



LESSON 15

God preserves Joseph

GENESIS 37:1-36



God works everything for the salvation of His people.



“His brothers said to him, ‘Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?’ So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words” (Gen 37:8).

Supporting Truths

1. God cares for His people.
2. God uses evil for the good of His people.
3. God directs people’s actions according to His plan.
4. God directs “random” events according to His plan.
5. God directs all things according to His plan of salvation.

Objectives

1. Identify one way God cared for Joseph.
2. Explain how one evil thing that happened to Joseph turned out for good.
3. Tell how God used the actions of one of the characters in the story to fulfill His plan.
4. List four “random” events in the story of Joseph. Tell why they are not random.
5. Explain how Joseph’s suffering allowed God’s people to be saved.

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God preserves Joseph • Genesis 37:1–36



Lesson Summary

This story appears to be a story about everything going wrong—Jacob showed favoritism, Joseph talked foolishly, the brothers were filled with jealousy and hatred, and Reuben failed to lead as the firstborn should—but God was at work, using every event to prepare for the salvation of His chosen people. Although the chapter ends with the family confused and grieving, we know that the story is not over yet.

Spotlight on the Gospel

Joseph suffered greatly, but God used his suffering to save his family—both from starving during seven years of famine and from the sins that were ruining the family. In the same way, when Christ came, He also experienced great suffering in order to bring about God's good plan. As Joseph suffered and became ruler to save his family, so Jesus suffered and became King to save all who come to Him.

LAST WEEK



Jacob wrestles with God
Genesis 32:1–33:20

THIS WEEK



God preserves Joseph
Genesis 37:1–36

NEXT WEEK



God delivers Joseph
Genesis 39:1–50:26

PROMISE

DELIVERANCE

Lesson Commentary

God works everything for the salvation of His people.

Previously we saw how Jacob learned to trust God and chose to worship Him as His own God. However, Jacob still struggled to be a godly leader. His past sin of deception and brotherly strife continued, this time infecting his own sons. As sin always does, it caused great pain and threatened to utterly destroy the chosen family. But as God always does, He did not allow the line of Christ to perish or to be lost through ungodliness. Instead, God showed His control. Genesis 37 appears to be a story about everything going wrong, but God was at work, using every event to prepare for the salvation of His chosen people.



THINK ABOUT IT
Partiality is a sin and can divide a family (Prov. 28:21).

Joseph's brothers hated him (37:1–11)

God chose to use Joseph, Jacob's second youngest son, to accomplish His plans. Joseph was still young, and he showed the immaturity

of a young man in the way he tattled on his brothers (37:2). To make things worse, Jacob showed favoritism by giving Joseph a special robe, one that honored Joseph as if he were the firstborn (37:3). Just as favoritism had divided Jacob and Esau, so favoritism again divided Joseph and his brothers (37:4).

Jacob was wrong to express favoritism, but he was not wrong to identify Joseph as the firstborn. God confirmed this by two dreams, showing how certain His plan was (cf. 41:32). The dreams were easy to understand: God had selected Joseph to rule over his family. God often chooses the younger, the smaller, and the weaker in order to demonstrate that salvation is from God and not from man. God chose the nation of Israel even though it was one of the least of the nations (Deut 7:7), and today God still chooses the weak and despised of this world so that all people may glorify Him (1 Cor 1:26–31).

God is not mentioned in Joseph's dreams, but this does not mean God was not present; rather, God was showing His presence through **providence**, causing all the details of the story to work together to accomplish His plan. The same occurs in our lives today: we may not see anything miraculous in our lives and we may not hear a divine voice in our ears, yet we can be sure that God is at work in every detail (Matt 10:29).

THINK ABOUT IT
Even the lives of sparrows are under God's watchful care.



What was God's plan? God had already declared that Abraham's descendants would spend 400 years in captivity in Egypt (Gen 15:13), so now God would work through the strife in Jacob's family to bring this about. God used Egypt as a place for Israel to become a nation, for Israel was isolated in Egypt rather than exposed to the vile wickedness of the Canaanites during those formative years. Then when God did bring Israel out of Egypt, He demonstrated His invincible power to redeem. Just as God would use difficult trials to shape His people Israel, so in Genesis 37 God would use difficult trials to shape Jacob, Joseph, and the brothers.

