

Genesis 39

Verse 1

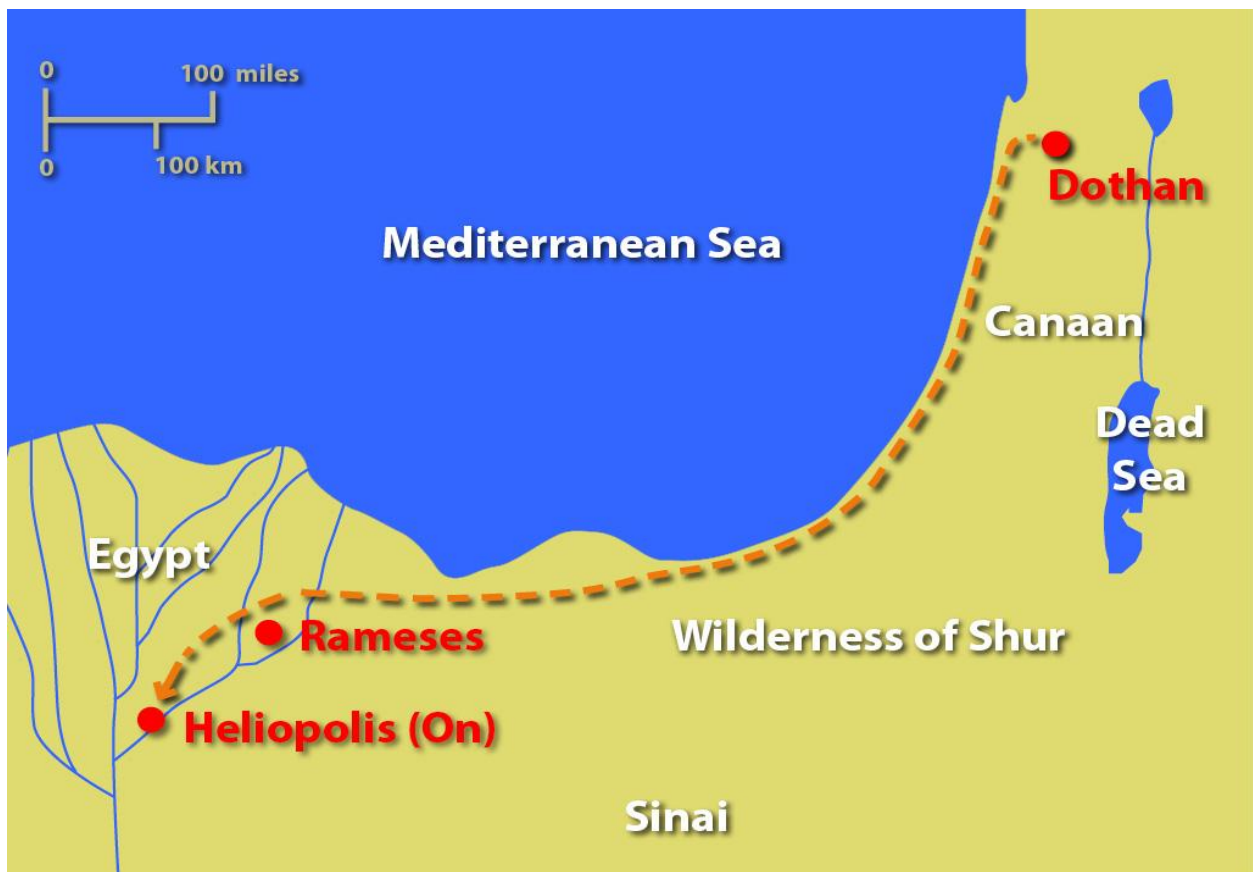
Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelite's, who had taken him down there. ² And the Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian.

Verse 1 brings us back to the event in Genesis 37:28.

²⁸ Then some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled *him* out and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty *shekels* of silver. So they brought Joseph into Egypt.

Potiphar was the captain of the body guard to the king of Egypt. This office included the overseeing of the prisons. He bought Joseph from the Ishmaelites who had obtained him from the sons of Jacob.

See map 3905



Let's look at a few interesting facts about Egypt and the Nile River.

1. There is some rainfall along the coast, but 100 miles south of the Mediterranean Sea, (from Cairo to the Sudan) there is no rainfall year round.

