

GENESIS

Chapter 39

Joseph and Potiphar's Wife

Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. 2 The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. 3 His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. 4 So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. 5 From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. 6 So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. 7 And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." 8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. 9 He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" 10 And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her. 11 But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, 12 she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. 13 And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, 14 she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. 15 And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house." 16 Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, 17 and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to laugh at me. 18 But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house." 19 As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, "This is the way your servant treated me," his anger was kindled. 20 And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. 21 But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. 22 And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. 23 The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed.

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, 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)

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.* 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 *cast her eyes.* 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)

wickedness and 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 *she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her.* 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 *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 *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)