

Genesis 39

- The LORD was with him -

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Foreword

- ❖ A masterpiece of storytelling! The narrator of this history uses sometimes a minimum of words to create a maximum of effect, especially in the discourse part.
- ❖ The story highlights the upright character of Joseph, as an illustration of the covenant: “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me and **be blameless**” (Gn 17:1). And: "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gn 12:2, 3).
- ❖ This outline will focus on the structure of the narrative and give some background information on Egyptian society.
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Book of Genesis. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a “stand-alone”. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

Context

- ❖ An outline of the Book of Genesis.

<i>THE CREATION</i>	
Genesis 1:1-2:3	"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."
<i>THE HISTORY OF HEAVEN AND EARTH</i>	
Genesis 2:4-4:26	"account of the heavens and the earth" (2:4)
Genesis 5:1-6:8	"account of Adam" (5:1)
Genesis 6:9-9:28	"account of Noah" (6:9)
Genesis 10:1-11:9	"account of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah's sons" (10:1)
<i>THE HISTORY OF (Terah) ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JAKOB – the founding fathers of Israel</i>	
Genesis 11:10-26	"account of Shem" (11:10)
Genesis 11:27-25:11	"account of Terah" (11:27)
Genesis 25:12-18	"account of Abraham's son Ishmael" (25:12)
Genesis 25:19-35:29	"account of Abraham's son Isaac" (25:19)
Genesis 36:1-	"account of Esau" (36:1)
Genesis 37:2-50:26	"account of Jacob" (37:2)

- ❖ The Book of Genesis consists of three main parts:
 - Genesis 1:1-2:3: In the beginning;
 - Genesis 2:4-11:9: The history of heaven and earth;
 - Genesis 11:10-50:26: The history of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
 - The promise given to Abram/Abraham (Gen. 12:2-3) is fundamental to the understanding of the third part of the book of Genesis (12-50):
 - "I will make you into a great nation
 - and I will bless you;
 - I will make your name great,
 - and you will be a blessing.
 - I will bless those who bless you,
 - and whoever curses you I will curse;

- and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."
 - The promise of becoming a father of a great nation and many nations is repeated several times: "I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted" (Abraham: Gen. 13:6-17; 15: 5; 17:5-6; 18:18; 22:17-18; Isaac: 26:4; Jacob: 28:14; 35:11).
 - Note that the accounts of Terah, Abraham's son Isaac and Joseph, are mainly narrated from the perspective of their sons: Terah – Abraham, Isaac – Jacob, and Jacob – Joseph.
- ❖ An outline of the account of Jacob. Although this is often called the story of Joseph, the focus is on Jacob, and the (saving of) the people of Israel.

<i>The account of Jacob (Gn 37:1-50:26)</i>	
<i>1. Joseph sold as a slave to Egypt (Gn 37)</i>	
Genesis 37	<p>Joseph and his two dreams (Gn 37:2-11):</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">His brothers said to him: "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?"</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">His father said to him: "Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?"</p> <p>Joseph sold by his brothers to the Midianites (Gn 37:12-28).</p> <p>Jacob mourns (Gn 37:29-35) because of the alleged death of Joseph.</p> <p>Joseph sold as a slave to Potiphar (Gn 37:36).</p>
<i>2. Interlude: Judah and Tamar (Gn 38)</i>	
<i>3. Joseph in Egypt (Gn 39:1-47:26)</i>	
Genesis 39	<p>Joseph serves as a slave in the house of Potiphar (Gn 39:1-7).</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered" (Gn 39:2).</p> <p>Joseph and the wife of Potiphar (Gn 39:8-18).</p> <p>Joseph serves in prison (Gn 39:19-23).</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"In the prison, the LORD was with him" (Gn 39:20, 21).</p>
Genesis 40	<p>Joseph and the two dreams of the cup-bearer and the baker of the king of Egypt.</p>

