

## LESSON 2

# The Lord Was with Joseph

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*The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, serving in the household of his Egyptian master.*

— Genesis 39:2

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*This chapter says the Lord was with Joseph four times. By the end of it, he is further down than when it began.*

## Introduction

Chapter 37 left Joseph standing on an auction block in Egypt. We would expect chapter 38 to pick up his story right there.

It doesn't. Moses turns away from Egypt entirely and takes us back to Canaan, where he spends thirty verses on Judah. Judah marries a Canaanite woman, buries two sons, leaves his daughter-in-law waiting with no future, and ends up in a roadside encounter he would have been ashamed for anyone to hear about. Then Genesis 39 picks up Joseph's story again as if nothing had happened: *Now Joseph had been taken to Egypt.*

Older commentators found chapter 38 so awkward that they assumed a later editor had inserted it by mistake. Very few people argue that anymore. The chapter is here on purpose, and once you see why, it is hard to read Joseph's story without it.<sup>17</sup>

Two of Jacob's sons left that broken household during the same season of life, and both of them went down. The CSB says Judah *left* and Joseph *was taken*, but the Hebrew uses the same verb for both, and it means "to go down." Judah went down to Adullam by his own choice. Joseph was taken down to Egypt as a slave. Judah was free and prosperous, living at home among his own people. Joseph was someone else's property. Genesis places their stories side by side and asks us to watch which man keeps his integrity. It turns out to be the one we would least expect.

Something also changes in the way Genesis speaks of God. In chapter 39, the covenant name of God, *Yahweh*, translated **the Lord**, appears again and again. That chapter takes place entirely on pagan soil, in a slave's quarters and in a prison. Two chapters earlier, God was never mentioned in the promised land. Now His name is all over Egypt.

That is what this lesson is about, and Genesis makes the point through repetition instead of explanation. As we go, pay attention to where Joseph is standing each of the four times we're told the Lord was with him.

## The Chapter That Isn't a Detour (38:1–30)

CHART 2

### Two Sons Go Down

|                  | Judah — chapter 38                    | Joseph — chapter 39                     |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Goes down        | To Adullam, by choice (38:1)          | To Egypt, in chains (39:1)              |
| Standing         | Free, prosperous, at home             | Property, no rights, no family          |
| The woman        | He initiates (38:15–16)               | She initiates, day after day (39:7, 10) |
| Leaves behind    | Signet, cord, staff (38:18)           | His garment (39:12)                     |
| Used against him | "Examine them" (38:25)                | A lie he cannot answer (39:14–18)       |
| How it ends      | Humiliated; one true sentence (38:26) | Accused; silent; prison (39:20)         |
| "The Lord"       | Twice, both in judgment               | Eight times, presence and blessing      |

*The free man falls. The slave stands.*

Chapter 38 covers about twenty years. In that time two boys grow up, marry, and die, a third son reaches manhood, and twins are born. These are the same years Joseph was spending in Egypt. The two stories run side by side.

Judah went down and married a Canaanite woman, and everyone in his family knew

better. Abraham had made his servant swear not to take a Canaanite wife for Isaac (24:3). Isaac had given Jacob the same instruction as he left home (28:1). Judah knew all of this and did it anyway. Genesis tells the whole courtship in one quick sentence. He saw her, and he took her.<sup>18</sup>

Judah had three sons by this woman. The first, Er, was so wicked that the Lord took his life. The second, Onan, married Er's widow, Tamar, under the old custom that required a man to raise up an heir for his dead brother. Onan took the privileges of that arrangement but refused its responsibility, and the Lord took his life too. Having lost two sons, Judah told Tamar to go back to her father's house and wait until his third son was grown.<sup>19</sup>

Judah had no intention of giving her his son Shelah. He was afraid of her. A childless widow in that world had no way to make him keep his word and nowhere else to go. Judah never mistreated Tamar openly. He simply set her aside and let the years go by.

**Remember who is telling this story.** These fourteen chapters are about God preserving a family. Judah is the son who will one day carry the scepter, and his line will lead to David and to Christ. Yet here he is, quietly cutting off his own future because he can't be bothered to keep a promise to a widow.