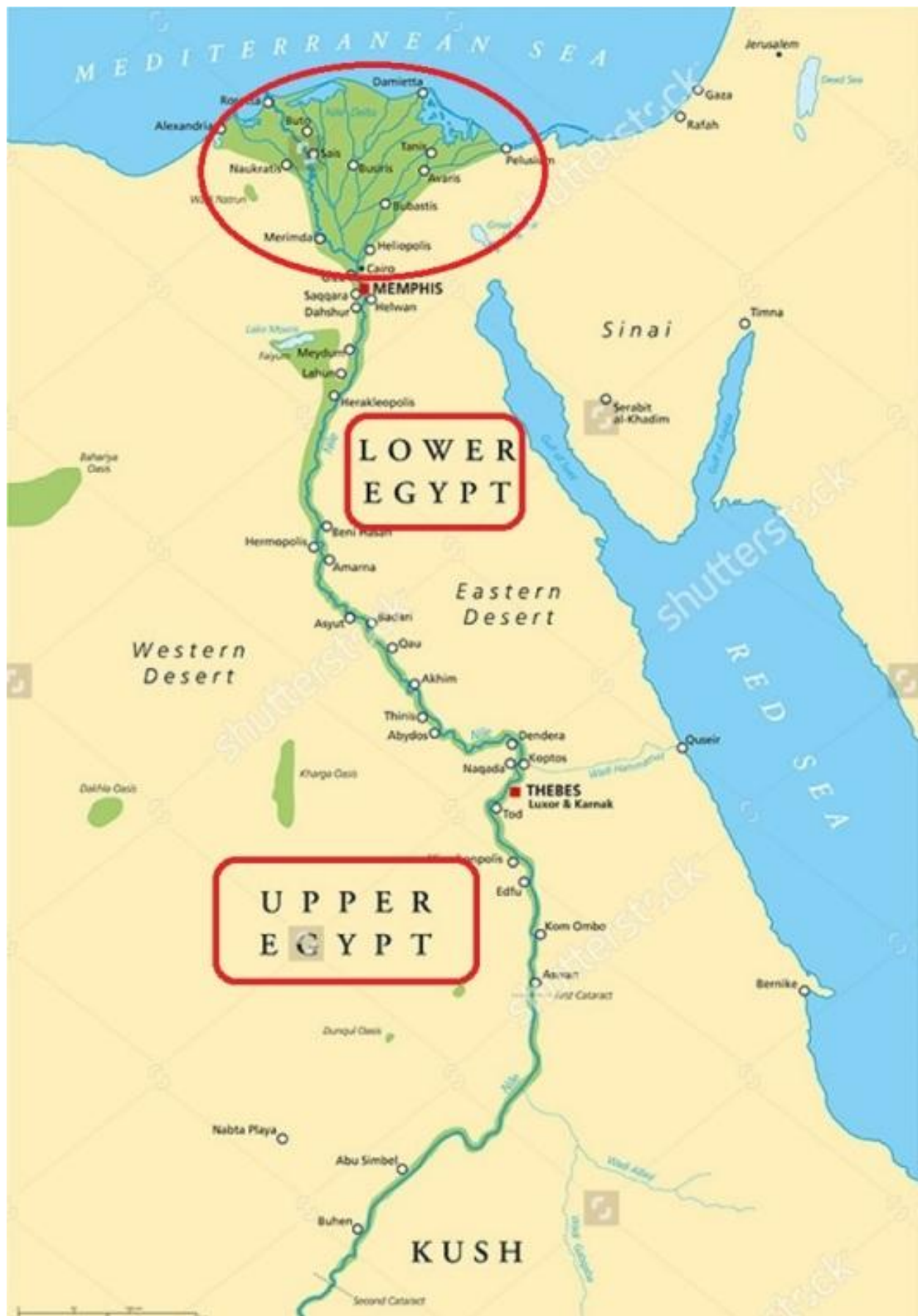
See map 3915



2. Practically everyone in Egypt lives along the Nile River which is approximately 3,470 miles long. The width of the Nile Valley varies between 12 to 31 miles.

3. The Northern part of Egypt around the Delta is called Lower Egypt. The Delta is where the Nile River spreads out and drains into the Mediterranean Sea. And the southern part of Egypt is called Upper Egypt. This is because the Nile River runs from the south to the north.

See map 3920



² And the Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian.

This was also true with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. No doubt these men all had some natural ability and worked hard but the success they experienced could only come from the Lord.

Verses 3 - 6

³ Now his master saw that the Lord was with him and *that* the Lord made all that he did prosper in his hand. ⁴ So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and put him in charge of all that he owned. ⁵ It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; so the Lord's blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field. ⁶ So he left Joseph in charge of everything that he owned; and with him *there* he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate.

³ Now his master saw that the Lord was with him and *that* the Lord made all that he did prosper in his hand.

Potiphar deserves some praise because he understood that these blessings were not just the result of hard work and effort. He probably didn't understand why God was doing this but he knew it was coming from God. We know God wanted Joseph in a leadership position so all of the nations of the world could be saved from the disaster that was about to take place but we have the advantage of hindsight.

Verses 7 - 10

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. ⁷ And it came about after these events that his master's wife had her eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Sleep with me." ⁸ But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, with me *here*, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put me in charge of all that he owns. ⁹ 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?" ¹⁰ Though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her *or* be with her.