Genesis 41:1-40	Joseph and the two dreams of the King of Egypt (Gn 41:1-40).
Genesis 41:41-56	Joseph in charge of Egypt (Gn 41:41-56).
	<i>A turning point in the life of Joseph: the birth of two sons (Gn 41:50-52)</i>
	<p>“Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, 'It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.'</p> <p>The second son he named Ephraim and said, 'It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.'”</p>
4. The journeys of the brothers of Joseph to Egypt (Gn 42:1-26)	
Genesis 42	<p>The first journey of the brothers of Joseph to Egypt.</p> <p>“Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. Then he remembered his dreams about them” (Gen 42:8, 9).</p>
Genesis 43-45	The second journey of the brothers of Joseph to Egypt.
Genesis 46	The third journey to Egypt. Jacob and his family are allowed to settle in Goshen.
Genesis 47:1-26	Joseph in charge of Egypt.
5. The final years of Jacob in Egypt (47:27-50:14)	
Genesis 47:27-41	Joseph promises his father Jacob to bury his body in Canaan.
Genesis 48	Jacob blesses Joseph and his two sons.
Genesis 49:1-28	Jacob prophecies about his other sons.
Genesis 49:29-50:14	The death and burial of Jacob in Canaan.
6. The reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers (50:15-26)	
Genesis 50:15-21	Joseph comforts his brothers.
Genesis 50:22-26	The death of Joseph and his (provisional) burial in Egypt.

- ❖ This account of Jacob consists of six parts:
 - 1. Joseph sold as a slave to Egypt (Gn 37).

- 2. Interlude: Judah and Tamar (Gn 38). This passage serves as an interlude to create suspense. It serves to show that Joseph was separated from his family for a long time, more than twelve years.¹
- 3. Joseph in Egypt (Gn 39:1-47:26).
 - The birth of his two sons marks a turning point in the life of Joseph: forgetting the past, looking into the future.
- 4. The journeys of the brothers of Joseph to Egypt (Gn 42:1-26).
- 5. The final years of Jacob in Egypt (47:27-50:14).
- 6. The reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers (50:15-26).



- An Egyptian family. This family consists of husband and wife, daughter and son. According to the colour of their skin, the wives stayed mainly indoors, while the men were working outdoors. Egyptian families were not big. The family of Joseph (husband and wife, two sons) fits into this picture. Look also at the man's dress.

¹ Wenham, G. J. (1994, Vol. 2, p. 363).

Form and structure

❖ Genesis 39 contains 3 parts:

- Verse 1-6 describes the setting for the unfolding story in the second part. Verse 1 connects this narrative with chapter 37.
- Verse 6-19 describes the story of Joseph and the wife of Potiphar. The story serves also as an explanation for the second setting.
- Verse 20-23 provides the background for the ensuing story of chapter 40.

Joseph in the house of Potiphar (verse 1-6) – setting (1)

Introduction
(Verse 1) Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

THE LORD WAS WITH JOSEPH

Setting
(Verse 2-6) The LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.

When his master saw that the LORD was with him
and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did,
Joseph found favour in his eyes and became his attendant.
Potiphar put him in charge of his household,
and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.
From the time he put him in charge of his household
and of all that he owned,
the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph.
The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had,
both in the house and in the field.
So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care;
with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the
food he ate.

Joseph and the wife of Potiphar (verse 6-20) – narrative

Scene 1
(verse 6-10)
Actors: Joseph + the wife of Potiphar

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." 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. He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

Scene 2
(verse 11-12)
Actors: Joseph + the wife of Potiphar

And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her. 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, 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.

Scene 3
(verse 13-15)
Actors: the wife of Potiphar + servants

And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, 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. 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."

Scene 4
(verse 16-18)
Actors: Potiphar + his wife

Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, 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. But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house."

Scene 5
(verse 19-20)
Actors: Joseph + Potiphar

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. 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.

Joseph in Prison (verse 20-23) – setting (2)

THE LORD WAS WITH JOSEPH

Setting 2
(verse 20-23)

But while Joseph was there in the prison, the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

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.

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.

A detailed outline of verse 1-6

Introduction
(Verse 1)

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

THE LORD WAS WITH JOSEPH

Setting
(verse 2)

The LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.

A. Blessing noticed

When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did,

Joseph found favour in his eyes and became his attendant.

B. Potiphar put Joseph in charge

Potiphar put him in charge of his household,

A'. Blessing continued

and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.

From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph.

The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had,

B'. Potiphar left Joseph in charge

both in the house and in the field.

