

CAPITOL STUDIES

FEBRUARY 8, 2023 • WEEK 5



JOSEPH: THE CIVIL SERVANT FROM EGYPT

Contents

Joseph Propositioned	2
Shocking Suggestion	2
Persistent Pressure	4
Blatant Assault	4
Joseph Prosecuted	5
Joseph Punished	5
Conclusion	6
About Capitol Studies	7



Verse of the Week

Genesis 39:12

She caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside.

From Steward to Prisoner Part II: Tempted as a Slave



JOSEPH HAD GROWN INTO A FINE LOOKING MAN, and Potiphar's wife became attracted to him. In the course of his exemplary obedience to God, Joseph finds himself in an extremely delicate situation. God gives us this story, and as a minimum it serves as a warning to every married man and woman, every young man or woman about to marry, and even to those who themselves may now be far from marriage. The sin represented in this passage is prevalent in our present society. It is flaunted openly and discussed freely. The world's openness exposes believers to this temptation on almost every hand. You can bring it voluntarily (and sometimes, involuntarily) into your home with the click of a remote or the click of a mouse. You can be drawn by advertisements you may see as you drive home or as you view the pages of a magazine or newspaper. The world, like the Devil, puts an attractive smile on the face of temptation to adultery or immorality. Joseph, on the other hand, helps us to unmask the temptation's true character and examine it before the face of God. He helps us see how to prepare in advance to resist the temptation to evil.

Arin Hess

Pastor Arin Hess

Chaplain, Capitol Studies



INTRODUCTION

In Genesis 38, Judah commits fornication. In chapter 39, Joseph resists the temptation to do the same. Judah falls while Joseph stands. The two sons are contrasted, and the present character of each of the brothers is set side by side. God seems to use Judah's failure to humble him and begin a transformation that unfolds throughout the Joseph narrative and eventually, through the lineage of David.

Joseph's successful labors for Potiphar may have continued up to ten years, but his service comes to an abrupt, unexpected end. No doubt, it is a comfort to Joseph that Potiphar cherishes his labor and values his service, but it is a curse to him to learn that he is desired by his master's wife. Two people are tempted in this story. Thankfully, one does resist.

I. JOSEPH PROPOSITIONED

Temptation Comes as a...

A. Shocking Suggestion in the Course of Duty

Genesis 39:6b-7

And Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me."¹

The Setting for the Suggestive Assault

Apparently, Joseph inherited the rare beauty of his mother that so captivated Jacob (Gen. 29:17), and Potiphar's wife was attracted to him. In Egypt, immorality on the part of a wife was an offense punishable by scourging or death. Being married to a prominent member of the court, and specifically to the chief of the executioners, it would seem that Potiphar's wife would not only be aware of the penalty but mindful of it, yet she is tempted to break the law of the land because she sees something that she believes will satisfy her in a way that she currently is not.

A study of Egyptian culture reveals Egyptian men considered their own obesity a virtue. In addition, most chief officials routinely housed a harem of concubines. Perhaps these were factors contributing to Potiphar's wife's light consideration of this sin. However, the passage itself provides other insights into the probability that she may have been dissatisfied with her husband or that Potiphar himself may have not believed her charge against Joseph.

Genesis 39:14: She accuses Potiphar before the servants.

Genesis 39:17: She blames Joseph's "crime" on Potiphar.

Genesis 39:20: Joseph receives an unusually light penalty for his "accused act," though rape is a horrible crime. False accusation of rape is an equally heinous crime. Potiphar may not have believed his wife, but she forces his hand with the public confrontation. Yet, Potiphar still has sufficient confidence in Joseph to later elevate him to leadership in the prison.



Joseph's Verbal Response to the Temptation

Genesis 39:8a
But he refused....

Ironically, though Joseph has the position of slave, he demonstrates that he is free and not a slave to passion. Potiphar's wife is outwardly free, but she is a slave to her lusts. As she observes Joseph in his routine service, she begins to lay a trap. Given the positions of both Potiphar's wife and Joseph (master/slave), her beauty (Proverbs 6:25) and his youth, the persistency of the demand and the secrecy by which it could be carried out, it would seem that Joseph is doomed to fail. "His destiny is suspended upon that manner in which he meets that fierce assault. If he fall, he will in all probability never rise. But if he stand, he will in all probability never fall.... Yes, there are cases in most men's moral history, when their whole character and destiny depend upon their decision regarding one single act!"²

Joseph's Reasons for Refusing the Temptation

Genesis 39:8-9
But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?"

