



Accused

Pure living brings honor from God.

GENESIS 39:7-21

It is always good to do the right thing, and it is always right to do what is good. This may seem obvious, but we live in a world that often rejects these statements. People ask the question, “If something feels good, then how could it be wrong?” On the flip side, people often think that doing the right thing means depriving oneself of joy. The thinking is that doing what is good and what is right will get in the way of one’s own desires and agenda. God’s Word tells us that He will honor those who do what is good and right. This truth is evidenced in the life of Joseph.

How does God honor those who live pure lives?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

GENESIS 38:1–39:23

Genesis 38 is an interlude to the story of Joseph that focuses on Judah and Tamar. This account may seem completely disconnected to the passages concerning Joseph but is important to an understanding of the development of the nation of Israel, and God’s purposes for the tribe of Judah in particular.

At the end of Genesis, Jacob prophesied that the rightful king of Israel would come from the tribe of Judah and that “to him shall be the obedience of the peoples [nations]” (49:10). Just as God used Joseph for the

salvation of Israel, God would use Judah to carry on the promised seed, the Messianic line. Genesis 38 reveals how the union of Judah and Tamar produced the ancestral royal lineage of this seed through their son, Perez, that would ultimately lead to the birth of Jesus (Ruth 4:18-22; 2 Chron. 2:5-15; Matt. 1:3-6; Luke 3:31-33).

In Genesis 38, Judah's first son Er was so wicked that God slew him. Consequently, Judah's second son, Onan, now had the obligation of fathering a child in Er's name with Er's widow, Tamar. Despite his responsibility, Onan had sexual relations with her but made sure she could not get pregnant. So God killed Onan too. Judah's youngest son, Shelah, was not old enough to marry at that time. When Shelah finally was old enough, Judah did not give Tamar to Shelah in marriage as he should have by custom. In response, Tamar dressed up like a prostitute and tricked Judah into sleeping with her, not realizing it was his daughter-in-law. Judah gave her his signet, bracelets, and staff as payment. When Judah learned Tamar became pregnant while being a prostitute, he was ready to have her burned to death. When Tamar revealed the items Judah had paid her when they had their sexual encounter, he relented from having her put to death. When it was time to give birth, Tamar had twins, Perez and Zerah.

Read Genesis 39:7-21. How did Joseph deal with temptation?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

TEMPTED (GEN. 39:7-10)

⁷ And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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?" ¹⁰ And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her.

VERSE 7

Genesis 38 contains several connections to the story of Joseph. First, changing the focus from the story of Joseph to a focus on his family provides a picture of what was going on in their lives while Joseph was separated from them. Second, the pause in the Joseph story helps build suspense. Joseph had just been sold into slavery in Egypt (Gen. 37:36). What's going to happen to him next? This is not revealed until Genesis 39. Third, chapters 38 and 39 contrast the unethical behavior of Judah, who sacrificed his moral integrity by being with a prostitute, with the uprightness of Joseph.

The final statement in 39:6 sets up what happens in the following verses. Joseph was "handsome in form and appearance." The phrase *after a time* indicates Potiphar's wife had been admiring Joseph long enough for her admiration to turn into lust. Though Potiphar had given Joseph authority over everything he owned, Joseph was still a slave. Therefore, Potiphar's wife was emboldened to order Joseph to sleep with her.

VERSES 8-9

While the command of Potiphar's wife was short and direct, Joseph had several things to say as he refused her bidding. First, he pointed out that doing what she wanted would be an abuse of the trust his master and her husband had placed in him (see v. 6). Note how Joseph referred to Potiphar as his *master*, emphasizing his sense of duty to Potiphar.

Second, Joseph recognized the generosity Potiphar had shown him by withholding nothing from Joseph except his wife. She was off limits. Third, it would also be a sin against Potiphar, given she was Potiphar's wife. This understanding was even understood by the pagan nations of that day. Ancient Near Eastern law codes and

inscriptions indicate that cultures throughout the ancient Near East and not just the Israelites believed adultery was a sin, particularly against the husband when committed by his wife (see 20:9).

Joseph declared his devotion to God by stating that what she was demanding was *great wickedness* and *sin against God*. Joseph understood adultery as a violation of God's established order for sexual expression centuries before Moses was given the law. The Law of Moses recognized adultery was not only an offense against a spouse but also an offense against God. Consequently, it applied the death penalty to both parties who committed the sin (Deut. 22:22). Note how Joseph appealed to *God* instead of to the more specific expression "the LORD," which was the personal name of God to Israel. He was communicating to this Egyptian woman that both of them would be accountable to God for this action. Joseph adamantly stated that for all these reasons, there was no way he was going to capitulate and indulge her sinful desire.

How do people often try to rationalize or make excuses for sin?

Pray that God would help you see sin for what it is—"great wickedness, and sin against God" (v. 9).

VERSE 10

Potiphar's wife was relentless in her efforts to pressure and persuade Joseph to give in to her sexual advances. The phrase *to lie beside her* is a typical Hebrew expression for sexual relations. Nowhere else in the Old Testament is the verb "lie" used with the preposition "beside." It is possible she was employing a strategy of familiarity and enticement with Joseph that over time would hopefully chip away at his moral wall and eventually coax him to have sex with her. Therefore, it must be understood that Joseph not only refused to commit adultery, but he also did his best to not put himself in a position where he might be tempted to do so.

