

Committed • Genesis 39

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Nepalese Paratroopers*

1. In 1964, there was an armed conflict between Malaysia and Indonesia.
2. The Indonesians needed assistance and asked for their allies from Nepal to assist them.
3. A group of Nepalese fighters arrived and were asked if they would serve as *paratroopers*.
4. Never having been trained as paratroopers, they declined, but the next day came to the Indonesian commander and said they'd talked and decided to volunteer for the mission on certain conditions:
 - 1) they would jump if the land was soft and marshy with no rocky outcroppings
 - not knowing how to land they wanted to make sure the ground would be forgiving.
 - the commander assured them the drop zone was a jungle and would provide a soft landing.
 - 2) they asked that the plane fly as slow as possible and only 100 feet high
 - the commander assured them that the drop plane always flew as slow as possible
 - but the request to fly at only 100 feet was *unsafe* for the soldiers; at that height, their parachutes wouldn't have time to open properly.
5. That's when the Nepalese said, "Oh, you didn't say anything about parachutes! If we have chutes we'll jump anywhere!"

B. *Commitment*

1. These were men of commitment & courage!
2. We're taking a look at *commitment* this morning.
3. As we do, we'll be covering the entire 39th chapter of Genesis.

II. TEXT

A. Sold To Potiphar • Vs. 1-6

¹Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt.

1. In ch. 37 we read that Joseph had been *sold* by his 10 older brothers to a caravan of Ishmaelites.
 - a. Jacob, their father, had made no secret of his *favoritism* of Joseph and the other sons resented it deeply.
 - b. Joseph had also unwisely told his brothers of some prophetic dreams he'd had.
 - 1) in these dreams his older brothers were bowing down to him.
 - 2) this only served to inflame their jealousy and hatred.
 - c. so one day when they had the opportunity, they conspired to get rid of him and sold him to this band of travelers who were on their way south to Egypt.

And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there.

2. When the Ishmaelites arrived in Egypt, they set up shop and began trading.
3. Among their wares was young Joseph, a strong, good looking lad and Potiphar, one of the Egyptian officials bought him.
 - a. Potiphar is called the “captain of the guard.”
 - b. with what we know of Egyptian society at this time, he was the head of what we would call the “Secret Service;” Pharaoh’s personal bodyguard.
 - c. these were the men who provided palace security and sniffed out plots against the king’s life.

²The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. ³And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand. ⁴So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all *that* he had he put under his authority.

4. Three words in v. 4 gives us the key to understanding why Joseph was so successful: “and served him.”

5. Joseph found favor in Potiphar's sight because whatever he did *prospered*; and Joseph prospered precisely because he *served* Potiphar.
6. Finding himself in the occupation and role of a slave, he sought to be only one thing – faithful!
7. It would have been so easy for Joseph to be bitter at the turn of events that saw him go from a position of favor in the home of a rich and powerful man, to being a slave in the courts of a foreign official.
 - a. his father Jacob had made no secret of his intent to make Joseph the heir of his vast estate.
 - b. and Joseph even had a sense of *divine destiny* on his life because of the visionary dreams he'd had.
8. His youthful expectations of greatness were all thrown into the dark when his own brothers sold him into slavery and then he found himself as nothing more than a common servant.
9. Let's be honest, most people given the same circumstances would be railing at everyone, including God!
 - a. "God, how could You let this happen to me? I thought you loved me!"
 - b. most would become bitter and fall into deep depression
10. But not Joseph! Joseph seems to have gained a perspective on life that ought to frame the thinking of *every* child of God – God is in control!
11. Regardless of *my circumstances* – God is in charge and still sits on the throne of heaven and over-rules in the affairs of earth.
12. Therefore, whatever's happening in my life is allowed and ultimately ordained by Him for some greater purpose.
13. Faith means holding on now, even in the darkness, confident that the dawn of a new and glorious day will come.
14. With confidence in the goodness, power, and wisdom of God, Joseph concluded the only thing left to him was to go along with God's plan and seek to be faithful right where he was.
 - a. and where he was, was a slave. So he *served* his master because that's what slaves do!
 - b. he didn't serve with resentment or bitterness but with true diligence, seeking God's glory and his master's profit. And whatever he did, the Lord blessed.

- c. his service quickly came to the attention of those slaves who were over him and they promoted him.
- d. finally he came to the attention of Potiphar himself who made him the chief steward over his *entire* household.

⁵So it was, from the time *that* he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field. ⁶Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate.

