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## Genesis 39

(2019)

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Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

## Genesis 39.

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### Topics.

- The Ishmaelite's sold Joseph to Potiphar an officer of Pharaoh.
- Potiphar made Joseph overseer and the LORD blessed the Egyptian.
- Potiphar's wife attempts to sexually force herself upon Joseph.
- Potiphar's wife tells Joseph's master Joseph came in to her.
- Potiphar's anger was enraged so he puts Joseph into the king's prison.
- The LORD was with Joseph and the LORD made all he did succeed.
- An overview of the complete story of Joseph.

**FOR INFORMATION:** concerning people, places and the meaning of words see the title: "Map Locations and People of the Bible," and the title: "Bible Dictionary" on Website Menu.

**The previous chapter:** in chapter thirty-eight Judah goes into a Canaanite woman and she gives birth to Er, Onan and Shelah; God puts Er to death; Onan waste his semen rather than raise up offspring for his brother's widowed wife Tamar; Judah gives Tamar his signet, his cord and staff and she conceives by him; Judah intends to have Tamar burned because he is told she is pregnant by immorality; he then discovers he is the father of her children and she gives birth to twins named Perez and Zerah.

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### GENESIS 39:1

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#### The Ishmaelite's Sold Joseph to Potiphar an Officer of Pharaoh.

- **Genesis 39:1:** Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there.

In chapter thirty-seven it says:

- Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt. (Gen. 37:28).
- Meanwhile, the Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer, the captain of the bodyguard. (Gen. 37:36).
- Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there. (Gen. 39:1).

These verses have raised the age-old question, "who purchased Joseph, the Ishmaelite's or the Midianites?" Since it is firstly stated that Joseph was sold to the Ishmaelite's and secondly that the Midianites sold Joseph to Potiphar and thirdly that Potiphar purchased Joseph from the Ishmaelite's. The confusion may be explained and the verses harmonised in the following two ways:

1. The Midianites were descendants of Midian who was a son of Abraham by Keturah (Gen. 25:1-2) and even though they were a distinct people from the Ishmaelite's the following verses show that they are called both Ishmaelite's and Midianites. Either because they were mixed together by marriage and the land in which they dwelt or because they are here travelling together as one caravan of merchants.

- The men of Ephraim said to him, "What is this that you have done to us, not to call us when you went to fight with Midian? (Judges 8:1).
  - Gideon said to them, "Let me make a request of you: every one of you give me the earrings from his spoil." (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.). (Judges 8:24).
  - So Midian was subdued before the people of Israel, and they raised their heads no more. (Judges 8:28).
2. The Ishmaelite's and the Midianites were near neighbours so for greater safety they travelled in a company together trading in merchandise, and are therefore sometimes referred to as one company and at other times as the two. Joseph brothers had sold him to the Ishmaelite's who took him to Egypt and sold him to Potiphar, an Egyptian and the captain of the guard and officer of Pharaoh. The full story is in (Gen. 37:12-36).

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## GENESIS 39:2-6

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### Potiphar made Joseph Overseer; the LORD Blessed the Egyptian.

- **Genesis 39:2-6:** The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. <sup>3</sup>His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. <sup>4</sup>So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. <sup>5</sup>From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. <sup>6</sup>So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

Joseph's brothers had cast him into the darkness of a pit, stripped him of his outward distinctions, separated him from his friends, relatives and country, but they could not rob him from his wisdom and grace or take from him the presence of the LORD and communion with God or take him from the throne of grace, or the blessings of salvation. Even in the house where Joseph was a slave he was wonderfully blessed by the presence of God and His favour toward him to make him prosperous in all he set his hand to do. No matter what the environment is godly men and women are a blessing to those around them whether they are esteemed or lowly and regardless of whether they are rulers or servants. Potiphar, Joseph's first master (his second was the prison keeper and the third the Pharaoh of Egypt) saw the prosperity that followed all that Joseph did, in fact his success was so abundant that Potiphar recognised that the LORD was with him and because of this he made him overseer over all his house and all his fields.

**LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake:** (v5) though Joseph had done no wrong he had suffered hardships, disadvantages and troubles of all kinds and yet he continued to faithfully and zealously serve God. it is very likely that the LORD poured out a special miraculous blessing upon the land of Egypt for the following two reasons

1. To bless Joseph for his enduring faithfulness
2. That Joseph still only a youth would be exalted to such a high position in the Egyptian Empire.

Joseph clearly lived by the rules spoken of in the following two Scriptures:

- Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, <sup>6</sup>not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, <sup>7</sup>rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man. (Ephes. 6:5-7).
- Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men. (Col. 3:23).

We are not told in what capacity Joseph entered into the service of Potiphar or how long he was in his service, but there must have been sometime for him to discern Joseph's superior skills and leadership qualities and the LORD'S blessing upon his families' health, his substance and the increase in his wealth and observe the multiplication of his livestock, his fruit and his crops, before making him his chief and having total trust in his abilities. The lesson to learn here is that no matter how lowly our circumstances are we should always remain faithful before the Lord and do the best with the abilities and skills we have with the mindset that we are working for the Lord and not for man. When we do everything with this attitude and mindset, we honour God and bring a good testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ and will be rewarded either in this life or the next for remaining loyal and faithful to the LORD. There is no doubt that Joseph's advancement was the consequence of Potiphar observing the astonishing prosperity that followed all that he did and it was the natural course of affairs that domestic servants who showed faithfulness and loyalty would be advanced to a higher station, but this extraordinary advancement of Joseph could only come about by the workings of the LORD.

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## GENESIS 39:7-10

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### Potiphar's Wife Attempts to Sexually Force Herself upon Joseph.

- **Genesis 39:7-10:** And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." <sup>8</sup>But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. <sup>9</sup>He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" <sup>10</sup>And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her.

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Joseph's words, "There is none greater in this house than I," can be taken to imply the following two things:

- 1 There was no servant or anyone else in Potiphar's house given greater authority than Joseph had been given, he was the chief of all those in Potiphar's house all others were under his rule and his authority.
- 2 Potiphar himself was not greater in his house than Joseph was in the sense that Potiphar had not kept back anything from Joseph. Joseph had full authority over all the servants, and everything in the house at his command, and the free use of everything his master had except of course, his wife.

Either way it is read it simply means that Potiphar was so impressed with Joseph he gave him equal power and authority over all things in his household except his wife.

**How can I do this great wickedness?** (v9) adultery was reckoned a great sin among all nations. Unlike Joseph whose heart was set upon doing what was right before God and before Potiphar the heart of Potiphar's wife was fully set to do evil and utterly devoid of any sense of loyalty toward her husband and toward God. She aggressively attempted to seduce Joseph, no doubt all the while robed in her most seductive garments.

**How can I do this great wickedness?** How can I shamefully deceive and betray the trust my master has put in me and the kindness he has shown me since I was sold to him as a slave by taking his wife to bed. How can I who professes to be a worshipper and servant of the invisible, immortal Almighty, Holy God the God of truth, justice, and holiness do such a great wickedness as committing adultery with the wife of my kind master? The integrity of Joseph's heart was toward mankind and toward God. It was these things that enabled him to overcome this aggressive

sensual assault of Potiphar wife. He was fully aware had he succumbed to her flattery and seductive temptation he would have sinned against himself, against her, against his master and above all against God and His righteous law, all of these things gave Joseph the inner fortitude to refuse Potiphar's wife's tempting seductive and sinful advances she made to entice him into her bed. Four reasons Joseph was able to resist the temptations of Potiphar wife:

1. He was fully aware he was in a covenant relationship with God.
2. He did not think that the temptation facing him was a small thing, he knew full well that it was a betrayal of his master who had been so kind to him and a gross sin before God.
3. His love for God, produced a hatred toward sin and anything that would be offensive to God.
4. He had enough wisdom to know that the best way to overcome this temptation was to flee from it. He did not linger around to be flattered or to give the seductress any time to seduce him.

