

# **Genesis 39 - Joseph in Potiphar's House; Temptation by Potiphar's Wife; Joseph Imprisoned**

## **II. Epilogue: Patriarchal history (Gen 11:10—50:26)**

### **(4) Life of Joseph (Gen 37:1—50:26)**

- (B) Joseph's trials and promotion in Egypt (Gen 39:1—41:57)**
  - (a) Joseph's faithfulness in Potiphar's house (39:1-18)**
    - (i) Prosperity in Potiphar's house (39:1-6)**
    - (ii) Temptation and accusation by Potiphar's wife (39:7-18)**
  - (b) Joseph's faithfulness in prison (Gen 39:19—41:36)**
    - (i) Prosperity in prison (39:19-23)**

## **Genesis 39**

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**1** Meanwhile, Joseph had been delivered to Egypt and turned over to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's court officials and the Commander-in-Chief of the imperial guards. An Egyptian, he bought Joseph from the Ishmaelites, who had brought him down there.

**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 Ishmaelites, which had brought him down thither.

- The narrative picks up from 37:36...
- The Ishmaelites sold Joseph to Potiphar, who was the Pharaoh's chief of security

In 37:36, it was the Midianites who sold Joseph into Egypt, while here it was the Ishmaelites who actually brought Joseph to Egypt and sold him to Potiphar. This means

that the Midianites sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites who, in turn, sold him to Potiphar. (The Midianites and Ishmaelites were two separate groups, but with connections to one another.)

2 And **the LORD was with Joseph**, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian.

2 The LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian.

2 But the LORD was with Joseph. He became a very prosperous man while in the house of his Egyptian master,

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

- "...the LORD was with Joseph" - 4x in this chapter (v2,3,21,23)

— God was with Joseph, just like He was with the Patriarchs (26:3,24,28; 28:15; 31:3)

— While this is true, God never spoke to Joseph by divine revelation

- God blessed Joseph while he was in the house of Potiphar

3 Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and *that* the LORD made all that he did prosper in his hand.

3 Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and *how* the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand.

3 who could see that the LORD was with Joseph, because the LORD made everything prosper that Joseph did.

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.

- This does not mean that Potiphar knew God was behind Joseph's prosperity; Potiphar saw the results of the work of the Hand of God in Joseph's life

4 So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and put him in charge of all that he owned.

4 So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge.

4 That's how Joseph pleased Potiphar as he served him. Eventually, Potiphar appointed Joseph as overseer of his entire household. Moreover, he entrusted everything that he owned into his care.

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.

- Joseph was promoted to administrator of Potiphar's entire household

5 It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; so the LORD'S blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field.

5 It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD's blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field.

5 From the time he appointed Joseph to be overseer over his entire household and everything that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The LORD's blessing rested on Joseph, whether in Potiphar's household or in Potiphar's fields.

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.

- Promoting Joseph brought blessings to Potiphar

— Here again is the outworking of the blessing aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant: Potiphar blessed Joseph, a Jew; God, in turn, blessed Potiphar

— An Egyptian pagan received blessings from God because of his correct relationship to Joseph the Jew

— God's blessing of Potiphar was all-inclusive

- 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 in Scripture

6 So he left Joseph in charge of everything that he owned; and with him *there* he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate.

Now Joseph **was** handsome in form and appearance.

6 So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him *there* he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

6 Everything that he owned, he entrusted into Joseph's care. He never concerned himself about anything, except for the food he ate. Now Joseph was well built and good looking.

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.

- Potiphar had total trust in Joseph, thus gave him complete control over his affairs

- Potiphar handled his own food, not that he did not trust Joseph, but because of Egyptian custom: Egyptians did not eat with foreigners, nor foreigners with Egyptians (43:32)

- "...was handsome in form and appearance" - this Hebrew phrase is used only of Joseph and David

- Joseph was handsome, equivalent to David
- Altogether, Joseph spent 7-9 years in Potiphar's house

### **Joseph is Tempted**

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."

(ii) Temptation and accusation by Potiphar's wife (39:7-18)

- 7 And it came about **after these events** that his master's wife had her eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Sleep with me."
- 7 It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me."
- 7 That's why, sometime later, Joseph's master's wife looked straight at Joseph and propositioned him: "Come on! Let's have a little sex!"
- 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.
- "...after these events" - after Joseph's elevation to authority in Potiphar's house
- 8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, with me *here*, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put me in charge of all that he owns.
- 8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me *here*, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge.
- 8 But he refused, telling his master's wife, "Look! My master doesn't have to worry about anything in the house with me in charge, and he has entrusted everything into my care.
- 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;
- 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
- 9 There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?"
- 9 There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?"

9 No one has more authority in this house than I do. He has withheld nothing from me, except you, and that's because you're his wife. So how can I commit such a horrible evil? How can I sin against God?"

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?