The brothers hated Joseph "for his dreams and for his words" (37:8). They hated the way Joseph spoke about his dreams, but they also hated the meaning of the dream itself. Many people continue to reject God's **election**, His right to choose some over others (Rom 9:14–19). God would use Joseph to cause his brothers to realize their error, give up their jealousy, and become patriarchs of Israel.

Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery (37:12–28)

Just as God did not appear in Joseph's dreams, so God continues to seem absent through the rest of the chapter. But God makes Himself known through His providence as He arranges many seemingly random events. Jacob just happened to send Joseph to check on his brothers at Shechem (Gen 37:12–14). But it just happened that the brothers

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had traveled north to Dothan (37:15–17), a place that happened to be nearer the trading route. When Joseph arrived at Shechem, it happened that a man found him wandering in the field, and it happened that the man had overheard the brothers say they were going to Dothan. As Joseph traveled to Dothan, he happened to be wearing his fancy robe, which allowed his brothers to see him in the distance and provoked their hatred so that they decided to kill him (37:18–20).

Reuben, sensing his responsibility as the firstborn, sought to save Joseph by having him thrown into a pit and rescuing him later. But he failed, lacking the courage necessary to confront his brothers' sin (37:21–24). The pit was a dried up cistern anywhere from six to twenty feet deep, carved out of the rock in the shape of a bottle, with a narrow opening at the surface that could be covered with a stone lid. If not rescued, Joseph would have died of thirst. But it just happened that a caravan came by at a time when Reuben happened to be absent, and Judah happened to have the idea that they should sell Joseph, thus avoiding the guilt of bloodshed and also getting some money at the same time (37:26–28).

Of course, none of these numerous “coincidences” just happened. Joseph himself would later see the truth: God had planned it all in order to save many people

(50:20). God's providence means that He is intimately involved in His creation. He directs the course of nature (Ps 147:15–18), the actions of people (Prov 16:9), evil and sinful actions (Gen 50:20), and seemingly random coincidences (Prov 16:33). He does so in order to further His plan of salvation, which can never be thwarted (Mic 2:12; 1 Thess 5:24). And while God cares personally for all things (Matt 10:29), He shows special care for those who belong to Him, working everything for their greatest good—their salvation through Jesus Christ (Rom 8:28–29). By His providence God would use Joseph not just to save the lives of his family, but through that family God would also send the Messiah to save the world.

Joseph's family fell apart (37:29–36)

God's providential control does not free humans from the consequences of their actions. Reuben tore his clothes, but felt more sorrow for himself than for Joseph or his father (Gen 37:29–30). The brothers plunged deeper into sin by using goat's blood and Joseph's robe to deceive Jacob (37:31–33). Jacob would not stop grieving (37:34–35). As for Joseph, he became a slave, separated from his family for what appeared to be forever (37:36). But God was using all this to accomplish His plan. God's providence always works for our ultimate good, if we belong to Him. Just as He saved Jacob's family and the line of the Messiah by causing sin and “coincidences” to work together for good, we can trust that God will use all things to work together for the good of those who love Him.

THINK ABOUT IT

Seeing God's personal providence over the lives of His people should provoke both praise and perseverance through the difficulties of life.



Lesson Outline

God works everything for the salvation of His people.

AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE



1. Joseph's father gave him a fancy robe (37:1–3).
2. Joseph dreamed that he would be king over his family (37:4–11).
3. Joseph's brothers hated him and threw him into a pit (37:12–24).
4. Joseph's brothers sold him to be a slave in Egypt (37:25–36)

AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE



1. Joseph's brothers hated him (37:1–11).
 - Joseph tattled on his brothers (37:2).
 - Jacob showed favoritism by giving Joseph a special robe (37:3–4).
 - Joseph announced his dreams about ruling over his family (37:5–11).
 - Therefore, Joseph's brothers were jealous and hated Joseph (37:4, 5, 11).
2. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery (37:12–28).
 - Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers at Shechem (37:12–14).
 - A man happened to find Joseph and told him his brothers went to Dothan (37:15–17).
 - Joseph's brothers saw him coming in his fancy robe and planned to kill him (37:18–20).
 - Reuben convinced the brothers to throw Joseph into a pit instead (37:21–24).
 - Judah convinced the brothers to sell Joseph to traders who happened to pass by (37:26–28).
3. Joseph's family fell apart (37:29–36)
 - Reuben felt sorry for himself after he failed to lead (37:29–30).
 - The brothers deceived their father using a goat's blood (37:31–33).
 - Jacob wept for a long time and would not be comforted (37:34–35).
 - Joseph was sold to Potiphar in Egypt, separated from his family (37:36).





Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

- 1. What did Jacob give Joseph?**
Jacob gave Joseph a fancy coat because he loved Joseph the most. His brothers were jealous and hated Joseph.
- 2. What did Joseph tell his brothers that made them hate him even more?**
Joseph told them two dreams about how he would be ruler over them.
- 3. What did Joseph's brothers do to him?**
First they threw him in a pit. Then they sold him to traders who took him to Egypt.
- 4. Was God with Joseph?**
Yes. God has a good plan, even when bad things happen.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

- 1. What did Joseph tell Jacob about his brothers?**
Joseph told Jacob that his brothers were doing a bad job with the sheep.
- 2. How do you know Jacob loved Joseph the most?**
Jacob gave Joseph a fancy coat. It showed that Jacob treated Joseph as the firstborn.
- 3. What did Joseph's brothers think about the coat?**
They were jealous and hated Joseph. They could not say even a single kind word to him.
- 4. How did Joseph add to their hatred?**
Joseph told them two dreams about how he would rule over them.
- 5. What did Joseph's brothers do to him?**
They threw him in a pit, then they sold him to traders who took him to Egypt.
- 6. How did Joseph's brothers deceive Jacob?**
They sent Joseph's coat to Jacob, all torn and stained with goat's blood.
- 7. What events in the story seem like they just happened by chance?**
The brothers went to Dothan, a man found Joseph in the field, the man heard what the brothers said, the traders came by at the right time, Reuben was away when the traders came by, the traders were going to Egypt.
- 8. Where is God in this story?**
God does not show Himself directly, but God has providence: He arranges everything, even bad things or things that seem to happen by chance. Joseph might not have felt like it right then, but God was working to save His people.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



INTRODUCE

FANCY ROBES

Bring brightly colored robes, coats, shawls, capes, or sweaters for the children to try on. Have a large mirror available for them to see how they look. The Bible lesson will tell us about a beautiful robe that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.

LARGE BOX

Bring a box that one child can comfortably fit in. Have them crawl in and, if they agree, close the top so it will be dark inside. The Bible lesson tells of Joseph being thrown in a deep well, where he was alone in the dark. Ask the child how they feel about being inside the dark box.



ILLUSTRATE

TAUGHT BY JOSEPH

Wear a brightly colored robe while you teach the lesson.

RULE OVER YOU

Bring in a crown and use it to explain the meaning of Joseph's dreams: he was to rule over his family; like a king.



APPLY

MY MULTICOLORED TUNIC

Materials: Large paper bags, scissors, crayons, construction paper, glue, and decorative edged scissors.

Directions: Before class, cut several large brown paper bags into vest shapes. Depending on how many children typically are in class, you can prepare one for each child or use one vest per table. Have the children cut various shapes and sizes of construction paper with decorative-edged scissors. Then glue the pieces all over the paper bag to make Joseph's coat.



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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AGES 6–8



INTRODUCE

ACT IT OUT: JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS

Have some young men act out the story of Joseph and his brothers. They will need a multicolored robe or coat and a designated spot for the “pit.”

IT’S JUST NOT FAIR!

Hook the children’s attention by doing a short skit (before the Bible lesson) that highlights typical ways in which a child might experience unjust treatment or suffering.



