

# The Man Not Caught in Adultery

- <sup>1</sup> 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.
- <sup>2</sup> 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.
- <sup>7</sup> 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 you, 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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."  
<sup>19</sup> 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.  
<sup>21</sup> 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.

## Genesis 39:1-23

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# **God Wants You to Prosper?**

What do you do when you come across a verse like **Genesis 39:3**, “His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.” How should you **interpret** it? How should you **apply** it? How about this one in **vs. 12** of the same chapter: “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.” Do you interpret and apply it in the same way that you might the first verse? On what basis would you make such a decision?

One of the most difficult questions that faces the reader of an historical book of the Bible (be it Genesis or Acts) is when and how do you decide if something is merely **informative history** that **depicts** vs. something that goes beyond mere information and acts as **an example** of something that continues over into today? The way you will often hear this question framed is like this: Is the text **descriptive** or **prescriptive**. More simply, is the passage telling you about something or moving into the realm of commanding you to do something. The books of Acts and 1 Corinthians usually serve as classic examples of this struggle with some of the strange things that happen in

them. For instance, is speaking in tongues descriptive (only describing the early church) or prescriptive (serving as examples for what happens throughout all of history)? Are the miracles of Peter something only for the early church or something people can do today? Of course, different segments of Christianity come to different conclusions on these questions.

Reformed Christians (and many others) have generally said that these kinds of things in Acts are descriptive of a unique time in church history, a time that served to prove to new people through supernatural power that the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ was true. 1 Corinthians which falls in the same time period was a letter written to a particular group of people in a very definite time frame addressing specific problems in that local church. There are some very good arguments here that more Charismatic minded people would do well to listen to as many of them come to the conclusion that these things are for today. This isn't a sermon on spiritual gifts, but it is a sermon that has to deal with a couple of interpretive questions that are similar to this NT question about the gifts. It is a question that within some of those

same Charismatic circles we find the same kind of interpretation.

When these people (and this is especially common with the televangelist crowd and those who emulate them) read, “His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands,” they interpret it as a principle for all time and for everyone. They interpret it through their strange and dangerous “name it and claim it” or “prosperity gospel” theology. If you have enough faith, you can call out the blessing of God to become successful and to succeed. If you really have enough faith, God will even make you rich.

Here is a mild example of this kind of thinking. In an article titled, “Whatever you put your hand to will prosper...” the author of a Christian Personal Finance website references our verse here and begins, “The Bible is amazing and I never cease to be amazed at all the wonderful promises that God has for us.” Notice the starting point: Genesis 39:3 is a promise for us to apply to ourselves.

It’s easy to say that we want God to prosper what we

are doing, but I have noticed that most times in my life when things aren't prospering like I want, it isn't because God didn't hold up His end of the bargain, but that I didn't hold up mine. Usually after prayer and re-evaluation, I can quickly figure out what I was or wasn't doing that was preventing things from prospering like I wanted. Obeying God Is For Our Benefit, Not His ... What I am finally starting to realize is that it is all for our benefit! God doesn't give us a bunch of rules just to make our lives challenging, He instructs us, not for His benefit, but for ours! When He says not to gossip, it is because He knows what it leads to – and how it ultimately makes our lives worse. When He says to give, its because He knows that the most fulfilling and joyful life is one of giving. Now I am not suggesting that we should just serve God to see what we can get out of the deal, but it is nice to know that He is really is looking out for our benefit!<sup>1</sup>

To most people, this kind of thinking sounds godly, biblical, and of course practical. Therefore, it must be true.

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<sup>1</sup> Bob Lotich, "Whatever You Put Your Hand to Will Prosper," *Christian Personal Finance*, "<http://christianpf.com/whatever-you-put-your-hand-to-will-prosper/>, last accessed 2-20-2015.