- 15. As soon as Joseph was made the chief steward, Potiphar's entire holdings experienced a dramatic season of blessing.
 - a. his investments and fortunes grew.
 - b. and it was clear to all who witnessed there was *more* to the prosperity than just Joseph's careful attention – it was the blessing of God!
- 16. To cap it all off – we read at the end of v. 6 . . .

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

- 17. He had it all; he was young, upbeat & positive, a skilled businessman, shrewd investor, and could grace the cover of *EQ* [*Egyptian Quarterly*.]
- 18. But even on the best day – he was still a slave!

B. Troubles With Mrs. Potiphar • Vs. 7-18

⁷And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me."

- 1. Though still a slave, being the chief steward in Potiphar's home was a mark of distinction and rank.
- 2. When it was seen his skill with the household affairs wasn't merely some flash in the pan, Joseph was more and more accepted as a part of Potiphar's inner circle.
- 3. He would have spent much time in the home, working with the other servants to plan special parties, state dinners, and special

events.

4. And this would all bring him into close contact with Mrs. Potiphar.
5. It wasn't long until she found herself attracted to him and made it clear she was interested in hooking up with him.
6. Now, according to the customs and culture of that time, what she was proposing was nothing out of the ordinary.
 - a. he was a servant and she, as a royal official's wife, was allowed a lot of moral latitude as far as *lovers* went.
 - b. and even though it was pretty much an accepted practice, it was still kept secret; rather like today.
7. What would be the reaction of the young, good looking Joseph to the offer of Mrs. Potiphar –who in all likelihood was attractive in her own rite, since important & powerful men usually get their choice of the finest brides?

8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what *is* with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. ⁹There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you *are* his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

8. Joseph's response to Mrs. Potiphar reveals a couple important things.
 - 1) he was *polite* in his resistance to her offer.
 - he knew he was absolutely right in denying her advance, but he didn't turn her away with a proud kind of arrogance that belittled her.
 - he didn't cop a morally superior attitude though he clearly was.
 - when confronted with the sins of the lost, Christians often become arrogant and act morally superior.
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- Ben Born Again never told anyone at work that he's a Christian and one day some fellow workers invite him to happy hour.
 - seeing this as an opportunity to "be a witness" replied to their friendly offer, "I wouldn't be caught dead in such a den of iniquity and vice! Alcohol is devil juice! I'm going to Bible

study tonight!”

- such moral smugness and superiority aren't likely to endear anyone who's lost to the excellence of the gospel of Christ.
 - in fact, we never see such arrogance on the part of Christ when dealing with sinners.
 - on the contrary, sinners were *attracted* to Him because His holiness was humble and His love was uncompromised.
 - Jesus saw what sinners *could become* through His loving grace & gently held forth the hope of a new life.
 - what an amazing thing – sinners were attracted, not repulsed by His holiness!
 - that's something to meditate on!
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- why is it that we so often *expect* sinners to act like Christians?
 - they aren't, they're sinners;
 - and what ought we expect from sinners? Sin!
 - their sin is never an excuse for us to act or treat them *rudely*.
 - when Mrs. Potiphar attempted to seduce him, Joseph politely declined.
 - more than likely, being the sharp guy he was, he'd become aware she was being attracted to him; he'd seen the stares and hungry looks she sent him.
 - and that leads us to the second important lesson here
- 2) Joseph had *pre-planned* his response to temptation.
- notice how he seems to have a response to Mrs. Potiphar's seduction all planned out.
 - he doesn't just refuse her; he's got a whole list of reasons why yielding to her offer is unwise.
 - it would be a betrayal of her husband's trust in him.
 - as adultery, it would be wrong.
 - and most important of all, it would be a *sin* against God.
 - let's all learn from this; decide ahead of time how you're going to deal with temptation when it comes!
 - don't wait until you are in the grip of temptation to figure out what to do;
 - realize that living in a fallen world, in bodies which are yet to be redeemed, you *are* going to be tempted. What are you going to do? Decide *now*.