ILLUSTRATE

GOD CARES FOR HIS CREATION

Bring a birdhouse to class and display it during the lesson. Use it to explain God’s care for His creation. Matthew 6:26 says that birds do not “sow, reap, nor gather into barns, yet [God] feeds them.” Ask the children if they’ve ever seen a bird planting tomatoes, or corn, or any other crop. Ask them if they’ve ever seen birds harvesting their crops. Finally, ask them if they’ve ever seen birds hauling their food to a barn to store it. They don’t do any of these things, yet God provides for their needs. If God faithfully provides for birds, we can be certain that He will provide for all of our needs (Mt. 10:31).

FOR OUR GOOD

Ask the children if anyone has ever gotten a shot (most will raise their hands). Then ask them how the shot felt. Did it hurt? Did you cry? Then ask the children why we get shots. Explain that we get shots to protect us from dangerous diseases. Shots may hurt, but they protect us from much greater pain and even death. In our story, Joseph felt pain, but God used it to protect Joseph and his family.



APPLY

INTO THE PIT

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1.

Materials: Craft pages, card stock, tape, yarn, hole punch.

Directions: Copy both craft pages on card stock. Allow the children to color Joseph, his brothers, and the pit. Tell them to cut out Joseph and punch holes on the two black dots. Help the children string the yarn through the two holes. Tape the ends of the string to the “Into the Pit” background page on the two circles. Joseph will be able to move freely along the string into and out of the pit.

Into the Pit
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1



AGES 9–11

**JOSEPH ACROSTIC**

Before beginning the lesson, write Joseph's name vertically on the chalkboard. Then fill in the following acrostic to give the children a preview of today's lesson.

J—Jacob's Son

O—Only Seventeen

S—Sold as Slave

E—Envied by Brothers

P—Put in a Pit

H—Had Dreams

THAT'S NOT FAIR!

Discuss and make a list of times when the children have been treated unfairly. How did they react? We often complain when things don't go just right for us. Is God aware of our misfortunes? Today's Bible lesson tells of a man who, although obedient, went through great times of suffering. His obedience brought about unjust treatment worse than most of us ever will encounter. Where was God, and what was He doing while this man was suffering? You will learn how this man responded and see how God was blessing him during these times of trial.

**REVERSE SIDE OF CROSS STITCH**

Bring in a large cross stitch. Show the children the reverse side of the cross stitch without revealing the front. Ask the children if they can make sense of all the colors and dots. Then ask them if they can guess how all these different points of thread are related. What will we see on the other side? Flip the cross stitch around to reveal how all the seemingly random points work together to create a beautiful picture. Use this as an illustration of God's providence.

CAN BROWN EYES BE MADE BLUE?

Amy Carmichael served as a missionary to India for 55 years. When Amy was a little girl she had begged God to give her blue eyes. But, had God answered her prayer, Amy might never have been able to serve as a missionary to India where her brown eyes allowed her to fit in with the local population (see "Can Brown Eyes Be Made Blue" by Catherine MacKenzie). Though Amy, like Joseph, may not have understood what God was doing at that time, it is clear that God was causing all things to work together to accomplish His plan.

**TRIBAL WHEEL OF FORTUNE**

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1.

Write out spaces for all Jacob's sons on the board (Reuben, Judah, Simeon, Levi, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulum, Joseph, and Benjamin). Photocopy the wheel on cardstock, cut out around the circle, and use a brad to attach it to another piece of square cardstock.

Play game similarly to Wheel of Fortune. Select three children to be contestants. Allow the first contestant to spin the wheel to see how many points he will receive per letter. Ask the child to tell you a consonant he believes is found in at least one of Jacob's sons' names. For example, if the child chose R after spinning for 100 points, he would earn 300 points because there are three Rs in the list of names. The first child can spin again and continue naming consonants until he asks for one that is not in the names or until his spin lands on "Lose a Turn." In either case, play moves on to the second contestant. If a child would like to buy a vowel, he must subtract 250 points from his score. A child may "Solve a Name" on his turn before a spin. Each solved name is worth 2,000 points.