It trades upon some true ideas, both biblically and more generally in terms of working to get ahead. In light of the two verses I started with this morning, notice how this quote lumps “gossip” in with “prosperity.” In other words, it answers “yes” to my question of whether or not we should interpret these two different kinds of verses the same way. Perhaps the most powerful point is that the author appeals to everyone’s favorite person in the world: Themselves! It does so in a way that isn’t as “in your face” as the health and wealth preachers on TV. But is it right? Let’s go to our text and begin to think through it together.

## Joseph in Egypt: A Slave

Genesis 39 returns us to the story of Joseph. When last we saw him, he was being sold to a rowdy group of Midianites by his brothers who then deceived their father with one of the most vile, loveless plans I can imagine one person doing to another. For a whole chapter we were kept in suspense about the fate of Joseph, as we watched the bizarre sexual escapades of Judah and his family unfold in Gen 38. But now Judah is out of the picture and we learn, “Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt” (Gen 39:1). He is not dead as Jacob has been lead to believe.

“Going down to Egypt” is a major theme of those both before and after Joseph. He is like Abram who went down (12:10), but unlike Isaac who was warned not to go down (26:2). He will be like his brothers (42:3) and later Jacob who will go down (46:4) to Egypt. Most of all, he is like the Lord Jesus who will go down to Egypt (Matt 2:13-14) so that “out of Egypt” God could “call my son” (15; cf. Hos 11:1). It is extremely important to redemptive history from this moment forward that what takes place with Joseph is taking place in Egypt. This fact alone tells you that you have something special going on in this history. We are not reading law or proverbs here.

A second fact enhances this point. A certain man named Potiphar, who is an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, “bought” Joseph from the Ishmaelites (Gen 39:1). In other words, Joseph is a slave in Egypt. This idea should also sound familiar, as it is the same language used of Israel many centuries later in the days of Moses when they were all slaves in Egypt (Ex 1:13). Joseph is a type of his own people who will later be delivered by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm by the LORD. Of course, that is what will also happen in a slightly different

way during the remainder of Joseph's life, but it will take us many chapters to unfold this.

It is into *this* context of slavery in Egypt that we read **Gen 39:2**, “The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master.” To divorce **vs. 2** from **vs. 1**, thereby turning it into a proverb for all Christians today is to miss the only thing that really matters in the story. It is *because* Joseph had been sold into slavery into Egypt, it is *because* Joseph is helpless, and most of all it is because God has an amazing plan for Joseph and his entire family, that we read “The LORD was with Joseph.” This is about God's choice, not Joseph's. It is God's hand of meticulous providence that “the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands” (**vs. 3**). It is God's blessing upon Joseph that allows Potiphar to see that the LORD was with Joseph. It is God's sovereignty that causes Joseph to “find favor in his sight and attend him.” It is the goodness of God towards Joseph that rouses Potiphar to make “him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had” (4).

You will remember that in the quote above, the man appealed to my sense of me. God blesses for *our* benefit.

Actually, he created a **false dichotomy** when he said that God does not bless for God's own benefit. It is tempting to go to the opposite extreme, given what we know about the whole story of Joseph and say that God is blessing Joseph for only God's benefit, *not* Joseph's. But this would also be a false dichotomy. Notice **vs. 5** says, “**The LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake.**”

The fact of the matter is, the blessing of God upon Joseph is for Joseph *and* the LORD's sake (see **Rom 9:17**, a verse that could not be if it were not for what God does with Joseph). God really does love Joseph, and so he really does do it for him. Yet, the LORD also loves Himself supremely, and so that he might show his mercy in remarkable ways to Joseph throughout his life, he is blessing him now. However, the blessing of God towards Joseph is not an end to itself. This is vitally important to understand, and it is remarkable to me that someone could take this language of blessing so completely out of context, given what we see happen to Joseph all the way from vs. 1 through the end of this chapter and beyond. What I am talking about is suffering.

## **Joseph and Potiphar's Wife**

We move now to the second of three sections in this chapter. The first set up Joseph as blessed abundantly by God, even as he had done with Abraham ([Gen 24:1](#)), Isaac ([26:12](#)), and Jacob ([30:30](#)), and even others with whom they came into relationship (like Laban: [30:27](#)). This was in accordance with the [covenantal promise](#): “I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” ([Gen 12:3](#)). But now we will find the blessing of God profoundly challenged by the jealousy of a wicked woman.

