

# THE SCROLLS

## Making Lemonade: Finding Faith When Life Turns Sour | Genesis 39:1-23

### Life Lesson

God's presence does not depend on our circumstances. Joseph stayed faithful to God despite being betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused, and imprisoned. Instead of becoming bitter or compromising his integrity, he trusted God and kept doing what was right. His story teaches us that obedience does not always prevent suffering, but God is with us through every trial and can use our hardships to prepare us for His greater plans. When we trust God's providence and remain faithful during tough times, we can be sure He is at work in ways we may not yet see.

### Examine Scripture

*39 Now Joseph had been taken to Egypt. An Egyptian named Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and the captain of the guards, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him there. 2 The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, serving in the household of his Egyptian master. 3 When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord made everything he did successful, 4 Joseph found favor with his master and became his personal attendant. Potiphar also put him in charge of his household and placed all that he owned under his authority. 5 From the time that he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house because of Joseph. The Lord's blessing was on all that he owned, in his house and in his fields. 6 He left all that he owned under Joseph's authority; he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome. 7 After some time his master's wife looked longingly at Joseph and said, "Sleep with me." 8 But he*

### The Risk and Reward of Right Living

Many times, as followers of Christ, we face a tough question: "Why do bad things happen to good people?" R.C. Sproul answers this by saying, "Why do bad things happen to good people? That only happened once, and He (Jesus) volunteered." We often think that God's blessings and curses are directly tied to our goodness or badness. If we are good, then God will bless us. If we are bad, then God will curse us. However, as we see in the life of Joseph, there are times when suffering and wrongdoing are completely unjustified. Joseph did not deserve what happened to him. There is no evidence that Joseph had an ounce of pride, arrogance, or any reason to dislike him, except for the fact that he was likable and sought to be righteous and good.

Genesis 39 illustrates the deep paradox of divine providence. It is a chapter filled with dramatic shifts—transforming sharply from the trauma of human trafficking to corporate promotion, and from a victory over sexual temptation to the stark reality of a prison. Yet, beneath the tumultuous surface of Joseph's changing circumstances lies an unshakeable theological truth. The text repeats four times a single, constant reality: "The LORD was with Joseph" (vs. 2, 3, 21, and 23).

This chapter dismantles the fragile, false prosperity gospel that equates God's presence solely with comfort, rescue, health, and wealth. Instead, Genesis 39 introduces us to a raw, resilient theology—one that shows God does not always keep His children out of the pit, but He consistently climbs into the pit with them, turning a slave quarters and a prison cell into the ultimate training ground.

Sometimes, we view suffering as the absence of God. For example, we might ask, "Where is God? Why am I suffering? Why will God not stop this? Does He not care?" All of this basically implies that God is not present in our suffering, which is

refused. "Look," he said to his master's wife, "with me here my master does not concern himself with anything in his house, and he has put all that he owns under my authority. 9 No one in this house is greater than I am. He has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. So how could I do this immense evil, and how could I sin against God?" 10 Although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her. 11 Now one day he went into the house to do his work, and none of the household servants were there. 12 She grabbed him by his garment and said, "Sleep with me!" But leaving his garment in her hand, he escaped and ran outside. 13 When she saw that he had left his garment with her and had run outside, 14 she called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "my husband brought a Hebrew man to make fools of us. He came to me so he could sleep with me, and I screamed as loud as I could. 15 When he heard me screaming for help, he left his garment beside me and ran outside." 16 She put Joseph's garment beside her until his master came home. 17 Then she told him the same story: "The Hebrew slave you brought to us came to make a fool of me, 18 but when I screamed for help, he left his garment beside me and ran outside. 19 When his master heard the story his wife told him—'These are the things your slave did to me'—he was furious 20 and had him thrown into prison, where the king's prisoners were confined. So Joseph was there in prison. 21 But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him. He granted him favor with the prison warden. 22 The warden put all the prisoners who were in the prison under Joseph's authority, and he was responsible for everything that was done there. 23 The warden did not bother with anything under Joseph's authority, because the Lord was with him, and the Lord made everything that he did successful.

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why we suffer. If God were present, He would stop all suffering. Yet, as we see in the life of Joseph, "The LORD was with him," and surely He is with us in the midst of our pits and prisons.

### Vs. 1-6

Notice the striking contrast in the first two verses: (v. 1) depicts human trafficking, degradation, and complete loss of autonomy, then (v. 2) immediately counters with, "The LORD was with Joseph." The text uses the divine covenant name Yahweh (The LORD) here. Even a pagan Egyptian captain can see the unmistakable mark of a higher power in Joseph's life. Notice how Joseph is described in (v. 3): he was successful in everything, not because he was a good manager, but because the Lord was with him. This is the theology of blessing: God prospers Joseph not just for his sake but to fulfill the Abrahamic promise that through Abraham's seed, "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3). It is interesting that the Lord blessed Potiphar and his entire house because of Joseph. In other words, Joseph's righteousness and devotion to God directly affected those around him. Joseph could have become bitter and angry toward God for allowing him to be thrown in the pit and sold into slavery, but Joseph chose to serve the Lord with complete devotion and trust.

God does not need to change our geography or social status to show His presence and power. Joseph is still a slave, far from home, yet he is "successful" because God is with him. Joseph did not run a ministry; he managed a household. He carried out everyday tasks with such exceptional integrity that a pagan saw God's hand at work. Our daily work, no matter how ordinary, is a stage for God's glory.