What Tamar did next can't be defended, and Genesis doesn't try to defend it. After Judah's own wife died, he went up to the sheep-shearing. Tamar took off her widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil, and waited for him beside the road. Judah didn't recognize her. He had nothing with him to pay her, so he left his signet, his cord, and his staff as a pledge. In that culture, it was a little like handing someone your driver's license and your Social Security card. Tamar took them and disappeared.<sup>20</sup>

Three months later Judah received word: *Your daughter-in-law, Tamar, has been acting like a prostitute, and now she is pregnant.* He didn't hesitate. *Bring her out, and let her be burned to death!*

Then Tamar sent Judah his own seal along with a message: *Examine them. Whose signet ring, cord, and staff are these?*

Stop and notice what has happened here. In 37:32, Judah and his brothers handed their father a bloody robe and said, *Examine it. Is it your son's robe or not?* The CSB makes the connection clear in English, with *Examine it* in chapter 37 and *Examine them* here, and it is the same phrase in Hebrew both times. The man who made his father identify a garment is now forced to identify his own staff in front of everyone.

The deceiver was deceived, and the tools were a personal item and a young goat. Jacob had deceived Isaac with a goat and a garment. Judah and his brothers deceived Jacob with a goat and a garment. Now Tamar deceived Judah with a goat promised as payment and the items that identified him. This family's pattern of deception had to be broken somewhere.<sup>21</sup>

It began to break here, when Judah said, *She is more in the right than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah.*

This is not a conversion, and Judah is not a good man at the end of chapter 38. But it is the first honest thing he says in the story, and it cost him something to say it in public. **Mark this verse and remember it.** In Lesson 7, we'll watch this same man stand before an Egyptian official he doesn't recognize and offer to become a slave in place of his youngest brother. The difference between 37:26 and 44:33 shows us what God can do with a man. It begins here, with a humiliated liar admitting out loud that someone else was right.

The chapter ends with the birth of twins. One baby's hand reaches out of the womb and then pulls back, and his brother is born first. That should sound familiar. Jacob's story began with twins struggling in the womb and the younger being chosen over the older, and now it ends the same way.

The child who came out first was Perez. Ten generations later came David. And in Matthew 1:3, in the genealogy of Jesus Christ, we find Judah, Tamar, and Perez.

The line that leads to the Messiah runs right through this chapter.<sup>22</sup>

**There is one more reason Genesis places this story here.** Look at what was happening to Jacob's family in Canaan. They were marrying Canaanites and settling into Canaanite life. Within two more generations, there might have been no covenant family left to save, only another Canaanite clan with an interesting story about their grandfather. The famine that drove them to Egypt looked like a disaster. It was also the very thing that removed them from a land that was slowly absorbing them.

## **Down to Egypt, and the Lord Was with Him (39:1–6)**

CHART 1

## Four Times. One Direction.

|                                                        | Where Joseph is  | What follows                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| The Lord was with Joseph 39:2                          | Potiphar's house | He becomes a successful man  |
| His master saw that the Lord was with him — 39:3       | Potiphar's house | Put over the whole household |
| The Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness — 39:21 | The prison       | Favor with the warden        |
| The Lord was with him 39:23                            | The prison       | Everything he does succeeds  |

*At the ochre line Joseph goes from slave to prisoner. The sentence above it and the sentence below it are the same.*

guard. That position likely put Potiphar in charge of the royal executions. Joseph now belonged to him in the same way a plow belongs to a farmer.<sup>23</sup>

Then verse 2 tells us, **The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man.**

We need to be careful not to read the word “successful” the way we normally use it. It has nothing to do with status, because Joseph had none. The same word describes the Lord prospering Abraham’s servant on his errand in chapter 24, and it is used of the suffering Servant in Isaiah 53:10. It means that whatever Joseph put his hand to turned out well. God was causing a slave’s work to succeed.<sup>24</sup>

Joseph rises one step at a time. In verse 2, Joseph succeeds. In verse 3, his master *sees* that he succeeds and understands the reason for it. In verse 4, Joseph is put in charge of the household. In verse 5, the blessing on Joseph spreads to everything Potiphar owns, both in the house and in the field. By verse 6, Potiphar has turned over everything he has and doesn’t concern himself with anything except the food he eats.

