were tempted in every way, just as we are, yet You were without sin (Heb 4:15). Be with us in our temptations, free us from the prison of sin, and by Your cross bring us to eternal life. Amen. (TLSB)