So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care;

with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

- ❖ Genesis 39:2-6 has an ABA'B'-structure.
 - Whereby A' is an elaboration of A. Compare:
 - "the LORD gave him success in everything he (Joseph) did"
 - "the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph.
 - The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had,
 - both in the house and in the field."
 - Whereby B' is an elaboration of B. Compare:
 - "he (Potiphar) entrusted to his care everything he owned."
 - "So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care;
 - with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate."
- ❖ Genesis 39:6 introduces already a potential problem:
 - "He did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate." Although it is not stated explicitly, Potiphar did not concern himself with his wife. A conclusion might be that he was neglecting his wife.
 - Compare with Genesis 39:9: "My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife."

Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

History, a historical narrative or a tale?

- ❖ Is this story rooted in history or is it just a tale? Longacre refers to a study of Hoffmeier.² This study discusses several pieces of evidence, including:
 - ❖ "(1) the detail that the price for which Joseph was sold, twenty pieces of silver (Gn 37:28), was the price of a slave in the first half of the second millennium (2000–1500 B.C.), while at later periods the price was considerably higher;
 - ❖ (2) the names Potiphar (Gn 37:36; 39:1), Potiphara the priest of On (Gn 41:45, 50), Asenath, the wife of Joseph (Gn 41:45, 50) and Zaphenath-paneah (Gn 41:45)." Asenath is a common name of the Middle Kingdom and first Intermediate (2000–1500 B.C.);³

² Longacre, R. E. (2003). *Joseph*. In T. D. Alexander & D. W. Baker (Eds.).

- ❖ "(3) the role of magicians as dream interpreters in Egypt (Gn 41:8);
- ❖ (4) the significance of Pharaoh's 'birthday' (reinterpreted according to Egyptian sources as the anniversary of accession/coronation)." This is comparable to the moment that Joseph receives a new Egyptian name.
- ❖ "(5) the scenes of the investiture of high officials whose details parallel the account of Joseph's investiture (Gn 41:41-43);
- ❖ (6) Joseph's status where the Genesis account suggests several Egyptian titles and parallels; and (7) even Joseph's age at death (110 years), which has been recognized for two centuries as an ideal age according to Egyptian sources."
- ❖ Longacre agrees with Hoffmeier: "It seems to me, however, that if the narratives look like history, are structured historiographically, and the events described (especially in the Joseph story) are not incredible and compare favorably with the Egyptian backgrounds, ... then the narratives ought to be considered historical until there is evidence to the contrary" (Hoffmeier, 91).⁴

A timeline

- ❖ Timeline of the life of Joseph:
 - Joseph was 17 years old when he had his dreams (Gn 37:2).
 - He spent approximately 12 years in slavery and prison (Gn 38-40).
 - At the age of 30, he entered into the service of Pharaoh (Gn 41:46).
 - He became the father of two sons when he was approximately 32/34 years old. The birth of his two sons marked a turning point in his life (Gn 41:50-52; see above).
 - At the age of 37/38, seven years of famine.
 - The brothers went to Egypt in the first year of the famine.
 - The brothers went to Egypt for the second time in the second year of the famine. There are five more years to come (Gn 45:6).
 - Jacob and his whole family moved to Egypt. Jacob was a hundred and thirty years old when he was presented to Pharaoh (Gn 47:3).
 - At the age of 44/45, the famine came to an end.

³ Yee, G. A. (1992; Vol. 1, p. 476). *Asenath (Person)*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.).

⁴ See Hoffmeier, J.K. (1997). *Israel in Egypt The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Jacob lived another seventeen years in Egypt. He died at the age of a hundred and forty-seven (Gn 47:28).
- Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten years (Gn 50:22).

God's providence

- ❖ This story is part of the greater story showing the providence of God. For more information, see Genesis 50:15-21.⁵ The story must be understood against this background together with the covenantal blessing of Genesis 12:2, 3. See above.

The concepts of marriage, and sin in ancient Egypt

- ❖ This story takes place in an interreligious situation: Egypt and its religion – Israel (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and the covenant with the LORD.
- ❖ Joseph said to the wife of Potiphar: “No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. **How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?**”
 - Two questions can be asked:
 - What did Joseph mean by these words?
 - How did the wife of Potiphar understand these words?
 - Within the story, the name "LORD" is confined to the descriptive parts in which the narrator writes about the blessing and the success which befell Joseph.
 - In the short discourse between Joseph and the wife of Potiphar he uses the general word "God." It must be noticed that the beliefs of Joseph and those of the wife of Potiphar were completely different. Joseph was raised within the emerging revelation of the "LORD", while the wife of Potiphar was (probably) familiar with the Egyptian religion, its gods and myths.