Note what is happening to Potiphar. God had promised Abraham that He would bless those who blessed him, and that all the families of the earth would be blessed through his offspring (12:3). Here, an Egyptian official who worships idols is growing richer by the month because he treated a Hebrew slave well, and he has no idea why. God’s promise to Abraham is already at work in a house where no one has ever heard of it.<sup>25</sup>

Then, in the middle of verse 6, the story takes a turn: *Now Joseph was well-built and handsome.*

The Hebrew describes Joseph with the same words it once used to describe his mother. Rachel is described with this same pair of words in 29:17, although the CSB translates them differently in each place, *shapely and beautiful* for Rachel and *well-built and handsome* for Joseph. He had his mother’s good looks. Genesis mentions it here for a reason, because trouble is about to come from it.

## Two Words, and Thirty-Five (39:7–12)

*After some time his master’s wife looked longingly at Joseph and said, Sleep with me.*

Now Genesis returns to Joseph, and the contrast with Judah is deliberate. Judah, who was free and at home, went after a woman he had no business pursuing. Joseph, a slave in a foreign household, ran from one.

Verse 1 places Joseph in the house of Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and the captain of the

In Hebrew, her words are only two, and they are a command, not an attempt at romance. She spoke to Joseph the way someone would give an order to a servant. She wasn't in love with him. To her, he was simply an attractive piece of her husband's property, and she was used to getting whatever she wanted.<sup>26</sup>

Joseph answered her with thirty-five words. He is the only person in the chapter who says anything worth hearing, and his answer deserves to be read slowly:

*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?*

There are three things we should notice in his answer.

First, **Joseph took the very arguments a weaker man would have used to say yes and turned them into reasons to say no.** No one was watching. He had the run of the house. There was only one thing in that household he was not allowed to touch, and from Eden onward we know how people tend to handle that kind of arrangement. Every circumstance that might have given another man an excuse became, for Joseph, a reason to stay loyal.

CHART 4

### Joseph's Years



*Genesis never says how the first eleven years divided between Potiphar's house and the prison.*

Second, **he called it what it was.** He said it would be *this immense evil*. He didn't reach for a softer word. He named it accurately and out loud, and that is a large part of the battle. Before people commit a sin, they usually find a gentler name for it.

Third, and this is the foundation of everything else

he said, Joseph asked, *and how could I sin against God?* He could have said it would be a sin against Potiphar, and his loyalty to his master was real. He could have said it would be a sin against her. But Joseph was a slave with no rights, no family, no witnesses, and no future to speak of, living in a land whose gods were carved on every wall. Even so, he lived his life before God.<sup>27</sup>

Verse 10 may be the hardest verse in the chapter: *Although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her.*

She asked *day after day*. What Joseph faced was a long, steady pressure that didn't let up. The Hebrew also includes something the CSB places in a footnote. Joseph refused to lie beside her, *or even be with her*. Over time, her demand seems to have changed. She stopped asking him to lie *with* her and asked only that he be *near* her. That sounds more reasonable, and it is much harder to refuse without looking foolish. Joseph refused that too. He wouldn't stay in the same room with her. He kept his distance from the danger and let people think whatever they wanted.<sup>28</sup>

That explains what happens in verse 12. When she finally grabbed him, there was nothing left to say. *But leaving his garment in her hand, he escaped and ran outside.*

Joseph ran. It didn't look brave. He ran out the door and into the street, leaving his garment behind, and his reputation went with it. That is the moment Scripture holds up as an example for us: *Flee from youthful passions* (2 Timothy 2:22). Some temptations should never be debated, because the longer we stand there and argue, the closer we come to giving in. **The way to win that kind of battle is to leave.**

## The Second Coat (39:13–20)

Potiphar's wife now had Joseph's garment, and she knew exactly how to use it.

