

Week Two

Living in the Shelter of a Sovereign God . . .

When Temptation Overwhelms You

God will often use what He hates to accomplish what He loves. Even amidst the sin and suffering of our fallen world, the words of Job ring ever so true: “I know that [God] can do all things, and that no purpose of [His] can be thwarted” (42:2). I can’t think of a single life that demonstrates this truth more than Joseph’s.

So far, God has used family dysfunction, jealousy, hatred, betrayal, and greed to accomplish His will for Joseph. This week we will stand by and watch as the cunning seduction and false accusations of a selfish, adulterous woman plunge Joseph into yet another pit that he didn’t deserve. But at the very same time we will stand by and watch God use it *all* to mold and position Joseph for future greatness and the salvation of God’s people. At the absolute lowest point in his life, as a slave in a hostile place, friendless and with no chance for release, God initiates the steps that would bring about redemption for Joseph, his family, and ultimately the whole world. No matter how many times I read the story of Joseph that will never get old. *Ever.*

Does God tempt us to sin? No. (See James 1:13.) Can God *use* temptation to accomplish His purposes in our lives? ABSOLUTELY! In fact, you will be hard-pressed to find a godly man or woman whose character and commitment to the Lord hasn’t been refined in the fiery furnace of temptation. So if you’re feeling the heat of those flames today, take heart. God has a word for you this week. However intense the temptation may be, *you don’t have to give in*. How do I know this? Because the God who captured Joseph’s heart, who shielded him in the blistering heat of persistent seduction, and who provided a way of escape in a seemingly hopeless situation is the very same God who sustains and shelters you.

Day 1

This week our focus is **Genesis 39:1-23**. Today's assignment is to read the entire chapter and answer the questions of *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why*. This will give you a really good overview of the passage before we break it apart in the coming days. You can be as detailed or general as you have time to be.

WHO? (List each character and jot down what the passages reveals about him or her.)

WHAT? (Briefly summarize what happens in the chapter.)

WHEN? (Write down any time clues given in the passage. What happened before? After?)

WHERE? (Where do the events of the chapter take place?)

WHY? (Why was Joseph put in charge? Why do you think the events of this chapter happened to Joseph? Why are they recorded in the Bible for us to study?)

Day 2

Read **Genesis 39:1-6** and answer the following questions.

- 1) Where was Joseph taken and sold?

A closer look: Keep in mind that Joseph is from a family of nomadic shepherds who had lived in tents moving from place to place throughout Canaan for several generations. He now finds himself in the house of a very powerful man who lived in a very powerful and well developed country. The language, customs, and gods of Egypt were all completely foreign to Joseph. To make matters worse, Genesis 43:32 reveals that the Egyptians would not even eat at the same table as the Hebrews and they detested shepherds. Given the language and cultural differences, the anti-Semitism, his despised social background, and his current standing as a slave, Joseph was pretty much as low as a human could possibly be in Egyptian society. Add to that the inner turmoil of having been betrayed by his own brothers, left for dead in a pit, and then sold into slavery and you can sort of get an idea of how much Joseph must have been suffering at this point.

- 2) How do you think you would have responded if you found yourself part of a slave caravan heading to Egypt?
- 3) What do you learn about Potiphar from these verses?

A closer look: John MacArthur's observations are helpful here: "Potiphar was an Egyptian, and Egyptians despised shepherds in general and Hebrews in particular. He was the captain of the guard, which meant that he had a military background and was probably cultured and well educated – in contrast to Joseph's rural, domestic upbringing. He was also a member of Pharaoh's retinue, quite possibly the chief of Pharaoh's personal bodyguards, which meant that

he was probably of noble birth and royal connections. From a human perspective there is little chance that such a man would pay any attention to a slave like Joseph.”¹

- 4) The first part of verse 2 is essentially the overall theme for the entire Joseph narrative. Underline it in your Bible and write it here:

- 5) Compare verses 3-6 with verses 21-23. What stands out to you?

- 6) How many times is “the Lord” mentioned in verses 1-6? (It may not be a bad idea to circle these in your Bible.)

A closer look: Kent Hughes provides this marvelous insight in his commentary on Genesis: “The God who was with Joseph was ‘the Lord’ (Yahweh), the personal covenant name of God, and this name is used eight times in this account (v. 2 once, v. 3 twice, v. 5 twice, v. 21 once, v. 23 twice), and then never again in the remaining eight chapters of Joseph’s story, except for Jacob’s use of it at the end on his deathbed (49:18). And more, no character in the story uses this personal name of God, not even Joseph. Here in our chapter, the narrator uses God’s covenant name, Yahweh, eight times to tell the reader what is going on – and four of those eight times to tell us that *Yahweh was with Joseph. Thus we are to understand that at the most uncertain time of Joseph’s life, when he could see nothing of God, the covenant God of Israel was at work to effect his covenant promises through Joseph.*” (emphasis added)²

- 7) How are verses 3 and 5 a fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:3?

- 8) To what position was Joseph promoted in Potiphar’s house and for what was he responsible? (vv. 4, 5)

What does this reveal about Joseph's character?

- 9) What do you learn about Joseph's appearance from verse 6?
- 10) If all you had of chapter 39 was verses 1-6, how would you expect the story to go?
- 11) At this point what evidence do we have that God was in control of Joseph's circumstances?

