

LESSON 2

The Lord Was with Joseph

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

— Genesis 39:2

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 a boy on an auction block. You would expect chapter 38 to pick him up there.

It doesn't. Moses swings the camera away from Egypt entirely, back to Canaan, and gives thirty verses to Judah: a Canaanite wife, two dead sons, a daughter-in-law left in limbo, and a roadside transaction that would embarrass anybody who had to tell it. Then 39:1 swings back as though nothing happened: *Now Joseph had been taken to Egypt.*

Older commentators found chapter 38 so awkward that they assumed an editor had wedged it in by mistake. Almost nobody argues that anymore. It is here on purpose, and once you see why, you can't unsee it.¹⁷

Two sons of Jacob leave that broken household in the same season. Both of them go down. The CSB says Judah left and Joseph was taken, but the Hebrew uses one verb for both, and that verb means to go down. Judah goes down to Adullam by choice. Joseph is brought down to Egypt in chains. One of them is free, prosperous, at home, and surrounded by his own people. The other is property. And Genesis sets their two stories side by side and asks you to watch which man keeps his integrity.

It is not the one you would bet on.

Now watch what happens to God's name. Chapter 39 can hardly stop saying it: the covenant name, *Yahweh*, **the Lord**, over and over, in a chapter that takes place entirely on pagan soil, in a slave's quarters and a prison. Two chapters back, God was invisible in the promised land. Here He is everywhere in Egypt.

That's the argument of this lesson, and Genesis makes it by repetition rather than explanation. Watch where Joseph is standing each of the four times.

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.

had made his servant swear not to take a Canaanite wife for Isaac (24:3). Isaac had said the same thing to Jacob on his way out the door (28:1). Judah knew, and did it anyway, and Genesis describes the whole courtship in a single breath. He saw her, he took her, that's it.¹⁸

Three sons come of it. Er is wicked enough that the Lord takes his life. Onan marries Er's widow, Tamar, under the old obligation to raise up an heir for a dead brother, then takes the privileges of the arrangement and refuses the duty, and he dies too. Judah, now down two sons, tells Tamar to go home to her father and wait for the third boy to grow up.¹⁹

He has no intention of ever giving her Shelah. He's afraid of her. And a childless widow in that world had no way to force his hand and nowhere else to go. Judah never laid a hand on Tamar. He filed her away and let the years do it.

Read that sentence again and remember who is telling this story. These fourteen chapters are about God preserving a family. Judah, the son who will carry the scepter and whose line runs to David and to Christ, is at this moment quietly strangling his own future because he can't be bothered to keep a promise to a widow.

What Tamar does next isn't defensible, and Genesis doesn't defend it. When Judah is widowed himself and heads up to the sheep-shearing, she trades her widow's clothes for a veil and waits by the road. He doesn't recognize her. He has no payment on him, so he leaves his signet, his cord, and his staff as a pledge, which in that world is roughly handing over your driver's license and your Social Security card. She takes them and disappears.²⁰

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

Then Tamar sends him his own seal and a message: *Examine them. Whose signet ring, cord, and staff are these?*

Stop there, because Genesis has just closed a trap it set one chapter earlier. In 37:32, Judah and his brothers handed their father a bloody coat and said, *Examine it. Is it your son's robe or not?* The CSB

Chapter 38 covers about twenty years. Two boys have to grow up, marry, and die; a third has to reach manhood; twins have to be born. Those are the same years Joseph is spending in Egypt, running on a parallel track.

Judah goes down and marries a Canaanite. Every man in that family knew better. Abraham

prints the trap in plain English — *Examine it there, Examine them here* — and it is the same phrase in Hebrew both times. The man who made an old father identify a garment is now made to identify his own staff in front of everybody. The deceiver gets deceived, with an item of identity and a goat, exactly as his father Jacob did to Isaac and exactly as Judah himself did to Jacob. Three generations, three goats, three lies. The line has to break somewhere.²¹

It breaks here. *She is more in the right than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah.*

This is no conversion, and Judah is not a good man at the end of chapter 38. But it is the first true sentence he has said in the story, and it costs him something to say it in public. **Mark this verse and hold onto it.** In Lesson 7 we will watch this same man stand in front of an Egyptian official he doesn't recognize and offer to be sold into slavery in place of his youngest brother. The distance between 37:26 and 44:33 is the whole argument of this book about what God can do with a man. It starts right here, with a humiliated liar saying out loud that somebody else was in the right.