A short note on Egyptian Religion⁶

“Religion played a part in every aspect of the lives of the ancient Egyptians because life on earth was seen as only one part of an eternal journey, and to continue that journey after death, **one needed to live a life worthy of continuance**. During one's life on earth, **one was expected to uphold the principle of *ma'at* (harmony)** with an understanding that one's actions in life affected not only one's self but others' lives as well, and the operation of the universe. People were expected to depend on each other to keep balance as this was the will of the gods to produce the greatest amount of pleasure and

⁵ <https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/files/pub/word/Genesis%2050.15-21.pdf>

⁶ Mark, J. J. (2021, May 30). Ancient Egyptian Religion. Retrieved from https://www.worldhistory.org/Egyptian_Religion/

happiness for humans through a harmonious existence which also enabled the gods to better perform their tasks.

By honouring the principle of *ma'at* (personified as a goddess of the same name holding the white feather of truth) and living one's life in accordance with its precepts, one was aligned with the gods and the forces of light against the forces of darkness and chaos, and assured one's self of a welcome reception in the Hall of Truth after death and a gentle judgment by Osiris, the Lord of the Dead.”⁷

A short note on marriage in Ancient Egypt

“As the Egyptians valued social harmony it makes sense that they would place special emphasis on stories encouraging domestic tranquility. Interestingly, there are no similar stories in which men are to blame. Monogamy was emphasized as a value even among the stories of the gods and male gods usually had only one female wife or consort but the king was allowed to have as many wives as he could support, as could any royal man of means, and this most likely influenced how male infidelity was perceived. Still, the ideal of the ancient Egyptian relationship was a couple who remained faithful to each other and produced children.”⁸

- There must have been a common ground of understanding.
 - At the same time, Joseph was raised in the context of polygamy. His father was married to two sisters, Leah and Rachel, and had also children with the two maidservants, Zilpah and Bilhah.
 - Common marriages in Egypt were monogamous.
- “Sin” or “wickedness” means in this context: acts against the principle of harmony (*ma'at*).
 - It must be remembered that the ten commandments were not given yet (Rom 5:13).
 - The covenant: “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless.’” (Gen 17:1). Abram was his grandfather.

⁷ See for more information: Mark, J. J. (2021, May 31). The Egyptian Afterlife & The Feather of Truth. Retrieved from <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/42/the-egyptian-afterlife--the-feather-of-truth/>

⁸ Mark, J. J. (2021, May 30). Love, Sex, and Marriage in Ancient Egypt. Retrieved from <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/934/love-sex-and-marriage-in-ancient-egypt/>

- “blameless” = “תָּמִים” (Gen 17:1): The behaviour of Joseph is best characterized as “blameless.” See for the same thought Matthew 5:48.

Exposition

Verse 1-6 (setting 1)

- ❖ The first verse picks up the story of Joseph where Genesis 37 ended:
 - “Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard.” (Gn 37:36).
 - “Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there” (Gn 39:1).
 - There is some confusion about the identity of the traders, which will not be discussed in this outline (Midianites - Ishmaelites). See also Genesis 37:25, 28, 36).
- ❖ The name Potiphar is only used here and in Genesis 37:36. The NIV adds his name in Genesis 39:4 and 5. From verse 1 onwards he is called the “Egyptian” or “Joseph’s master” or “master”.
 - The attention remains focused on Joseph.
- ❖ The structure of verse 1 has an ABA’ character:
 - A. Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt.
 - B. Potiphar, an Egyptian
 - who was one of Pharaoh's officials,
 - the captain of the guard,
 - A'. bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.
 -
 - The central part of this verse depicts Potiphar as a high official. This description shows how Joseph is nearing the centre of power, the throne of the Pharaoh.
- ❖ See for the structure of verse two to five above. The house of Potiphar is blessed because the LORD is with Joseph. This blessing is described by words like “prospered” and “success.” This part of the story has a climactic character and a sort of anticlimax:
 - Joseph: "So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge,
 - Potiphar: he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.”