I think most of us know the story of [Joseph and Potiphar’s wife](#). I want to frame it today in the context of the last chapter with [Judah and Tamar](#) (hence the relation of the two sermon titles), because if we were reading through Genesis together, this would be fresh on our minds. What we find with Judah is the exact opposite thing we find with Joseph, and what we find with Tamar is the exact opposite that we find with Potiphar’s wife.

It begins in [vs. 6](#), “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.” It isn’t clear what this means, but it is possible that it is [a euphemism](#) for his wife.

“This is the way of an adulteress: she eats and wipes her mouth and says, ‘I have done no wrong’” (Prov 30:20). If so, then what we are about to see from her may not be the first time she has tried such a thing. At any rate, it sets the scene by saying, “No Joseph was handsome in form and appearance” (39:6).

One of my favorite ancient books is called *Joseph and Aseneth*. It is sort of the first romance novel of Israel, except that it bears little in common with trash like “Fifty Shades of Grey.” Rather, it is a love story between Joseph and his Egyptian wife whom he will meet several chapters from now. It tells of her stunning beauty, her moral purity and virginity, her paganism, her conversion, and the love the two shared for one another. When she is first introduced to the thought of meeting Joseph, she is disgusted at her father, for she knows Joseph as the man who was “caught in the act” and thrown into prison because of Potiphar’s wife. Well, her father corrects her views of Joseph and his God, but it is not until she sees his face that she changes her mind. And this is what she says the moment she beholds Joseph:

<sup>2</sup> What shall I now do, wretched that I am?  
Did I not speak saying that Joseph is coming,  
the shepherd's son from the land of Canaan?  
And now, behold, the sun from heaven has come to us on its  
chariot  
and entered our house today,  
and shines in it like a light upon the earth.  
<sup>3</sup> But I, foolish and daring, have despised him  
and spoken wicked words about him,  
and did not know that Joseph is a son of God.  
<sup>4</sup> For who among men on earth will generate such beauty,  
and what womb of a woman will give birth to such light?  
(Joseph and Aseneth 6:2-4, second century B.C.)

He is so handsome that only the angels of heaven can compare with him. In fact, she thinks he must be one of them (note: she calls the angels “sons of God”). Only two people in the entire OT are awarded with accolade of “a fine figure and a beautiful face.” They are Joseph and Rachel (his mother). No wonder Potiphar's wife could not keep herself hands to herself!

If Joseph's looks set the scene, Potiphar's wife creates

the tension. “And after a time his master’s wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, ‘lie with me.’” This is essentially what Judah said in the last chapter to his daughter-in-law whom he thought was a temple prostitute (**Gen 38:16**). But unlike Tamar who would be caught in the act of adultery, Joseph “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” (**39:7-9**).

Joseph basically preaches a sermon to this woman. It is a most holy and righteous sermon. Curiously, it is also a **three-point sermon**. He gives three reasons for not committing “a great wickedness,” which as we have seen meant adultery throughout the ancient world (**Gen 20:9**; cf. **Ex 32:21**). **First**, great trust had been placed in him. To sleep with Potiphar’s wife would be to destroy that trust. **Second**, it is an offense against Potiphar himself. How could he do this to a man who has treated him so well? **Finally**, and climactically, this great sin would be against

God himself, and he could not do such a thing against the God of his fathers who had proved so faithful for 200 years.<sup>2</sup>

Let's return for a moment to the opening question. What do we do when confronted with a verse like **Gen 39:12**? Let's read it and **vs. 11** together. "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, 'Like with me.' But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house" (**11-12**). Is this something we can apply today? If so, why?