- As far as functional authority was concerned, Joseph was an equal to Potiphar

— Had Joseph agreed to sex, Potiphar trusted him as such that he would've never been caught

- Joseph's rhetorical question told her that he could not betray the trust the Potiphar had placed in him, and he could also not sin against God, who had placed him in this position

10 Though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her.

10 As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her.

10 She kept on talking to him like this day after day, but he wouldn't listen to her. Not only would he refuse to have sex with her, he refused even to stay around her.

**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.

- Potiphar's wife was persistent, so Joseph made every effort to avoid being in her presence

11 Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the people of the household was there inside.

11 Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside.

11 One day, though, he went into the house to do his work. None of the household servants were inside,

**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.

- Joseph's persistent refusal led to her attempted sexual harassment of him

— His responsibilities brought him into the house, and unfortunately there were no servants there

12 So she grabbed him by his garment, saying, "Sleep with me!" But he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside.

12 She caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside.

12 so she grabbed Joseph by his outer garment and demanded "Let's have some sex!" Instead, Joseph ran outside, leaving his outer garment still in her hand.

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.

- Joseph's proper reaction to sexual temptation: run away (2 Tim 2:22)

- She tore off a piece of Joseph's clothing, then used it to falsely accuse him

13 When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside,

13 When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside,

13 When she realized that he had left his outer garment right there in her hand, she ran outside

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

14 she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, **he** has brought in a **Hebrew** to us to **make fun** of us; he came in to me to sleep with me, and I screamed.

14 she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed.

14 and yelled for her household servants. "Look!" she cried out. "My husband brought in a Hebrew man to humiliate us. He came in here to have sex with me, but I screamed out loud!

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:

- Her first accusation was to her servants; she accused Joseph of attempted rape

- "...he" - Potiphar; his wife partially implicated him in front of her servants

- "...Hebrew" - this term is used when Jews identify themselves to Gentiles

- "...make fun" - same root as "Isaac" (26:8)

*Hell hath no fury as a woman scorned.*

15 When he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside."

15 When he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside."

15 When he heard me starting to scream, he left his outer garment with me and fled outside."

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.

- The piece of clothing was now used as "evidence" of attempted rape

16 So she left his garment beside her until his master came home.

16 So she left his garment beside her until his master came home.

16 She kept his outer garment by her side until Joseph's master came home,

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

17 Then she spoke to him with these words: "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make fun of **me**;

17 Then she spoke to him with these words, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me;

17 and then this is what she told him: "That Hebrew slave whom you brought to us came in here to rape me.

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:

- Her second accusation was to Potiphar himself

- She again puts partial blame on Potiphar

— She obviously had a degree of bitterness toward Potiphar for one reason or another, and she had previously indirectly criticized him before her servants

- "...me" - she changed the pronoun from "us" (v14) to "me"

— To the servants, Joseph came to mock "us," so that the servants would be mad at Joseph as well

18 but when I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside."

18 and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside."

18 But when I started to scream, he left his outer garment with me and ran outside."

18 And it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out.

- It was the wife's position that she was the victim, not the perpetrator

- 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

- (b) Joseph's faithfulness in prison (Gen 39:19—41:36)
  - (i) Prosperity in prison (39:19-23)

19 Now when his master heard the words of his wife which she spoke to him, saying, "This is what your slave did to me," his anger burned.

19 Now when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, "This is what your slave did to me," his anger burned.

19 When Joseph's master heard his wife's claim to the effect that "This is how your servant treated me," he flew into a rage,

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.

20 So 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 the prison.

20 So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail.

20 arrested Joseph, and locked him up in the same prison where the king's prisoners were confined. So Joseph remained there in prison.

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

- "...prison" - *cohar*, "round house"; probably a famous round tower or dungeon where prisoners who were connected with official life were housed

— This prison was under Potiphar's authority; he was also the Captain of the Executioners, so he could have executed Joseph under Egyptian law

— The Hebrew word is used only in Gen 39-40

21 But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the warden of the prison.

21 But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer.

21 But the LORD was with Joseph. He extended gracious love to him, causing the prison warden to be pleased with Joseph.

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

- Again, the LORD was with Joseph (Cf. v2,3,23)

- The result of God's presence with Joseph was that he received favor from the prison keeper
- What had previously happened to Potiphar had now happened to the prison keeper
- Joseph originally underwent physical suffering and torture (Ps 105:18-19), but somehow Joseph's reaction to his torture, and his actions, caused the keeper of the prison to change his mind about Joseph

22 And the warden of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible *for it*.

22 The chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible *for it*.

22 So the prison warden entrusted into Joseph's care all the prisoners who were confined in prison. Whatever they did, Joseph was in charge of the work detail.

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.

- Just as with Potiphar, the prison warden noticed Joseph's ability and put him in charge

23 The warden of the prison did not supervise anything under Joseph's authority, because the LORD was with him; and, the LORD made whatever he did **prosper**.

23 The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper.

23 The prison warden did not have to worry about anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with him. That's why Joseph prospered in everything he did.

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.

- Again, as in the case of Potiphar, the prison warden fully trusted Joseph, so much so that he did not bother checking on Joseph's work (Cf. v6)

- "...prosper" - same word used in v3 (Joshua 1:7-8; Ps 1:2-3)

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...