- Reyburn and Fry give an overview of different explanations: “Interpreters understand **but the food which he ate** in three ways:
- (1) as referring to his private sexual life,
- (2) as referring to his private affairs generally,
- (3) as referring to religious regulations concerning the preparation of food, which he could not entrust to a foreigner.”⁹
- In this and the third part of the story, the name LORD is used. This name is connected with the covenant (Ex 3:14). In the central part, Joseph refers to God.
- Potiphar trusted Joseph in everything. This trust was not in vain, as will be seen from the next scene. But in the end... “He was appointed chief manager or steward of his household.”¹⁰
- See for **the blessing of the covenant** (Genesis 12:2; 21:22; a.o.). The blessing that Joseph will bring to Egypt and the neighbouring nations including his family (Gn 50:20) is already being anticipated.¹¹

Verse 6-20 (narrative)

- ❖ Scene 1 (verse 6-10). For an overview of the different scenes, see above.
 - “**Now Joseph was well-built and handsome.**” This comment introduces and explains this and the next scene.
 - The question of the wife of Potiphar is short and direct. The refutation of Joseph is elaborate. He is loyal to his master and his God. Joseph refused to give in to the sexual advances of the wife of Potiphar:
 - “**he told her.**” The Hebrew is more elaborate: “**he told his master’s wife.**”
 - A. "With me in charge,
 - B. my master does not concern himself with anything in the house;
 - C. everything he owns he has entrusted to my care.
 - A'. **No one is greater in this house than I am.**
 - B'. My master has withheld nothing from me except you,
 - C'. because you are his wife.

⁹ Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998, p. 891).

¹⁰ Wenham, G. J. (1994, Vol. 2, p. 374).

¹¹ Wenham, G. J. (1994, Vol. 2, p. 374).

- D. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"
 - **"No one is greater in this house than I am."** This is already an allusion to what will happen later when Joseph is put in charge of the whole of Egypt (Gn 41:39-43).
 - D. Is the final word. Joseph does want to do a sinful and wicked thing because he wants to be blameless. See above the remark on the covenant. Sin against God is best understood against the Egyptian background of "harmony" as a common ground for an understanding of the concept of "sin", both for his master's wife and Joseph himself.
 - This "rhetorical question highlights the absurdity of considering such a breach of moral conduct."¹²
- ❖ Scene 2 (verse 11, 12)
 - She is persistent in her request and Joseph in his refusal. At one day, his position became vulnerable: **"none of the household servants was inside."** There will be no witnesses. It will be her word against his.
 - **"She caught him by his cloak."** It seems that she acted premeditated with no servants around. Pulling off the cloak, probably a skirt (see above), was against the will of Joseph.¹³ xx
 - **"He left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house."** This is the second time, that a piece of cloth plays an important role in his life (Gn 37).
 - Reyburn and Fry remark: "Ancient Egyptian art shows the dress of a worker as being bare above the waist and with the lower body covered by a cloth that tied at the waist and hung over the hips in the form of a short skirt. If Joseph was wearing such a skirt, it could easily come loose when he pulled away from the woman's grasp. As a result Joseph would be left naked."¹⁴ Look at the image above for an impression of the dress, Joseph possibly was wearing.
- ❖ Scene 3 (verse 13-15). She calls her servants. She tells them the distorted version of the incident. The evidence is against Joseph. She has his cloak. He ran out of the house. She creates them into (second-hand) witnesses.
 - She is very cunning: "Look,' she said to them, 'this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us!"
 - He is a foreigner – "Hebrew" and not one of us. Genesis 43:32: "Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that is detestable to Egyptians."

¹² Mathews, K. A. (2005, Vol. 1B, p. 734).

¹³ Wenham, G. J. (1994, Vol. 2, p. 376).

¹⁴ Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. (1998, p. 895).

- He is not one of “us” – us, being the wife and her servants. She wants to have her servants side with her.
- “To make sport of us” – the contrast with the description of verse 2-6 is sharp.
 - “To make sport” = “צחק”¹⁵: to make fun of someone.
- Interestingly, she also forsakes her husband. Potiphar has brought Joseph into the house to make sport of us. He is responsible.