**NOTE:** some today excuse a man that has committed a adultery with the words, "you can't blame him, she is so beautiful," she may well be the most stunning wife on the planet, but that is no excuse for adultery. There is no doubt that there may be times when a married man or woman is sensually attracted to another, but that does not justify acting upon such an attraction. It is not sexual passion that causes a man or woman to commit adultery, but a lack of integrity within themselves and toward their partner and toward God. It is highly likely Potiphar's wife was a most beautiful young women and very sensual to look at (at least while she was attempting to seduce Joseph). It was not the fact that he had no attraction toward her or that she had no effect on his passions since it is most likely he did think she was a beautiful woman and that his passions were stirred in some manner. The thing that gave him the power to resist was the integrity of his heart and his love for God and respect for her husband, his master.

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## **GENESIS 39:11-18**

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### **Potiphar's Wife tells Joseph's Master, Joseph Came in to Her.**

- **Genesis 39:11-18:** But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, <sup>12</sup>she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. <sup>13</sup>And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, <sup>14</sup>she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. <sup>15</sup>And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house." <sup>16</sup>Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, <sup>17</sup>and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to laugh at me. <sup>18</sup>But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house."

We would be safe to suppose that Joseph tried to avoid as much as possible being in the company of Potiphar's wife, but since much of his work involved overseeing the servants of the house there were of course times when they would both in the same room, and the story shows that she deliberately went out of her way to be in his company.

**Potiphar's wife accuses Joseph:** (v14) here again we see the wickedness of Potiphar's wife manifested in her evil plot to turn her husband against Joseph and thereby get her revenge against him for him having rejected her sensual advances. Having tried in vain to seduce him she now successfully gets her revenge upon him. Here is a perfect

example of the best of God's people being falsely accused by the worst of sinners. Those who find themselves in such positions should do as Joseph did, remain faithful and loyal to man and to God resting in the knowledge that there is a day of discovery coming, in which all descendants of Adam will appear in their true characters before the LORD God the Judge of all mankind.

**I cried with a loud voice:** (v14) the following Scriptures show that these words are intended to be the proof of her innocence:

- If there is a betrothed virgin, and a man meets her in the city and lies with her, <sup>24</sup>then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them both to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry for help though she was in the city. (Deut. 22:23-24).
- If a man seizes a woman in the open country to lay with her shall die only the man who committed the offense shall be punishable by death, because though the young woman cried for help there was no one to rescue her. (Deut. 22:25-27).

Potiphar's wife being intensely outraged and feeling insulted determines to get revenge, firstly by accusing Joseph to the servants of the house and secondly by accusing him to her husband Joseph's master. With Joseph's garment in her hand (probably his robe) she tells her husband that the Hebrew servant he brought into their house has mocked her and him by attempting to take her by force to her bedroom with the intention of laying with her. Potiphar naturally believes the accusations of his deceiving wife and unknowingly becomes an accessory to his wife's evil crime.

**NOTE:** the national title for Abram was Hebrew, he was commonly referred to as the Hebrew, (Gen. 14:13) and at this time the proper national title for Joseph was still, "a Hebrew." Jacob's descendants had not yet gotten beyond the family name Hebrew. The title, Israelite was not yet commonly used. The following verse shows that to the Egyptians the national name Hebrew was commonly used as a term of reproach.

- They (Joseph's Egyptian servants) served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. (Gen. 43:32).

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## GENESIS 39:19-20

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### Potiphar puts Joseph into the Kings Prison.

- **Genesis 39:19-20:** As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, "This is the way your servant treated me," his anger was kindled. <sup>20</sup>And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison.

Potiphar believes the lying story his wife told him and naturally resents the supposed unfaithfulness of the slave he had placed his trust and honoured so highly. However, his treatment of Joseph is mild compared to what he could have done. He puts him in the king's prison waiting to stand trial for his offence. He was away from all his friends and relations; he had none to help or comfort him; but the LORD was with him to show him favour and open the way to his honour. One of the reasons God gave Joseph favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison was because God's favour is toward all who have a good conscience and remain faithful to Him, but God's purpose for Joseph goes far beyond what is general for the faithful as a whole. Joseph's skills as a leader, his honesty and integrity were so clearly manifested that the Jail keeper trusted him to manage all the affairs of the prison.