Day 3

Read **Genesis 39:7-19** and answer the following questions. Today our focus will be on Potiphar's wife.

- 1) What did Potiphar's wife want Joseph to do? (v. 7)

How often did she try to get her way? (v. 10)

- 2) How do you think Potiphar's wife expected Joseph to respond to her demand in v. 7?
(We don't know for sure, so there's no right or wrong answer.)

Why do you think this?

- 3) Finish this statement: Verse 7 says that she “looked with desire” (NASB) or “cast longing eyes” (NKJV) at Joseph which is a delicate way of saying that she . . .

- 4) What role does lust/desire play in the progression toward full-blown sin according to **James 1:13, 14**?

- 5) Perhaps you have heard a married woman say something like, “There’s no harm in just looking!” to justify a fixed, lustful gaze at handsome man. In light of what you see in today’s passage and what you read in James, is this a true statement? Explain your answer.

- 6) **Proverbs 7:10-23** reveals some common characteristics of an adulteress woman and warns young men to stay far from her. Read this passage and write down any words, phrases, or general characteristics that apply to Potiphar’s wife.

- 7) Read verse 11 again. Do you think this was a coincidence?

- 8) What did she accuse Joseph of doing? (vv. 13-15)

- 9) What do you think motivated her to set Joseph up and lie about him?

- 10) How do the words of Potiphar's wife in vv. 13-15 illustrate the truth of **Proverbs 18:21** and **James 3:6**?

Day 4

Our passage is **Genesis 39:7-19** again today. This time we will focus on Joseph.

- 1) Refer back to verse 37:2. Approximately how old was Joseph when he arrived in Potiphar's house?

What is a common characteristic of most 17-19 year old young men in relation to women and sexual desire?

- 2) List as many ways you can think of that Joseph could have justified an affair with Potiphar's wife.

- 3) How did Joseph respond to Potiphar's wife's demand? (v. 8)

What were his reasons for saying "no"? (vv. 8, 9 – There are two or three, depending on how you read it.)

- 4) How did Joseph describe the act of sleeping with Potiphar's wife in verse 9? (Fill in the blanks for your particular translation.)

NASB, ESV: "How could I do this _____ and sin against God?"

NIV: "How could I do such _____ and sin against God?"

- 5) What did Joseph understand about sin according to the last part of verse 9? (also see David's words in Psalm 51:4.)
- 6) Modern Christians like to identify sin with more pleasant sounding terms such as "moral indiscretion", "lapse in judgment", or "poor choice." How might Joseph have acted differently if he viewed sleeping with Potiphar's wife as a "poor choice" rather than a "great wickedness" against God?
- 7) How often was Joseph tempted? (v. 10)
- 8) Verse 10 gives us significant insight into *how* Joseph was able to remain pure in the midst of such persistent temptation. Explain.

Had he given in "just a little" (i.e. listened to her, talked to her, and/or acted slightly affectionate towards her) how might the storyline have changed?

What can we learn from this and apply to our own temptation(s)?

- 9) Who was the one and only witness on the day of her final attempt to be with Joseph? (v. 11 – it's not directly stated in the text)

What truth from **Proverbs 5:21** obviously motivated Joseph?

- 10) What did Joseph do when she grabbed him?
- 11) Read **1 Corinthians 6:18** and **2 Timothy 2:22**. What is the **one and only** biblical response to sexual temptation?
- 12) What aspects of this situation were out of Joseph's control?

What aspects were within his control?

- 13) What tempts you "day after day"? What reaches out and tries to pull you in?

Do you see the potential sin as a "great wickedness" against God or do you tend to write it off as "not that bad"?

What are some practical ways that you can refuse to listen and choose to flee?

Day 5

Read **Genesis 39:19-23** and answer the following questions.

- 1) How did Potiphar respond to his wife's accusation against Joseph? What was Joseph's punishment? (v. 20)
- 2) In light of Joseph's integrity, what do you think about this turn of events?

A closer look: While we look at this and immediately think "*not fair!*", it's actually quite remarkable that Potiphar didn't have Joseph killed. Joseph was a Hebrew *and* a slave (can't get much lower than that) who appeared to have taken advantage of his position by sexually violating his boss's wife. The fact that a Joseph even exists past chapter 39 is yet another example of God's sovereign protection.

- 3) Where was God when Joseph was falsely accused and wrongly sentenced? (v. 21)
- 4) What pattern recurs in verses 21-23? (You may want to refer back to vv. 2-6.)

What does this pattern reveal about Joseph?

What does it reveal about God?

- 5) Read **1 Corinthians 10:13**. What was the "way of escape" God provided for Joseph? (v. 20)

Having read the whole story, why was jail the perfect place for God to shelter Joseph from the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife?

- 6) We all have or will experience times when we are not promptly rewarded for our righteousness. In fact, sometimes our pursuit of integrity makes life a whole lot harder. Why do you think God allows this?

What principle(s) from Joseph's story can we apply to these situations?

- 7) List every shred of evidence you can find of God's faithfulness in chapter 39.

- 8) What principle from our study of this chapter stands out to you the most and why?

How are you currently applying this principle to your own life?

¹ MacArthur, John. Jacob and Egypt – The Sovereignty of God (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 28.

² Hughes, 461.