1. *I am free from supervision.* God always sees me.
2. *I am in authority over everything of my master.* The higher the position that God gives me, the more important it is to be trustworthy.
3. *I am in a privileged position.* God has put me in this position; therefore, I must use it for His glory.
4. *I have only been prohibited one thing (Potiphar's wife).* When I am tempted to covet what God has forbidden, I must think of the many things which He has not forbidden, but has freely given.

These four reasons are used by weaker men to justify falling. Joseph uses these reasons to justify standing. He demonstrates loyalty to Potiphar when his wife is not: "How base was her conduct, when she tempted his favorite servant to betray him [Potiphar] in the most cruel manner, and to repay the greatest favors with an irreparable shame."³

5. *How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?*

"In the hour of temptation, it is of infinite importance what view we take of the evil to which we are tempted. If we suffer our thoughts to dwell on its agreeableness, a number of excuses will present themselves, and we shall inevitably be carried away by it; but if we keep our eye steadfastly on the holy will of God, and the strong obligations we are under to him, that which would otherwise appear a little thing will be accounted what it is, a *great wickedness*, and we shall revolt at the idea of sinning against Him."⁴





How does one respond so well and give such a thorough answer to temptation? Joseph is aware of and responding to the presence of God in his employment (vv. 1-6), and now he applies the same truth of God's presence in the face of temptation. Long before his temptation, Joseph purposed in his heart to stand. Glancing through a pictorial history of Egypt reveals an embarrassingly low level of modesty in the dress of both the Egyptian free women generally and even more so among the slaves. From Joseph's first days in Egypt, he would have been bombarded with internal temptations like what he faces here. Joseph had to have determined in his heart that he was not going to succumb to the prevailing immodest and immoral culture. Daily submission to God and resistance to sin prepare him for the seductive approach of Potiphar's wife.

B. Persistent Pressure Despite Refusal

Genesis 39:10

As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her.

The Setting for the Persistent Assault

Potiphar's wife capitalizes on Joseph's faithful performance of his obligations to her husband. Her shocking suggestion now turns into repeated assaults, designed to impress the attractiveness of the offer on Joseph. No doubt she uses her position to provide opportunities for Joseph to be near her, to attend to her projects, so she can whisper her suggestion to him yet again. She shows an utter disregard for his earlier refusal that should have smitten her conscience as to her own disloyalty.

Joseph's Active (Physical) Response to the Temptation— Avoiding the Temptation

Potiphar's wife gets exactly the opposite of what she desires. Instead of having Joseph near her, Joseph now seeks to avoid her. Knowing the danger of her ways, he avoids, wherever possible, any contact with the source of the temptation. His deliberate, overt response is a demonstration that the words he spoke were the true thoughts of his mind and the desires of his heart. His actions support his words and accentuate Joseph's sincere desire not to sin.

His actions also demonstrate wisdom in avoiding the temptation. Proverbs 4:14-15: "Do not enter the path of the wicked and do not proceed in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not pass by it; Turn away from it and pass on." Fuller warns believers that "if we voluntarily go into temptation, we shall assuredly be hurt, if not ruined by it; but when God by his providence leads us into it, for the trial of our graces, we may hope to be kept in it, and brought victorious out of it".⁵

C. Blatant Assault When Alone

Genesis 39:11-12

Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. ¹²She caught



him by his garment, saying, “Lie with me!” And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside.

The Setting for the Blatant Assault

We are not told why Joseph is not able to avoid Potiphar’s wife on this occasion. Knowing that he has been trying to do so makes us inclined to think that somehow his being alone with her in the house is either unanticipated or is entirely unavoidable in the course of his duties to Potiphar. The passage implies that the absence of other men in the house is unusual, and even Joseph’s response of flight indicates a measure of surprise. Likely Potiphar’s wife has arranged the setting, and Joseph walks into a situation he thinks will be safe, only to find it to be perilous. She catches him by the garment (cf. 1 Cor. 10:13 – “*overtaken you*”).