### Vs. 7-9

Joseph was not only very successful but also described as "well-built and handsome" (v. 6). While these traits are largely beyond his control (aside from diet and exercise), he was endowed with dreams, strategic insight, managerial talent, and good looks. Nonetheless, this combination placed him in an awkward position through no fault of his own. Not only did Potiphar notice Joseph's success, but his wife also admired Joseph's appearance: "After some time his master's wife looked longingly at Joseph and said, 'Sleep with me'" (v. 7). Despite being

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a young man faced with a highly tempting situation, Joseph's response is telling: "Look with me here my master does not concern himself with anything in his house, and he has put all that he owns under my authority. No one in this house is greater than I am. He has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. So how could I do this immense evil, and how could I sin against God?" (vs. 8-9). Potiphar's wife sees Joseph's outward appearance; Joseph sees God's inward holiness. His refusal demonstrates a profound vertical faith. He does not merely justify his integrity by saying, "It would break Potiphar's trust," but instead emphasizes, "It is a sin against God." All horizontal sins, sins committed against others, are fundamentally rooted as vertical violations against God.

Consider how extraordinary this moment is. Joseph comes from a lineage marked by moral failures. From Abraham to Isaac to Jacob, they repeatedly fell short of God's expectations. Even when they repented and returned to Him, they still missed the mark. In contrast, Joseph is entirely devoted to God and seeks to live with integrity and righteousness. Notice his response to Potiphar's wife. He was not just worried about disappointing Potiphar; his primary concern was displeasing God: "So how could I do this immense evil, and how could I sin against God?" (v. 9). Temptation flourishes in solitude. Joseph was cut off from his family, his culture, and his religious community. He could have thought, "God let my brothers sell me out, so why should I keep His rules?" Instead, his relationship with God remained independent of his circumstances. Genuine integrity is shown by what you do when no one is looking, yet acknowledging that God is the One who sees everything.

### **Vs. 10-20**

As difficult as it may be to accept, we see that Joseph's righteousness does not protect him from trouble; in fact, it often brings it. Scripture shows us that living a holy life sometimes results in suffering. There is no indication that Joseph sinned against God or committed any unrighteous act. That is not to say he was sinless (we know everyone has sinned and will continue to do so), but Moses, inspired by the Holy Spirit, did not see it necessary to list any of Joseph's sins. In fact, throughout the Book of Genesis, Joseph is the only one Moses describes as "a man who has God's spirit in him" (Gen. 41:38). Because of this, Joseph ran

## Personal Reflection

1. When I face suffering, disappointment, or injustice, do I see these situations as signs that God is absent, or do I trust that God remains with me as He was with Joseph?
2. How am I using my current responsibilities—whether at work, home, school, or church—to reflect God's character and bless those around me?
3. What temptations am I currently facing, and am I responding to them with Joseph's mindset of honoring God above all else, even when no one else is watching?
4. Have I let difficult circumstances, past wounds, or unanswered questions make me bitter toward God, or am I choosing to stay faithful and obedient despite them?
5. Could my current struggle, setback, or season of waiting be a training ground that God is using to prepare me for future opportunities and greater kingdom purposes? How might He be shaping me through it right now?

## Commentaries

*Expositor's Bible Commentary (Abridged Edition): New Testament*  
Edited by Kenneth Barker

*New Bible Commentary* Edited by D. A. Carson

*NIV Application Commentary: Genesis* by John H. Walton

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from sin, but his fleeing angered Potiphar's wife all the more. Like his brothers, his righteousness angered unrighteous people. The garment, once a symbol of his brothers' jealousy in (Chap. 37), is again used as false evidence against him (v. 16).

Joseph teaches us that the only proper response to some temptations is to run. He did not stay to argue, debate, or prove his spiritual strength. He fled, even though it meant leaving his coat behind. Sometimes, protecting your purity means being willing to lose your reputation or even leave people or things behind. As Jesus said, "And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to go into hell" (Matt. 5:30). In other words, remove yourself from any source of temptation before the temptation starts, and if you are tempted, remove whatever tempts you. Jesus is showing us that we ought to pursue holiness with radical intensity at any cost. This is what Joseph modeled for us by fleeing, even leaving his garment behind.

### Vs. 21-23

This is the central point of the chapter. Notice how the scenery changes, but the theological message remains the same: in (v. 2), Joseph is in the house and "the LORD was with Joseph," and in (v. 21), Joseph is in prison and "the LORD was with Joseph." God did not stop Potiphar from throwing Joseph into the dungeon, but He entered the dungeon with him. Notice the consistency of God's presence. God was with Joseph in the pit. He was with him in the house. He was with him in prison, and we will later see that God is with him in the palace.

The chapter ends exactly where it began—with Joseph overseeing an entire facility because of God's clear blessing. The dungeon becomes a training ground. God is using the administrative tasks of a prison to prepare Joseph to manage Egypt's empire.

When we trust in God's providence, we may not always feel His presence, but we know He is there. God never wastes a crisis. The skills Joseph developed while suffering in darkness were exactly what he needed to save nations in the light. Your current trial is not just something to endure or simply survive; it could be the very crucible God is using to shape you for your calling.