She told the servants, *my husband brought a Hebrew man to make fools of us*. Look at what she did with that sentence. She took a shot at her husband before she ever got to Joseph. She also put herself on the same side as the household staff by saying *us* and not *me*. Joseph became a foreigner forced on all of them. If any of the servants resented the Hebrew slave who had been promoted over them, she had just given them a reason to turn on him.<sup>29</sup>

Then she changed the story for her husband. *The Hebrew slave you brought to us came to make a fool of me*. This time she aimed the blame directly at Potiphar, since *you* brought him here. Joseph was no longer a Hebrew *man* but a Hebrew *slave*, and now it had happened to *me* and not to *us*.

Here we see the pattern again. A piece of Joseph's clothing was held up before the man who had power over his life, and it told a lie Joseph couldn't answer.

The first garment went home to Jacob soaked in goat's blood. This one was laid out for Potiphar to see. **Twice now, Joseph's clothing reached the man in charge of his life before Joseph did, and both times it testified against him.** Genesis is keeping track of these garments, and we'll come back to them more than once.

Potiphar was furious, and Joseph was sent to prison. That is more surprising than it first appears. Potiphar was the captain of the guard. He could have had Joseph executed that same day, and by the standards of that world he would have been expected to. A slave accused of assaulting his master's wife was not usually sent to a holding place for royal officials.

We can't prove why Potiphar didn't have him killed. But commentators have long observed that Potiphar doesn't seem to have fully believed his wife. He may have known what kind of woman she was. He certainly knew Joseph, since he had trusted him with everything he owned for years. So, he did what a man does when he can't ignore an accusation but can't quite believe it either. He put Joseph out of sight and didn't ask any more questions.<sup>30</sup>

That is how the one man in Egypt who could interpret dreams ended up in the very prison where Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker would soon be held.

Genesis doesn't point that out yet. It simply puts Joseph there.

## Down Again, and the Lord Was with Him (39:20–23)

If you read verses 20–23 alongside verses 1–6, you’ll see that they are almost the same paragraph written twice, only at a lower point in Joseph’s life.

The Lord was with Joseph, and he found favor. The man in charge placed everything in his hands, and then stopped paying attention to any of it, because the Lord made whatever Joseph did succeed.

First a slave, then a prisoner, and the same things are said of him in both places. Kidner says it well: whether as a prisoner or as a governor, Joseph was the same man.<sup>31</sup>

We shouldn’t romanticize this prison. Genesis says very little about it, but Psalm 105:18–19 fills in the picture: *They hurt his feet with shackles; his neck was put in an iron collar. Until the time his prediction came true, the word of the Lord tested him.* The Hebrew word Genesis uses for this prison doesn’t appear anywhere else in the Old Testament outside these chapters. It may describe a round fortress. Whatever it looked like, there were chains inside it.<sup>32</sup>

This is where our lesson leaves us, and it is a hard place to stop.

Joseph did everything right. He worked hard for the man who owned him. He refused a sin he could have gotten away with. He ran when running cost him his position. Yet he ended this chapter lower than where he started it. He was a prisoner now and not just a slave, with a criminal charge attached to his name and no way to clear it.

**And four times in twenty-three verses, Genesis says the Lord was with him.**

That repeated statement describes something deeper than Joseph’s circumstances, something his circumstances could never reach. God’s presence and God’s rescue are two different gifts. In Genesis 39 Joseph receives the first, and he will wait thirteen years for the second.<sup>33</sup>

If you have ever done the right thing and been punished for it, this chapter speaks to you. What it offers may not be what you want, and it can be harder to hold on to, but it is enough: *the Lord was with Joseph.*

## Looking to Christ

There are two lines in this chapter that lead to Christ, and they come from very different places.

The first runs through Judah. The line of the Messiah passes through one of the darkest chapters in Genesis, through a man who broke his word to a widow and through a woman who deceived him to get what was rightfully hers. Matthew knew what he was doing when he included Tamar’s name in the genealogy of Jesus. She is the first of four women listed there. Each of them was an outsider, and each was connected to a marriage people talked about. Then comes Mary, whose circumstances people also talked about. God has never needed a respectable family line to carry out His promise, and He seems to have made a point of showing it.<sup>34</sup>

The second line runs through Joseph. He was tempted and did not sin. He was falsely accused, and Genesis doesn’t record a single word he said in his own defense. He was handed over by a man who had every reason to know better, and he went down to prison without a word. Isaiah describes the Servant of the Lord this way: *He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth* (Isaiah 53:7).