- when you're handed too much change at the store, what are you going to do; keep it or give it back?
 - when your boss comes to you and asks if you've completed that project, and you haven't; are you going to say you have or tell the truth?
 - when someone of the opposite sex at work suggests an inappropriate private meeting, are you going to accept or politely decline, while at the same time *affirming* your commitment to your spouse?
 - pre-planning our response to temptation is a key strategy in spiritual warfare.
 - don't walk through life being spiritually naïve; satan has laid countless moral mines along our path and we need to be wise, stepping over and around them.
- 3) most importantly, notice Joseph's *main motivation*.
- he resisted Mrs. Potiphar's offer because to give in would have been a *sin against God*.
 - here's another clue to the secret of Joseph's success – he was *totally committed to God*.
 - it was that *commitment* that freed him from bitterness at finding himself a slave.
 - it was that *commitment* that allowed him to devote himself to being faithful in the midst of the humiliating place he found himself.
 - it was that *commitment* that gave him the resolve to *resist* her advances.
 - make no mistake; this was a serious temptation for Joseph!
 - a young, good looking man; away from his family,
 - given great power;
 - and as we read on, we see that it wasn't a one time appeal . . .

10 So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her.

- her offer went on, day after day!
- but Joseph never allowed himself to entertain the temptation.

- he didn't fantasize or imagine;
 - he gave no place to the temptation in his soul.
9. Joseph was a man *committed* to God, and that commitment drew a fence around his life he would not tear down for anything or anyone.
- a. it didn't matter what his *circumstances* were, he was God's man.
 - b. and being God's man, he had *surrendered* himself into the Lord's keeping.
 - c. what the Lord chose to do with him was up to the Lord.
 - d. Joseph's duty was simple – stay *faithful* to the Lord!
 - 1) so if the Lord placed him in the hands of some Ishmaelites on their way to Egypt – he'd go to Egypt.
 - 2) if the Lord placed him at the bottom of the social heap as a slave in some Egyptian's house, he'd do the best job of being a slave he could.
 - 3) if he found himself as the chief steward in that same man's house with his wife offering herself to him, he'd refuse simply because it wouldn't be right.
10. Because He was committed to God, Joseph lived by the principle Paul spells out in Colossians 3:17 -

Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

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11. Mrs. Potiphar was a woman who was used to having things her way and saw Joseph's resolve and commitment to God as a thing to be overcome.
- a. his resistance only made him more attractive to her.
 - b. her desire grew and she became more brazen and bold in her seduction.
 - c. it all came to head one day -

¹¹But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside, ¹²that she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. ¹³And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand

and fled outside, ¹⁴that she called to the men of her house and spoke to them, saying, “See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. ¹⁵And it happened, when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me, and fled and went outside.”

12. Mrs. Potiphar decided to take the *direct approach* with Joseph.
 - a. so one day when it was just the two of them alone in the house, and the implication is that she'd sent all the other servants away, she took hold of Joseph and demanded that he lie with her.
 - b. if discovery or modesty was what was bothering him, she made it *easy* for him to yield to her.
 - c. anything that might have stood in the way of Joseph's surrender to her was now removed.
 - d. in her mind, there was no reason now for him NOT to lie with her.
 - e. but in Joseph's heart, though no human was present to see them God was still watching and his commitment to the Lord meant he could *not* give in to this woman, no matter how appealing the offer might be.
13. Okay, let's be honest once again – there are few men who could or *would* resist this temptation.
14. In fact, the only one's who would are those who are *committed* – committed to God!
15. You see, those who are committed to God live their lives *Coram Deo* – “before God's face.”
 - a. the morality that shapes their choices isn't *situational*.
 - b. it's shaped by what pleases the God Who is always present, Who always sees.
 - c. the committed live their lives for God's *approval* and no one else's.
16. For Joseph, even though Mrs. Potiphar had removed all the obstacles, nothing had changed because God hadn't changed!
17. Of course, from her perspective, Joseph's refusal meant only one thing – *rejection!*

18. And as they say - hell hath no fury as a woman scorned.
19. She simply could not accept this defeat and determined to undo Joseph's morality by accusing him of attempted rape.

16So she kept his garment with her until his master came home. **17**Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, "The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to mock me; **18**so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside."

20. This was of course a false charge.
21. It was *she* who ought to have been made to answer to her husband for her attempt to seduce Joseph.
22. Joseph's loyalty to his master, empowered by his commitment to the Lord, ought to have been REWARDED and PRAISED. Instead, he's thrown into prison.

C. Joseph In Prison • Vs. 19-23

19So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, "Your servant did to me after this manner," that his anger was aroused. **20**Then Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were confined. And he was there in the prison.