Of course the answer is yes, of course we can. The reason is exactly what Joseph says. Adultery is a sin against God. Adultery is an offense against a husband or wife. Adultery is an abuse of trust. **This is always the case.** The story of Joseph here is not merely historical. That is, it is not merely here to tell you what happened. It is also illustrative of righteousness, as many stories in the Bible are (either of righteousness or unrighteousness). It is true, of course, that there are no commands here for us to follow

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<sup>2</sup> For these three points see Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 375.

specifically, but there are commands other places in the Bible that speak directly to this point, and that is actually Joseph's point too. Therefore, as one article I read this week on how to interpret these historical books put it, perhaps we should not merely look at them as either prescriptive or descriptive, but also instructive, suggestive, and reflective.<sup>3</sup>

I think we all know this intuitively, and so I don't think I'm telling you anything you don't already know. But it is helpful to remind ourselves that what Joseph is doing here is righteous and holy, and what Potiphar's wife is doing is wicked and evil. Frankly, most of our culture today no longer believes this is the case. They would applaud the woman which mocking Joseph.

It is important to see that in the text, the source of Potiphar's wife's evil is her lust for Joseph. Woman are capable of lusting too. After her initial attraction, she began to harbor these thoughts in her mind. After Joseph's refusal, it only made things worse in her mind, so that now what was forbidden to her became the only thing that she

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Voorwinde, "How Normative Is Acts?", *Vox Reformata*, 2010: 55 [33-56]. <http://www.rtc.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/How%20Normative%20is%20Acts.pdf>, last accessed 2-20-2015.

desired. Hence, the power of the law to make us covet after that which we cannot have.

The Apostle puts it this way. “For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet’ [so the law it itself good]. But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me” (**Rom 7:7-11**). This is what happened to **Zuleika** (this is the name given to her in both the medieval Jewish book of Jasher and, curiously, the Koran) as she was carried away with her passions.

Of course, it did not stop here, for after Joseph refused her again, he left his garment in her hand as he was fleeing the house (**Gen 39:12**). (This is the same word used for the “**garment**” of Tamar in the previous story, it simply refers to clothing in a generic way). This provided the woman the perfect form of retribution. If she could not have him, then

she would destroy him. This is the fruit of a sinful heart left unsubdued by God. For rather than repent of wrongdoing, it seeks revenge and a pound of flesh. For it hates righteousness more than it loves its own life. Those who are righteous in this world necessarily show the world what unrighteousness is, simply by being what they are. This is something that no wickedness can tolerate, for evil is itself spiteful of even being called evil. Evil does not think that it is wrong, but rather that it is right. To the devil, evil is good and good is evil. The one thing evil cannot tolerate is for someone to call it wrong, to call it evil. This is what revenge is all about. It is about vindicating itself rather than humbling itself.

Be careful about how you read this part of the story. Some may see Joseph as himself being attracted to the woman as if he was playing with fire. This becomes how she got his garment. The ESV's "caught him by his garment" implies closeness, but leave's the reason for the closeness open to the imagination. Was Joseph close because he was tempted by her? However, this is not what the verb "caught" (*taphas*) conveys. Warriors "take" booty in a war (Num 31:27). Moses "took" the tablets of the

covenant and threw them to the ground (Deut 9:17). Israel “captures” a city in a war (Deut 20:19). A stubborn son is “seized” by his parents and brought before the elders (Deut 21:19). The word usually implies some kind of violence. So the idea is that Joseph was minding his own business, working, and the married woman seized him by his garment, thereby thrusting herself upon him.

He fled. But since he left the garment in her hand, she used it as a means to harm him. This will be the second time that Joseph will be without his garment, and the second time that something terrible will happen to him because of it. It is also the second time that great deception will occur against Joseph at the hands of someone who is jealous of him. “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’” (Gen 39:13-14). This is the first part of her plan, and it is both a racial mockery and the grounds of her claim.

First, she poisons the well with labeling, name calling, racial mockery. According to Genesis 10, the Egyptians (called Mizraim, see RSV) are sons of Ham. The word

“Hebrew” refers to the sons of Eber who came from Shem. So calling Joseph a Hebrew would have reminded the Egyptians that Joseph comes from one of the brothers who humiliated Ham.