Both lines come together in the statement this chapter repeats four times: the Lord was with him. When Stephen retold this story in Acts 7:9, that is the line he chose. They sold him into Egypt, *but God was with him*. And when Matthew wanted to describe what God finally did for all of us, he chose the name Immanuel, which he explains means *God is with us* (Matthew 1:23).

The phrase repeated in Genesis 39 became the name of Jesus.

## Applying the Text

**God's presence is not the same as God's rescue.** Joseph had God's presence for thirteen years before he was rescued. If you measure whether God is with you by whether your situation is improving, this chapter will show you that measure doesn't work. Let it go.

**Where you are does not determine who you are.** Joseph did a slave's work as though it mattered, and later he did a prisoner's work the same way. In both places, he was promoted by people who had no reason to favor him. He didn't wait for a position worthy of his dreams before he gave his best. Many of us are waiting for exactly that.

**Call sin what it is before you start reasoning with it.** Joseph asked, *So how could I do this immense evil?* The first thing to change when we start drifting toward sin is our vocabulary. An affair becomes a connection. Theft becomes an adjustment. Cruelty becomes honesty. When we use the right word out loud, most of the argument for the sin falls apart.

**Live your life before God.** No one was watching Joseph. His family was on the other side of the desert and believed he was dead. The only reason he had left to do right was God, and that turned out to be enough.

**Run.** Not every temptation is fought by standing your ground. Some can only be overcome by leaving. That might mean staying out of the room, closing the app, refusing to meet with someone alone, or letting a late-night message wait until morning. Joseph ran. He looked foolish, and he paid a price for it, and Scripture says he did the right thing.

**Tell the truth, even when it costs you.** Judah's long road back to God began with one honest sentence spoken in public: *She is more in the right than I*. Real change in us usually begins when we're willing to say something true out loud.

## For Discussion

1. Why do you think Moses interrupts Joseph's story with Genesis 38? What would you miss if you skipped it?
2. Judah was free, at home, and among his own people, and he fell. Joseph was a slave in a pagan household, and he stood firm. What does that comparison teach us about the relationship between our circumstances and our character?
3. Joseph's reason for refusing was that it would be a sin against God, and not only against Potiphar. Why does that difference matter? Which reason is actually holding you back from sin?

4. Verse 10 says she spoke to him day after day. How is a temptation that never goes away different from one that comes and goes? How do you fight it?
5. Four times this chapter says the Lord was with Joseph, yet his situation kept getting worse. Is that a comfort to you, or is it hard to hear? Be honest.
6. Judah's first honest moment came when he was publicly humiliated. Why does change so often begin there?

## Looking Ahead

### Lesson 3: God's Wisdom in Prison (Genesis 40)

Two men have dreams on the same night, and the forgotten Hebrew prisoner knows what they mean. Joseph asks the cupbearer for one small favor, simply to remember him. The chapter ends with a sentence that is hard to read: *Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.*

Then two years go by.

Before you come, read Genesis 40. Count how many times Joseph gives God the credit for his gift when it would have been much easier to keep it for himself.

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<sup>17</sup> Hughes, *Genesis*. On 38:1–30 he notes that older critical commentators treated the Judah–Tamar episode as a clumsy editorial insertion, while most interpreters now regard its placement as intentional, pointing to the literary and thematic parallels between chapters 37 and 38. Grigoni et al., *Joseph*. They make the same judgment, observing that the chapter plays a significant role both in Joseph's narrative and in the line leading to the birth of Jesus. Kidner, *Genesis*. On 39:1 Kidner notes that the opening clause is more strictly “Now Joseph had been . . .,” resuming the story after the chapter 38 digression.

<sup>18</sup> Hughes, *Genesis*. On 38:1–5 he observes that Judah, who by virtue of his three older brothers' sins now occupied the place of the birthright, knew full well the prohibition against Canaanite marriage (cf. 24:3; 28:1) and married one anyway. He cites Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, WBC 2 (Dallas: Word, 1994). Wenham describes the union as based on chemistry rather than principle. Smith, *Pentateuch*. On 38:1–30 Smith sees in Judah's departure from his brothers a sign that the family was on the verge of breaking apart.