1. One of the questions students of the Bible have asked over the years is, why didn't Potiphar have Joseph *executed*?
 - a. attempted rape by a slave was easily cause for such punishment.
 - b. an owner had absolute right to dispose of his slaves any way he chose, including killing them.
 - c. as the head over the secret service he could have easily disposed of Joseph, so why didn't he?
2. Probably because he knew the charge was false – but what else could he do?
3. If he ignored his wife's accusation, it would shame and belittle her and drive a serious wedge between them. He had to pretend to believe her.
4. Potiphar had come to know the character and quality of young

Joseph and did the only thing he could do – put him in prison rather than execute him.

- a. in v. 19 it says Potiphar grew *angry*, but not at Joseph.
- b. he was angry with his wife for manipulating him into a situation where, to save face, he had to dismiss the man who'd made his entire household run so well. [\[1\]](#)

5. Now, what do you suppose went through Joseph's mind?
 - a. so, this is what resisting temptation gets me!
 - b. what profit is there in holiness? I go from chief steward to *prisoner*?
 - c. what's lower than being a slave? Being a slave in prison!
6. Do you think Joseph was tempted to be bitter? You know he was!
 - a. just as Mrs. Potiphar had tried to wear him down day by day,
 - b. you can be sure there was another messenger who came to wear him down night by night with the temptation to despair and give up on God.
 - 1) "What's your commitment to God got you Joseph?"
 - 2) "Your commitment to God has put you in this stinking hole."
7. But as he always does, the devil overplayed his hand in his attempts to break Joseph's commitment to God.
8. You see, it was true that Joseph's commitment to God had landed him in prison; and if being in prison was where God wanted him, Joseph didn't want to be anywhere else.
9. So once again he looked for *how* he could be useful for the Lord there in prison.

21 But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. **22** And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing. **23** The keeper of the prison did not look into anything *that was* under Joseph's authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made *it* prosper.

10. It wasn't long until once again, because of the Lord's blessing, Joseph rose to the attention of the authorities.
 - a. they recognized his skill in administration and entrusted the

- oversight and upkeep of the entire prison to him.
- b. everything he did prospered because God blessed him.

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Too Close*

1. I'm sure there were times when Joseph wondered what was happening, moments when he was tempted to doubt. But he never gave in to them.
2. He'd come to see that while his circumstances quickly changed and changed dramatically, there was one bedrock truth that does not change – the nature and character of God.
3. In a world subject to upheaval, God was the One unchanging certainty and Joseph held on to Him with every ounce of his strength.
4. What you & I can see because we have the advantage of hindsight, is that all that happened to Joseph was necessary to put him where he *needed to be* so he could save thousands and even hundreds of thousands of lives.
5. He had to be in that prison, because he needed to meet one of Pharaoh's advisors who was under investigation.
 - a. that advisor would later recommend Joseph to Pharaoh, and Joseph would end up becoming the prime minister of all of Egypt.
 - b. but in order to get to the prison, he had to take a tour in Potiphar's house.
 - c. and in order to get to Potiphar's house, he had to be sold by his brothers to a caravan of desert travelers.
6. In order to perform his duties as prime minister of Egypt during a horrendous national crisis, Joseph had to *learn administrative skills*.
 - a. so God sent him to Potiphar to learn economics, the Egyptian's system, and investing.
 - b. in overseeing the prison, he learned how to work with difficult people and take care of the needs of many.
7. What an important lesson for us – success is not just arriving at the end or the goal.
 - a. success is the *journey* that prepares us to be the people we need

- to be when we get to the end.
- b. God couldn't just take Joseph from Jacob's tent and stick him on the throne of Egypt.
 - c. the route to the throne had to lead through the difficult path of adversity so Joseph might learn and be shaped by his experiences to be a good and gracious ruler.

B. We Too

1. Just as Joseph was destined for the throne of Egypt, so you and I are destined for a throne.
2. The Bible tells us we will rule and reign with Christ.
3. As the Bride of Christ, we're given the promise and privilege of sitting with Him on His throne.
4. Our lives today parallel Joseph's as he made his way to the throne of Egypt.
5. Our path is this life and it lies through the desert of adversity as well as the green fields of plenty.
6. The one thing that will make sure we make it safely and successfully through is an *unshakeable commitment to God*.
 - a. one not hampered by circumstances good or bad.
 - b. one that holds on to God in the day and the night.
 - c. one that sees His purposes above and beyond where we are right now.
7. One that lives in the reality Romans 8:28 & 29 reveal –

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be conformed to the image of His Son*, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

[\[1\]](#) Guzik, David *On Line Commentary, Genesis 39*