Second, the word “**laugh**” is not what you think, nor would it make sense for her to blame her husband for bringing, what, a circus clown into their house, a court-jester? No, this is a play on words as it was when Isaac (to laugh) was “laughing” with Rebekah and Abimelech saw it (**Gen 26:8**). In other words, it is a delicate way of saying that something sexual is going on here. So why not come out and say it? Why, because she is a lady, of course! Ladies don’t mention such things. She has a reputation and an image to uphold. Notice also the word “**us**.” She includes them in on it. Joseph is mocking not only me, but you as well! Always make sure you make those trying to pity you feel some empathy and sense of self-preservation.

But unfortunately, some people might not understand her meaning. So she puts it more bluntly in the next sentence, “**He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice**” (**39:14**). He tried to commit the great sin: adultery! How dare he. The only “**lie**” going on here is

from her mouth. This is bearing false witness against Joseph in order to harm him.

But she is not finished. Next, she not only does she lie about Joseph, she lies about herself. She did not cry out with a loud voice until just now, so that she could destroy Joseph. “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” (15). Of course, he did flee and get out of the house, but not for that reason. But now she has the whole household of servants who will be witnesses to something they only saw the tail end of: Joseph running away. But that was her plan all along, to get others to help her with her lie by filling them with racial hatred and fooling them with lies and half-truths. After all, you can’t punish a man if only one witness comes forward, not even in Egypt. These are classic tactics for anyone who seeks to do evil to another.

Next, *she waits* for Potiphar to come home. Like a snake in ambush. And oh, this woman is cunning indeed. She laid up his garment by her until his master came home (16). That way, she could stew over it all day, you see. What a great way of putting it: “his master.” Potiphar’s

wife is just a servant about to do a servant's duty for the master.

At last, he arrives (17). It tells us that **she told him the same story** that she told the others in the household. Yet, **her wording is different**. It has to be, because she has to win over a different kind of a person. It has to make the maximum impact. She begins with the racial slur, “**The Hebrew.**” But now, since it is Potiphar she is dealing with, she makes sure she adds the word “**servant/slave.**” Oh, and by the way, you brought him here. “**Don't you know what he did today?**” She leads him. He came in to me to laugh at me (17). Same euphemism to make herself look decent. But now “us” turns to “me.” Your slave tried to rape me. But I cried out (18). He was foolish and left his garment behind as he fled the scene of the crime. As one writer puts it all, this is a “**clever adjustment of psychological tactics ... to sting her husband into action.**”<sup>4</sup>

It worked! “**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**” (Gen 39:19). For all the hay we rightly make about Potiphar's wife, equally as egregious is

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<sup>4</sup> M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985), 425.

how he is the ultimate source of what happens to Joseph. It is Eve and Adam all over again. She lies and blames, Adam bites. His anger was kindled. Why not? You always trust those closest to you, right? They would never say anything wrong, never deceive, never lie. It is an extremely difficult thing, not merely to sort through lies, but even prior, to be fair to someone being accused of some wrong doing, because what if, in fact, they are innocent? The easy way is to just believe what you are told and have your wrath be kindled. Of course we know that in this instance Joseph is completely innocent. But Potiphar acts rashly.

Or does he?

## **Joseph in Prison: A Slave**

I ask this question as we now enter the **third and final part** of our story. What happens is that Joseph's master takes him and puts him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined (**vs. 20**). The question you need to ask yourself is, **why wasn't he put to death?** Not only did Israel punish rapists with death, so did other cultures around them.