<sup>19</sup> Hughes, *Genesis*. On 38:6–11 he explains the levirate obligation and identifies Onan's sin as the refusal of that duty while retaining its privileges, since the child would have been his brother's heir rather than his own. Smith, *Pentateuch*. Smith makes the same point and adds that Judah used Shelah's youth as an excuse. Both note that Tamar was left with no legal redress.

<sup>20</sup> Hughes, *Genesis*. On 38:12–19 he explains that Tamar timed her plan to the end of Judah's week of mourning and to the sheepshearing season, and that the signet was likely a cylinder seal worn on a cord, the staff distinctively carved — items declaring individual and corporate identity, which Hughes compares to a modern license and Social Security number. He quotes Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011). Alter observes that Judah's appetite would not tolerate postponement, though he had been content to let Tamar languish indefinitely. Smith, *Pentateuch*.

On 38:11–14 Smith notes that under ancient law the levirate responsibility could pass to the father-in-law when no brother remained to fulfill it.

<sup>21</sup> The verbal link is exact: the same Hebrew phrase stands behind “Examine it” in 37:32 and “Examine them” in 38:25. Hughes, *Genesis*. On 38:18 he calls the pattern three generations of deceit now complete, each involving an item of identity and a goat — Jacob deceiving Isaac with a goatskin, Judah deceiving Jacob with a goat's blood on Joseph's robe, and now Tamar deceiving Judah. On 38:24 he quotes Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, for Judah's sentence of burning, and suggests Judah may have welcomed the chance to be rid of her permanently.

<sup>22</sup> Hughes, *Genesis*. On 38:27–30 he follows the line from Perez through the ten generations to David recorded at the close of Ruth (4:18–22) and quoted by Matthew (1:2–6). Grigoni et al., *Joseph*. They likewise trace the Davidic line from Perez forward to the Messiah.

<sup>23</sup> Kidner, *Genesis*. On 37:36 he discusses Potiphar's recognizably Egyptian name and observes that “officer” is strictly “eunuch” but had become a general term for a courtier; he defends “captain of the guard” as the better rendering, consistent with Potiphar's command of the prison in 40:3–4. Borthwick, *Life of Joseph*. Borthwick notes that scholars understand the captain of Pharaoh's guard to have also served as chief executioner, which would have made Potiphar judge, jury, and executioner in Joseph's case.

<sup>24</sup> Kidner, *Genesis*. On 39:2 he prefers “he became a successful man,” noting that the slightly complacent ring in English is no part of the Hebrew: it is the word used of the outcome of Eliezer's mission (24:21, 40) and of the Servant's suffering in Isaiah 53:10, and it speaks of achievement rather than status.

<sup>25</sup> Hughes, *Genesis*. On 39:4–6 he observes that in promoting Joseph, Potiphar became the unwitting beneficiary of the covenant promise of 12:3. Grigoni et al., *Joseph*. They add that “overseer” (Egyptian *mer-per*) was a recognized administrative title for those managing an estate, a treasury, or a royal household.

<sup>26</sup> Grigoni et al., *Joseph*. On 39:7 they note that the demand of Potiphar's wife is two words in Hebrew — *shikhvah immi* — using one of the most common Old Testament euphemisms for intercourse, and that the narrative records nothing from her beyond this coarse command. Hughes, *Genesis*. On 39:7–9 Hughes contrasts her two-word proposition with Joseph's thirty-five-word refusal. That count covers only the quoted Hebrew speech, from *hen* (“Look”) in verse 8 through the last word of verse 9, and follows the usual convention of treating maqfef-joined elements as separate words; counting them instead as the single accentual units the Masoretic text prints yields twenty-eight. Her demand is two words under either method. Borthwick, *Life of Joseph*. On 39:7 Borthwick observes that a man of Potiphar's standing would likely have taken a younger wife, so Joseph and his mistress may well have been close in age, and suggests her motives may have included lust, boredom, and rebellion against a husband to whom she was herself nearly a slave.