The chapter ends with twins, a hand reaching out of the womb, then pulling back so the other brother comes first. If that sounds familiar, it should: the Jacob story opened with wrestling twins and a reversed birth order, and it now closes the same way. The younger comes ahead of the older, again.

The one who breaks out first is Perez. Ten generations later, David. And in Matthew 1:3, in the genealogy of Jesus Christ, there is Judah, and there is Tamar, and there is Perez.

The messianic line runs through this chapter, not around it.²²

One more reason Genesis parks this story here. Look at what's happening to Jacob's family in Canaan. They're marrying into it. They're settling into it. Give them two more generations, and there is no covenant family left to save, just another clan of Canaanites with an interesting story about their grandfather. The famine that drives them to Egypt looks like a disaster, and it is also what gets them out of a country that was digesting 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.

Now back to Joseph, where the contrast is deliberate. Judah, free at home, chases a woman he shouldn't have. Joseph, a slave in a foreign house, runs from one.

Verse 1 puts him in the household of Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard, which likely made him the man in charge of

the royal executions. Joseph now belongs to him the way a plow belongs to a farmer.²³

And verse 2: **The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man.**

Don't hear that word the way we usually hear it. It isn't about status; Joseph has no status. It's the same word used of the Lord prospering Abraham's servant on his errand in chapter 24, and of the suffering Servant in Isaiah 53:10. It means the thing he set his hand to came off. God was making a slave's work turn out.²⁴

Then watch the ladder. Verse 2, Joseph succeeds. Verse 3, his master *sees* that he succeeds and knows why. Verse 4, Joseph is put over the house. Verse 5, the blessing spills off Joseph onto everything Potiphar owns, in house and field. Verse 6, Potiphar hands over every last thing and stops thinking about any of it except what's on his plate.

Notice what just happened 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's an idol-worshipping Egyptian bureaucrat getting richer by the month because he was decent to a Hebrew slave, and he has no idea why. The promise is already working, quietly, in a house where nobody has heard of it.²⁵

Then verse 6 turns a corner in half a sentence: *Now Joseph was well-built and handsome.*

The Hebrew pays Joseph the same compliment it once paid his mother. Rachel is described with that very pair of words in 29:17, though the CSB renders them two different ways — *shapely and beautiful* there, *well-built and handsome* here. He has his mother's looks. And Genesis mentions it at this moment for one reason, the way a storyteller mentions the loose stone just before somebody trips on 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.

In Hebrew, that's two words, and they are a command rather than a seduction, the way you'd speak to furniture. She isn't in love with him. He is a good-looking piece of her husband's property, and she has spent her whole life getting what she asks for.²⁶

Joseph answers with thirty-five. He is the only person in this entire chapter who says anything worth reading, and it's worth reading 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?

Three things in that speech.

First, **he uses the arguments a weaker man would have used to say yes.** Nobody's watching. He has the run of the place. There's exactly one thing in this house he isn't allowed to touch, and Eve could tell you what people usually do with that arrangement. Every circumstance that would have given another man a rationalization becomes a reason for loyalty.

CHART 4

Joseph's Years



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

Second, **he calls it what it is.** *This immense evil.* There is no softer word in his mouth for it. He names it accurately and out loud, which is most of the battle, because sin has to be renamed before it can be committed.