It is at this point that Potiphar's occupation comes into sharp view. He was “**an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the**

guard” (39:1). Why does this matter? Dr. Walton explains, “Since Potiphar is referred to as the ‘captain of the guard’ (39:1) and later Joseph meets Pharaoh’s other officials in the house of the captain of the guard (40:3), it appears that Joseph is detained under Potiphar’s supervision and is there again given authority. In other words, he is transferred to another part of Potiphar’s house. That does not mean that his imprisonment is a farce, but it suggests that Potiphar’s anger may well have been directed toward his wife and that after an adequate show of indignation, Joseph is gradually again moved into a position of authority.”<sup>5</sup> Who was Potiphar’s wrath directed towards? Joseph or his wife? Perhaps it was both. Perhaps it was even more his wife than his servant. We have already seen that he may not have trusted her (“the food that he ate;” vs. 6). What does seem clear is that Potiphar at least was objective enough to get more facts than what his wife told him. And this is why he did not kill Joseph. It is a wondrous thing to see a pagan man acting better than many Christians do. It is also a shameful thing.

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<sup>5</sup> John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 127.

Of course, there are many reasons why Joseph is put into prison rather than being killed. Potiphar may **not have trusted his wife**. He did **trust Joseph**, implicitly, such that he did not have a care at all about anything in his household because Joseph was over it all. This last reason gets to two more important reasons as well. The first is **Joseph's honor** and righteousness. Not that Joseph never sinned, of course (we have seen as much in the events leading up to his brother's wanting to kill him). But Joseph is, in fact, acting with moral purity here. It really is possible to avoid at least outward sins. Joseph's action that ends up being exonerated in the fact that he is put into prison rather than being executed. No one could prove the woman's accusations. Joseph probably defended himself honorably, though curiously we don't know that he ever said a word to defend himself.

But the greatest cause is **God himself**. The end of the story returns us to the beginning in a parallel. Just as Potiphar bought Joseph who had been taken and brought down to **Egypt** (**vs. 1**), so now Potiphar takes Joseph and puts him into **prison** (**20**). But then, just as "**the LORD was with Joseph**" in **vs. 2**, so now, "**But the LORD was with**

Joseph” in vs. 21. Just like Joseph found favor in Potiphar’s eyes (vs. 4), so now God shows him steadfast love “and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison” (21). Just like Potiphar put him as overseer of his house (vs. 4), so now “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” (22). And just like Potiphar “had no concern about anything” (vs. 6), so now the keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph’s charge” (23).

Why? Because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed. So we can see in the story itself that the first set of facts, including God’s blessing Joseph were not an end to themselves, but rather paved the way for testing Joseph to see if he would remain faithful to God, must like the LORD tested Israel to see if they would commit adultery with the nations and the gods around them in the desert. So we will also come to learn that the second set of parallel facts are also not ends to themselves. Joseph’s suffering is not over. Nor is the plan that God has for him. This plan will include saving many lives. But first, Joseph will be put into positions where he

can rise to the top in order to make that happen. In other words, The LORD's blessing in this chapter is not like the passage about adultery, which is rooted in God's holiness and moral law.

Instead, it is rooted in redemptive history and God's plan for his people according to the covenant promises made long ago to Abram, Joseph's great grand-father. To answer our original question, we cannot take both kinds of verses as applying equally to our lives. To do so is to do irreparable damage to God's word and to those who are promised health, wealth, and happiness in this life. Imagine telling the family members of the 21 Coptic Christians behead this past week by ISIS Muslim terrorists that God wants whatever you do to prosper and that if it doesn't it is because of something you have done. There could be no greater insult to the martyr's death than that.

But if you could tell them that the reason they could die a martyr's death is because the same God who blessed Joseph so that he might try his faith, so that he might bless Joseph so that he might save his brothers, so that he might keep his people in Egypt, so that they might become slaves, so that they might be redeemed with an outstretched arm,

so that they might go into captivity, so that they might be freed, so that they might be promised a redeemer who is the better Joseph who has appeased the wrath of God and died for sin, so that all who trust in him will never be put to shame: whether blessed in this life or called to poverty or a martyrs death, well now that would be good news that would cause such people to rejoice that their own suffering is not in vain. Just like Joseph's. Just like any who trust in Christ Jesus, who are called to suffer to produce perseverance to produce hope. May it be true of all who hear God's word today.