❖ Scene 4 (verse 16-18). Her husband comes in.

- Compare the two stories.

The story (1) she told the servants (verse 14, 15):	The story (2) she told Potiphar (verse 17, 18):
<p>“Look, this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us!</p> <p>He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed.</p> <p>When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.”</p>	<p>“That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me.</p> <p>But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.”</p>

- She adds “slave” to stress the position of Joseph in the house. Indeed, he was a slave but also “in charge” (Gn 39:5).
- Story (1): she suggests that Potiphar is also responsible for “to make sport of us.” In the story (2) he is not responsible. She evades this suggestion by inserting “came to me”, making Joseph solely responsible for his alleged actions. “**Came (in)to me**” is deliberately ambiguous; it may be taken literally, but it is also a euphemism for sexual intercourse.”¹⁶
- Story (1): “to make sport of **us**” doesn’t imply sexual harassment. Therefore, she needs to add: “He came in..., but I screamed.” Story (2): “to make sport of **me**” leaves open the suggestion to Potiphar that Joseph came in the room to sleep with his wife.

¹⁵ Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000), p. 1019.

¹⁶ Wenham, G. J. (1994, Vol. 2, p. 376).

- In both stories, she gives the impression that Joseph stood already naked, leaving his cloak beside her, instead it was she who caught his cloak off. In both stories “the cloak” remains problematic. Why should he leave his cloak beside her as a piece of evidence?
- Final remark. She didn’t scream at all. After Joseph had fled the room, she called her servants.

❖ Scene 5 (verse 19-20)

- The story comes to an end. The narrator adds one more quote: “This is how your slave treated me.” Did she tell more, expanding the original story, and now summarized by her?
 - “That Hebrew slave you brought us
 - came to me to make sport of me.
 - (a gap to give way to imagination and suggestion by Potiphar – sexual harassment)
 - But as soon as I screamed for help,
 - he left his cloak beside me
 - and ran out of the house.”
 - “This is how your slave treated me.”
 - “This” is probably a mixture of what his wife told him and his thoughts and feelings filling in the gap. At that moment he became furious.
- Joseph is put in prison without any hearing.
 - **“Where the king’s prisoners were confined.”** Joseph is nearing the centre of power, the throne of Pharaoh.

Verse 20-23 (setting 2)

- In prison, the history repeats itself, although the circumstances are completely different. The text shows an ABB'A'-structure.
 - A. “The LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden.”
 - B. “So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there.”
 - B’. “The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph’s care,”
 - A’. “because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.”
- Compare this with the first scenery at the house of Potiphar (Gn 39:2-6).

Application

Covenant

- ❖ This story must be read against the background of the covenant (Gn 12:1-3; 17:1) and with the outcome in mind (Gn 50:20). If this story is read apart from its overall context, the question arises why the LORD was with Joseph before and after the episode and didn't protect Joseph against this seducing woman.

Tell the story

- ❖ Tell the story vividly.
 - This story is an example of what the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:28: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Praise

- ❖ Praise God because of His faithfulness, blessing and wisdom.
 - Praise Christ because he has promised his faithful disciples to be with them (Mt 28:20).
 - Praise the Spirit of Wisdom because he enabled Joseph to be faithful to his master and his God (Gn 41:37).

Joseph is an example of a Christian life

- ❖ Be faithful.
- ❖ Be righteous.
- ❖ Be honest.
- ❖ Be respectful.
- ❖ Be wise.

Some cautions

- ❖ Joseph was blessed and successful when he served Potiphar. This success might evoke lust, jealousy, hatred, anger. Be prepared.
 - Joseph was treated unjustly by his master, who didn't give him a hearing.
 - At the same time, Joseph was brought into the vicinity of the court, the centre of power. It was just a matter of (long) time that he would become the second man in Egypt to be a blessing to Egypt, his family and many nations.
- ❖ What happened to Joseph can happen to any pastor, Christian, man or woman alike.

In addition

- ❖ Although Joseph and the wife of Potiphar didn't share the same beliefs, Joseph could refer to the concept of sin, which was not contrary to live a blameless life (Gn 17:1; Mt 5:48). It might be helpful to look for common ground in your society to live an upright and respectful life.
 - It must be remembered that the law of the covenant had not been given. The Law came years later.

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