Third, and this is the foundation everything rests on: *and how could I sin against*

God? He could have said sin against Potiphar, and the loyalty behind it was real. He could have said sin against you. Joseph is a slave with no rights, no family, no witnesses, and no prospects, standing in a country whose gods are carved on every wall, and he is living in front of an audience of One.²⁷

Then verse 10, which is the hardest verse in the chapter: *Although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her.*

Day after day. What Joseph faced here was a siege. And the Hebrew keeps something the CSB moves down into a footnote: he would not lie beside her, *or even be with her*. Notice how the demand quietly shrinks. She stops asking him to lie *with* her and starts asking him only to be *near* her, which is a more reasonable request and much harder to refuse without looking ridiculous. Joseph refuses that too. He won't sit in the room. He puts distance between himself and the trouble and lets people think whatever they want.²⁸

That is why verse 12 reads the way it does. When she finally grabs him, there's no speech left to make. *But leaving his garment in her hand, he escaped and ran outside.*

He ran. It looked nothing like bravery: out the door, into the street, his shirt left behind and his reputation with it. That's the moment Scripture holds up for the rest of us. *Flee from youthful passions* (2 Timothy 2:22). There is a kind of temptation you do not stand and debate, because standing there is already losing. **You win this one with geography rather than willpower.**

The Second Coat (39:13-20)

She has his garment, and she knows exactly what to do with it.

To the servants she says: *my husband brought a Hebrew man to make fools of us.* Look at what she does with that sentence. She gets a swipe at her husband in before she ever reaches Joseph, and she makes herself one of the household staff — *us*, not *me*. Joseph becomes a foreigner imposed on all of them. If any of them resented the Hebrew slave who'd been promoted over their heads, she has just given them somewhere to put it.²⁹

Then she edits the story for Potiphar. *The Hebrew slave you brought to us came to make a fool of me.* Now the blame is aimed straight at him — *you* brought him — and Joseph is a Hebrew *slave* rather than a Hebrew *man*, and it happened to *me*, not to *us*.

And there it is again: a piece of Joseph's clothing, held up in front of the man who has power over his life, and it tells a lie he cannot answer.

The first coat went home to Jacob soaked in goat's blood. This one goes to Potiphar, arranged on a couch. **Twice now, Joseph's clothes have gotten where he was going before he did, and both times they testified against him.** Genesis is keeping a list of these garments; we'll come back to it more than once.

Potiphar's anger burns, and Joseph goes to prison. And that is stranger than it looks. Potiphar was the captain of the guard. He could have had Joseph executed before lunch, and by the law of that world he should have. A slave accused of assaulting his master's wife does not go to a holding facility for royal officials.

Nobody can prove why he didn't. But commentators have long noticed the same thing: Potiphar doesn't seem to have fully believed his wife. He may have known her. He certainly knew Joseph; he'd trusted the man with everything he owned for years. So he did what a man does when he can't ignore an accusation and can't quite swallow it either. He put Joseph somewhere out of sight and asked no more questions.³⁰

Which is how the one man in Egypt who could interpret dreams ended up in the exact building where Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker were about to be held.

Genesis doesn't say a word about that yet; it simply puts him there.

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

Read verses 20 through 23 next to verses 1 through 6 and you'll find they are the same paragraph written twice, at two different depths.

The Lord was with him. He found favor. The man in charge put everything into his hand. The man in charge stopped paying attention to any of it, because whatever Joseph did, the Lord made it succeed.

Slave, then prisoner. Same sentences. Kidner puts it as well as it can be put: as prisoner and as governor, he was simply the same man.³¹

And do not romanticize the prison. Genesis is spare about it, but Psalm 105 is not: *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 used for this prison shows up nowhere else in the Old Testament outside these chapters. It may describe a round fortress. Whatever it was, there were irons in it.³²

Here is where the lesson leaves us, and it is a hard place to be left.

Joseph did everything right. He worked hard for a man who owned him. He refused a sin he could have gotten away with. He fled when fleeing cost him his position. And he ends this chapter lower than he

began it: a prisoner instead of a slave, with a criminal accusation 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 refrain describes something underneath his circumstances, something his circumstances never touched. God's presence and God's rescue are two different gifts, and in Genesis 39 Joseph gets the first one and waits thirteen years for the second.³³

If you have ever done the right thing and been punished for it, this chapter was written for you, and what it offers is harder to hold than what you want: *the Lord was with Joseph*.