Joseph’s Active (Physical) Response – Fleeing the Temptation

Matthew Henry says, “It is better to lose a good coat than a good conscience.”⁶ Joseph, without a Bible, without the Ten Commandments, responds in a way that foreshadows Paul’s words to Timothy, “Now flee from youthful lusts” (2 Timothy 2:22). Have you purposed in your heart to flee temptation? What can you do to avoid putting yourself in its path?

II. JOSEPH PROSECUTED

Genesis 39:13-18

When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside,¹⁴ she called to the men of her household and said to them, “See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed.¹⁵ When he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside.”¹⁶ So she left his garment beside her until his master came home.¹⁷ Then she spoke to him with these words, “The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me;¹⁸ and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside.”

III. JOSEPH PUNISHED

Genesis 39:19-23

Now when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, “This is what your slave did to me,” his anger burned.²⁰ So Joseph’s master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail.²¹ But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer.²² The chief jailer committed to Joseph’s charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible for it.²³ The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph’s charge because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made to prosper.





CONCLUSION

Joseph demonstrates that by God's grace he can be sold, but he cannot be bought. No amount of wooing will sway him from following the God of his fathers. While some temptations are boldly to be encountered and resolutely overcome, there are others only to be conquered by flight or distance. "So should it be in many cases of temptation; to parley [discuss] is to be in danger, to listen is to be in jeopardy, to linger is to fall. He that enters with his eyes open into temptation, or remains in it voluntarily, is already vanquished."⁷



With temptation comes a spiritual battle of the heart. In Joseph's case, his was a battle for purity. This brings us to the second of the winged virtues in the rotunda dome: Temperance. Temperance involves self-control or, more rightly, Spirit-control. It is a purposeful commitment to think only on those things that are "true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellent, and praiseworthy" (Phil. 4:8) and to pray continually for submission to the power and control of the Holy Spirit. Joseph purposed in his heart that he would not sin against God. His verbal response to Potiphar's wife shows that he had readied his heart before the battle came. His responses to physically avoid and then physically flee remind us that we cannot presume that we will always withstand temptation. Physically avoiding evil is a spiritual response.

The Lord was with Joseph and could have easily restored him at once to his father Jacob, yet He did not do it but instead left him many years in a state of slavery. We cannot judge God's ways by man's ways. God shows His love and manages His affairs according to His own infinite wisdom and not according to the plans which our finite human minds seem to think is.

Pastor Arin Hess

FOOTNOTES

1. All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*.
2. John Angell James, *Addresses to Young Men*, Soli Deo Gloria Publications, Reprint Edition 1995, pp. 170-71.
3. George Lawson, *Life of Joseph*, Banner of Truth, 1972, p. 34.

4. *Works of Andrew Fuller*, Banner of Truth, Republished 2007, pp.152-53, original emphasis.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

6. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible: Genesis*, BibleStudyTools.com, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/genesis/39.html>.

7. James, *Addresses to Young Men*, p. 173.

Much of this material was gathered by Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina (© 2009); it is used with permission.

Personal Study Notes

PAGE 7
FEB 8, 2023

Theme Verse

Philippians 4:8

*Finally, brethren,
whatever is true,
whatever is honorable,
whatever is right,
whatever is pure,
whatever is lovely,
whatever is of
good repute,
if there is any
excellence
and if anything is
worthy of praise,
dwell on these things.*



WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

Meeting during the
108th Legislature's
First Session

SENATORS

7:00–8:00 A.M. Wednesdays
Office #1107, Capitol Building

STAFF

12:00 P.M. Wednesdays
1526 K Street, Omaha Room



www.CapitolStudies.org
info@capitolstudies.org
/CapitolStudies
402-770-6270



Serving Civil Servants With Scripture

Capitol Studies™ exists to serve kings for the King of kings until His glorious return. We are privileged to minister to Civil Servants at all levels of government for their good and God's glory. Capitol Studies is led by Pastor Arin Hess, who has over 40 years of ministry experience in the State of Nebraska and Washington, D.C.

Capitol Studies Offices
4547 Calvert Street • Lincoln, NE 68506