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

Some of the same words were used of his mother Rachel.

See Genesis 29:17

¹⁷ And Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in figure and appearance.

⁷ And it came about after these events that his master's wife had her eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Sleep with me." ⁸ But he refused and said to his master's wife, how then could I do this great evil, and sin against God

Ladies aren't you glad that men don't act this way. ☺

On a more serious note there are few men that would have reacted in a way like Joseph did if they were in a similar situation. Some men might have said no because they were smart enough to know that this kind of thing is always discovered in time but to say no because it was a sin against God was a testament to his belief in God and what the Lord demanded in the life of a believer. Again, this was long before the written Law was given to the people of Israel.

⁹ 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?"

This would have been wrong for 2 reasons

1. It would have been an act of disloyalty to his master.
2. It would have been a sin against God.

¹⁰ Though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her.

Joseph knew that giving in to her wishes would be a sin but he probably understood that his refusal could also bring about some negative consequences. Nevertheless, Joseph held to his convictions and did what was right.

Verses 11-18

¹¹ Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the people of the household was there inside. ¹² So she grabbed him by his garment, saying, “Sleep with me!” But he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside. ¹³ 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 fun of us; he came in to me to sleep 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 fun of me; ¹⁸ but when I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside.”

¹¹ Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the people of the household was there inside.

We don't know how many people are indicated here but it seems fair to assume that it was unusual for no one to be in the house. Joseph was probably one of several servants (see verse 14) and no family members were present.

¹² So she grabbed him by his garment, saying, “Sleep with me!” But he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside.

It's always good to flee temptation, but preferably with your clothes on. Joseph seems to have had bad luck with cloths. His coat of many colors angered his brothers and here his garment was used to “prove” he was guilty of sexual assault.

¹⁴ she called to the men of her household and said to them, “See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make fun of us; he came in to me to sleep with me, and I screamed.

Potiphar's wife used words that cast her husband in a poor light alleging that Potiphar was to blame for the situation. This was also a way to stir up racial animus.

¹⁵ When he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside.

Of all the false claims that she used this one seems the least reasonable. This suggests that he had removed his garment and when she screamed he left in such a hurry that he left his garment behind.

However, the fact that she did scream entitled her to a claim of innocence.

See Deuteronomy 22:24

²³ “If there is a girl who is a virgin betrothed to a man, and *another* man finds her in the city and sleeps with her, ²⁴ then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city and you shall stone them to death: the girl, because she did not cry out for help though she was in the city, and the man, because he has violated his neighbor’s wife. So you shall eliminate the evil from among you.

The Law had not been given yet, and if it had, it would not have applied to an Egyptian but as we have seen there were numerous laws that had been around for many years before they became part of the Law in 1446 BC.

Verses 19 - 21

¹⁹ 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 prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined; and he was there in the prison. ²¹ But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the warden of the prison. ²² And the warden of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible *for it*. ²³ The warden of the prison did not supervise anything under Joseph’s authority, because the Lord was with him; and, the Lord made whatever he did prosper.

⁹ 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.

Do you think Potiphar believed his wife? It seems like his anger was real enough, but an accusation of rape should have led to a quick death for Joseph not imprisonment. He may have been angry that his wife had put him in this unfavorable position of getting rid of Joseph because he was enjoying an “early retirement”.

It was unfair that the wife of Potiphar got away with a false accusation and Joseph had to spend time in jail for something he didn't do but by doing it this way, his wife would know that he didn't believe her claim of rape, and it also prevented a scandal that would have harmed the honor of Potiphar.

²¹ But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the warden of the prison.

A very similar statement was made in verse 2 of this chapter. God showed kindness to the Patriarchs and Joseph that he might bless Israel and all of mankind thru his chosen people.

²² And the warden of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible *for it*.

Joseph was in charge over his brothers, then he was in charge of Potiphar's house and now he is in charge of the prisoners. He still has one more promotion coming but we will leave that for later.

²³ The warden of the prison did not supervise anything under Joseph's authority, because the Lord was with him; and, the Lord made whatever he did prosper.

The Lord blessing whatever Joseph did is a major theme of this chapter. God wanted Joseph to be in charge for a very specific purpose. All of the known world would be saved from starvation because of God's intervention.

Also God needed to get Israel out of Canaan until they became a nation. We saw in chapter 38 that Judah had married a Canaanite woman and his other brothers would have done the same. Israel as a people would have ceased to exist and the promise made to Abraham would have died by the next generation if God had not brought them all to Egypt. They remained a nation in Egypt because when they were subjected to slavery they could not marry outside of their community (race).

God can use any evil, including slavery, and turn it into a blessing.

See Romans 8:28

²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.