Looking to Christ

Two threads run from this chapter to Christ, and they come from opposite directions.

The first runs through Judah. The line to the Messiah passes through the worst chapter in the book, through a man who broke his word to a widow and through a woman who deceived him to get what she was owed. Matthew knew exactly what he was doing when he put Tamar's name in the genealogy of Jesus. She's the first of four women there, all of them outsiders, all of them attached to a marriage the neighbors talked about. Then comes Mary, whose situation the neighbors also talked about. God has never once needed a respectable line to run His promise through, and He seems to have made a point of it.³⁴

The second runs through Joseph. He was tempted and did not sin. He was accused falsely, and Genesis records not one word of self-defense from him. He was handed over by the man who had every reason to know better, and he went down without opening his mouth. *He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth* (Isaiah 53:7).

Both threads meet in the sentence this chapter says four times.

The Lord was with him. When Stephen retold this story in Acts 7:9, that's the line he reached for: they sold him into Egypt, *but God was with him*. And when Matthew wanted a name for what God finally did about it all, he chose *Immanuel*, which he translates *God is with us* (Matthew 1:23).

The refrain of Genesis 39 becomes the name of Jesus.

Applying the Text

God's presence is not the same as God's rescue. Joseph had the first for thirteen years before he got the second. If you are measuring whether God is with you by whether things are improving, this chapter will break that instrument, and you should let it.

Where you are is not who you are. Joseph did a slave's work like a man who mattered, and then did a prisoner's work the same way, and he was promoted in both places by people who had no reason to like him. He didn't wait for a job worthy of his dreams before he started working. Most of us are waiting for exactly that.

Name it before you negotiate with it. *So how could I do this immense evil?* Watch how the vocabulary softens first: an affair becomes a connection, theft becomes an adjustment, cruelty becomes honesty. Say the accurate word out loud, and half the argument collapses.

Live in front of an audience of One. Nobody was watching Joseph. His family was on the other side of a desert and assumed he was dead. The only reason he had left to behave was God, and it turned out to be enough.

Run. Not every temptation is fought standing up. Some are survived only by leaving: staying out of the room, closing the app, refusing the meeting alone, letting the 11 p.m. message wait until morning. Joseph fled, looked foolish, and paid for it, and Scripture calls it the right move.

Say the true sentence, even when it costs you. Judah's long road back to God began with one sentence said in public: *She is more in the right than I.* Nothing changes in a person until something true gets said out loud.

For Discussion

1. Why do you think Moses interrupts the Joseph story with Genesis 38? What would you miss if you skipped it?
2. Judah is free, at home, and among his own people, and he falls. Joseph is a slave in a pagan house, and he stands. What does that comparison say about the relationship between our circumstances and our character?
3. Joseph's stated reason for refusing was *sin against God*, not sin against Potiphar. Why does the difference between those two reasons matter, and which one is actually holding you?
4. Verse 10 says she spoke to him *day after day*. What is different about a temptation that never goes away, and how do you fight one of those?

5. Four times this chapter says the Lord was with Joseph, and his situation gets worse anyway. 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 is that so often where change starts?

Looking Ahead

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

Two men have dreams on the same night, and the forgotten Hebrew in the corner knows what they mean. Joseph asks one small favor of the cupbearer: only remember me, and the chapter ends with a sentence that will sit in your stomach: *Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.*

Then two years pass.

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

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ 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.

²¹ 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.

²² 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.

²³ 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.

²⁴ 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.

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ Grigoni et al., *Joseph*. 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*. 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 maqqef-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*. 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.

²⁷ Borthwick, *Life of Joseph*. 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*. They add that Joseph also grasped the danger of his position, since continual refusal might provoke her to retaliate with false charges.

²⁸ 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.

²⁹ 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.

³⁰ 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.

³¹ 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.

³² 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.

³³ 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.

³⁴ 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).