What are ways you can avoid putting yourself in positions where you might be tempted?

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Family*

Marriage is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race. (See Genesis 2:24; Hebrews 13:4.)

TRAPPED (GEN. 39:11-16)

¹¹ 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, ¹² 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. ¹³ And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home,

VERSE 11

But one day communicates that this was a day like any other. Joseph was going about his daily tasks in his master's home. He was carrying out his normal routine and not guilty of any provocation or wrongdoing in what was about to happen. The statement that **none of the men of the house was there in the house** implies there usually were other servants in the house when Joseph was there carrying out his duties. It is possible that Potiphar's wife set up the situation, but the text is silent on this point. What is clear is that she sought to take advantage of this opportunity. Joseph unknowingly had entered into a dangerously vulnerable situation.

VERSE 12

Potiphar's wife saw her opportunity and took it. Instead of inviting Joseph to sleep with her, now she aggressively insisted he do so. The Hebrew word translated **caught** often denotes a physical and even violent seizure. In Deuteronomy 22:28 it is associated with an act of rape. **Garment** is a general term for clothing. It can refer to both outer and under clothing. Consequently, it is unclear what piece of clothing she grabbed. Typically, Egyptian servants wore only a loincloth that tied at the waist and hung like a short skirt.

VERSES 13-16

Potiphar's humiliated wife had been jilted by Joseph for the last time. When she saw that Joseph had fled out of the house and she was holding an article of his clothing in her hand, she now had a means to exact revenge on him for rejecting her. She also used the opportunity to lash out at her husband, maybe because he was one of Joseph's reasons for rejecting her advances. By blaming Potiphar, she was forcing him to take responsibility for what happened and ensuring that he would deal with Joseph harshly. So, she cried out to her household servants and told them to **see** as she showed them Joseph's clothing. Then she accused her husband of bringing in **a Hebrew to laugh at us**.

Historically, the Egyptians loathed the Hebrews at worst and didn't trust them at best. While Potiphar recognized Joseph's administrative skills, it is likely Potiphar gave him authority over everything but the food he ate because Egyptians typically detested Hebrews, believing they were inferior and would not eat with them. Letting Joseph prepare his food probably was even a little too much for Potiphar (v. 6, see also 43:32). So Potiphar's wife calling Joseph a **Hebrew** served to characterize Joseph to be exactly what any Egyptian should expect him to be.

After she rehearsed her claims before her household servants, Potiphar's wife coolly waited for her husband to return home with **his garment by her**. Her household servants witnessed the rehearsal, but her husband, Joseph's **master**, was about to witness the live performance.

What makes fleeing a temptation so difficult?

TRUSTWORTHY (GEN. 39:17-21)

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house." ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

VERSES 17-20

When Potiphar returned, she told him her version of what happened. She called Joseph *the Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us*. She blamed Potiphar for what happened and made it clear that he must do something about it. Potiphar should never have trusted this Hebrew by bringing him into their home.

She concluded her tale with , once again emphasizing Potiphar's responsibility for bringing this person into their home to perpetrate this terrible assault. It was then that Potiphar's *anger was kindled* and had Joseph thrown into *prison*. What is amazing is that Potiphar did not have Joseph executed. This would have happened to a citizen who committed this crime, much less a slave. However, God preserved Joseph's life once again.

Doing what is right before God, as Joseph did when he resisted the seducing efforts of Potiphar's wife, does not guarantee your circumstances will result in what you hoped for. Joseph's living arrangement became much worse in the king's prison than what it had been in Potiphar's household where Potiphar withheld nothing from Joseph except his wife (v. 9). He went from the best situation a slave in Egypt could hope for to possibly the worst situation in the king's prison, a place of punishment for those who had wronged the Pharaoh or other people with great power in the kingdom.

How does the way people deal with false accusations reveal their true character?

VERSE 21

This is one of the most beautiful verses in the Joseph story. Joseph had endured the hatred of his brother and the lies of a seductress, but they could not bring Joseph down because the Lord was with him and had *showed him steadfast love*. When he found himself in another difficult situation in the king's prison, God granted Joseph *favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison*. This is a reminder of Romans 8:31-32 and 38-39, which declares: "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? . . . For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

How can remembering Genesis 39:21 encourage believers when they suffer because of false accusations made against them?

BIBLE SKILL: Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.

In Genesis 39:7-12, Joseph successfully resisted the attempts of Potiphar's wife to lure him into temptation. What do you think enabled Joseph to successfully resist? Read Matthew 4:1-11 and Hebrews 4:15. How was Jesus able to resist the devil's temptations? What do these Scriptures teach us about how we can overcome temptation? Read 1 Corinthians 10:13. Since God has promised not to allow His children to be tempted beyond what they are able, why do we so often fall prey to the devil's enticements?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers must consider the consequences of giving in to temptation.
- Believers may need to flee from a situation to escape temptation.
- Believers can demonstrate trust in God when falsely accused.

Discuss with your group what principles we can learn from Joseph about how to deal with temptations. What are the consequences of giving into temptation? What are the benefits to withstanding temptation? How can other believers help us to withstand temptation?

Identify the greatest temptation you are struggling with right now. How can you apply this passage to your situation?

Memorize Genesis 39:21.

PRAYER NEEDS