<sup>27</sup> Borthwick, *Life of Joseph*. On 39:9 Borthwick observes that Joseph did not say he would be sinning against Potiphar or against her, but against God — his moral character was governed by an audience of One. Grigoni et al., *Joseph*. On 39:9 they add that Joseph also grasped the danger of his position, since continual refusal might provoke her to retaliate with false charges.

<sup>28</sup> Kidner, *Genesis*. On 39:10 he calls the day-after-day pressure profoundly searching, the same kind that found out Samson twice (cf. Judges 14:17; 16:16), and notes the flexibility of the attack: if Joseph could not be stormed he might be coaxed, and a refusal even to be *with* her could be made to look unreasonable. He sees in Joseph's declining to be drawn the realistic wisdom of Proverbs 5:8. Hughes, *Genesis*. Hughes makes the same observation about the moderated demand.

<sup>29</sup> Kidner, *Genesis*. On 39:14 he notes the scorn carried by “a Hebrew” here and again in verse 17, and observes that the side-thrust at her husband both colored her pose as victim and put pressure on him to act. Hughes, *Genesis*. Following Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, Hughes calls her a mistress of syntactic equivocation, tailoring her lies first to enlist the servants and then

altering them to incite her husband. Grigoni et al., *Joseph*. They add that by involving the household first she divided it along ethnic lines and forced her husband's hand, and that other servants may have resented the promotion of a foreigner over them.

<sup>30</sup> Kidner, *Genesis*. On 39:19–20 he observes that death was the only penalty Joseph could reasonably expect, that his reprieve presumably owed much to the respect he had won, and that Potiphar's mingled wrath and restraint may reflect a faint misgiving about the accuracy of the charge — but that the unfolding story makes plain that God was preserving him for his task. Grigoni et al., *Joseph*. They note that imprisonment was not the ordinary Egyptian response to a charge of attempted rape. Borthwick, *Life of Joseph*. Borthwick cites Walton and Matthews, *Bible Background Commentary*, 70. on the royal prison for political detainees, which would place Joseph in contact with members of Pharaoh's court.

<sup>31</sup> Kidner, *Genesis*. On 39:22–23, comparing verses 4b–6 with 41:40, 44: Joseph's outstanding abilities and integrity, crowned with the touch of God, were constant at every level — as prisoner and as governor he was simply the same man. On the chapter as a whole he observes that its symmetry, in which the serene opening is matched point for point at a new level at the close, expresses God's quiet control and the man of faith's quiet victory.

<sup>32</sup> Kidner, *Genesis*. On 39:20–21 he notes that the unusual word *sohar*, used for this prison and found only in these chapters, suggests a round structure and therefore perhaps a fortress, and that the memory preserved in Psalm 105:18 corrects any idea that Joseph had a gentle reception. Hughes, *Genesis*. Hughes quotes the same psalm on Joseph's fetters and iron collar.

<sup>33</sup> The chronology rests on three fixed points: Joseph is seventeen when he is sold (37:2), the cupbearer forgets him for two full years (41:1), and he is thirty when he enters Pharaoh's service (41:46). Grigoni et al., *Joseph*. They put the span from the sale to the elevation at thirteen years, noting that Joseph spent nearly half his life to that point as a slave or a prisoner. Borthwick, *Life of Joseph*. Borthwick reaches the same figure and lays out the fuller reckoning — twenty-two years from the first dream to the moment Joseph reveals himself. Hughes, *Genesis*. Hughes works the same numbers from the other end, observing that eleven years have passed by the time of the cupbearer's dream in chapter 40, and that Genesis never tells us how those eleven years were divided between Potiphar's house and the prison.

<sup>34</sup> Hughes, *Genesis*. On 38:27–30 he notes that Tamar is the first of four women named in Matthew's genealogy before Mary — Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba — all of them Gentiles and all of them attached to an irregular or potentially scandalous union, while the great mothers of Israel are absent. He quotes Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995). Hamilton observes that these unions were, by God's providence, links in the chain to the Messiah, each preparing the way for Mary, whose own marital situation was peculiar. Smith, *Pentateuch*. Smith likewise notes Tamar's place in the lineage of Jesus (Matthew 1:3).