**NOTE:** those that have a good heart will do good wherever they are and will be a blessing to those around them regardless of whether their situation or circumstances are good or bad. In the same way that Joseph looked to the LORD for comfort and hope, we must likewise when in



suffering circumstances look to Jesus who resisted temptation and was without sin, yet was slandered, imprisoned and crucified as a common criminal without cause and by his righteousness his heavenly Father resurrected him to the right-hand side of his throne. Our heartfelt prayer should always be that we would have the grace and the trust that Joseph had before the LORD and Jesus had before his heavenly Father.

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## GENESIS 39:21-23

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### **The LORD made whatever Joseph did Succeed.**

- **Genesis 39:21-23:** But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. <sup>22</sup>And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. <sup>23</sup>The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed.

The LORD gave Joseph favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison (v22) for the following two reasons:

1. He displayed enduring faithfulness and integrity of heart toward God and toward mankind even under the worst of circumstances.
2. He displayed kindness and goodness toward the prisoners.

But the LORD'S favour in this story reaches far higher than what is the general norm for the faithful in His Global Kingdom. Not only was Joseph's good character and his leadership skills working together to bring to him the prisons keepers favour, but there was also a higher influence at work which of course was the Spirit of God working behind the scenes (as it were) to bring about Joseph's success and prosperity in all he put his hand to do. The keeper of the prison gave Joseph great honour, credit, and influence by committing all the prisoners to his rule.

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**Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it:** (v22) does not mean that he learned every trade the prisoners were doing or even that he did everything that was done in the prison. It means that he gave orders for everything that was done in the prison and there was nothing done without his ordering it or his authority; all that was done he commanded it to be done or, approved it to be done by his word which was the authority over all matters in the prison.

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## AN OVERVIEW OF THE COMPLETE STORY OF JOSEPH

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When the previous chapters and the following ones are viewed as a complete whole, we see the wonder in the way in which God's sovereign purpose was brought about through the natural affairs of mankind despite their sinful deeds. The wicked brothers achieved their ends, the merchants also obtained theirs and Potiphar gained a wise young slave obtained his (Genesis chapter 37, 38, 39). Now in this chapter we read of the evil workings of Potiphar's wife her sinful accusations and Joseph's wrongful imprisonment, yet despite all these things we see as we travel through the story that God achieves His sovereign purposes.

This is the wonder and mystery of the sovereignty of God, it was these evil events and sinful actions that prepared the way for Joseph to save his family from certain death due to the great famine in the land, and prepared the way for Jacob's family to go down to Egypt which ends in their deliverance by Moses which leads to the establishing of the true faith in the world and the spread of it amongst all nations by the Gospel. This is an ugly story of jealousy and cruel hate that shines a vivid light upon the following ten truths:

- 1 The wickedness of mankind's afflictions is often the direct path to the fulfilment of God's purposes
- 2 Mankind in their rebellion and sin often act as blind instruments to bring about God's sovereign purposes.
- 3 God's great purposes are often worked out and come to pass by the works of the wicked even though they are unconscious that they are bringing it to pass.
- 4 The poisonous fruit of family hatred if left to fester has the potential to bring about the evillest of crimes.
- 5 Corruption amongst God's children is the worst corruption.
- 6 Showing open partiality for one child has the potential to bring about jealous and envious passions in the other children.
- 7 Outward manifestations of sin are connected to the inmost passions that dwell on the inside and stem up from them.
- 8 The smallest seed of hate has the potential to dispel from the heart and mind all forms of compassion, empathy and mercy.
- 9 The heart and mind must be guarded from the beginnings of envy, jealousy and greed.
- 10 God's choice that Israel would be His chosen nation was not grounded on any merit in them, but on His sovereign purpose.

The stories undisguised openness in revelling such sins is the tone of Scripture throughout the Bible. It never attempts to hide the faults even of God's best men. It tells its story with open honesty and without showing any favouritism by covering the sins of its great kings and prophets. Whether a heavenly man or an earthly man the faults and flaws of neither are hidden. The Bible tells its story as it is in reality with all mankind's goodness and all their ugliness to bring out into the open the hidden and unseen inward nature of humanity, both the good and the bad. It does this to shine a light upon the truth that no one is without sin and that we all need a Saviour.

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*As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.*