3 Joseph's Early Life

Key Themes

- God is sovereign over all things.
- God's plans are perfect.

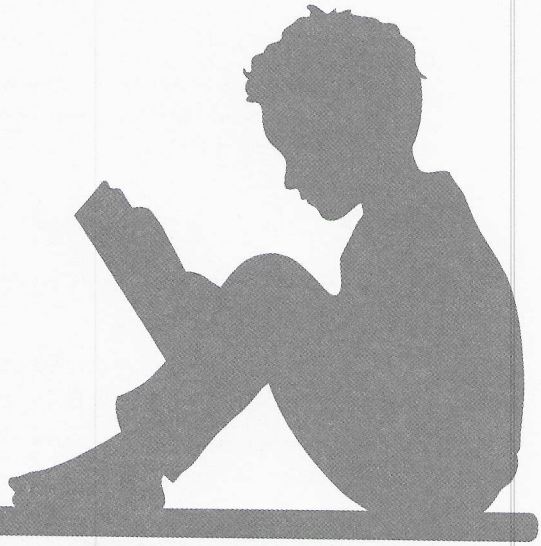
Key Passages

- Genesis 37:5–11, 37:18–35

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe the meaning of Joseph's dreams.
- Identify the events God used to take Joseph to Egypt.



Lesson Overview

Come On In

page 5

Students will find and bookmark Genesis 37. Students will continue to learn the names of the 12 sons of Jacob by singing the song to the tune of "Skip, Skip, Skip to My Lou."

Studying God's Word

page 5

In Joseph's early life, his father favored him while his brothers hated him. His dreams indicated that one day his family would bow to him, but instead his brothers persecuted him and sold him into slavery in Egypt. In spite of man's sins, God was organizing circumstances to fulfill His sovereign plan to save lives and change Joseph.

Activity 1: Sin Can't Stop God

page 9

Students will read the "Sin Can't Stop God" poem and color the page.

Activity 2: Memory Verse Cover Up

page 9

Students will practice saying the memory verse as more and more words are covered up.

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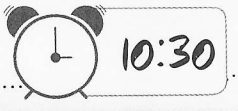
Lesson Preparation

WHAT YOU WILL DO	WHAT YOU WILL NEED
COME ON IN	
☐ Cut strips of paper for students to mark Genesis 37 in their Bibles.	☐ One strip of paper for each student
☐ Print one Twelve Sons of Jacob Song sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.	☐ Twelve Sons of Jacob Song sheet for each student
☐ Optional: Give out candy or some other small prize to students who know the names of the sons of Jacob.	☐ Optional: candy or small prizes for students who have memorized the names of the sons of Jacob
STUDYING GOD'S WORD	
☐ Study the Prepare to Share section.	☐ Joseph's Dreams illustrations sheet
☐ Go Before the Throne.	☐ Trade Route Map
☐ Print one Joseph's Dreams illustrations sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for use in class.	☐ Optional: small bundled sheaf of grass to illustrate sheaf of grain or pictures of wheat sheaves
☐ Print one Trade Route Map from the Resource DVD-ROM for use in class.	☐ Lesson Board Work outline
☐ Optional: Gather and tie a bundle of grass to illustrate a grain sheaf or get pictures of wheat sheaves.	
☐ Print the Lesson Board Work outline from the Resource DVD-ROM.	
SIN CAN'T STOP GOD	
☐ Print one Sin Can't Stop God coloring sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.	☐ Sin Can't Stop God coloring sheet for each student
	☐ Crayons
MEMORY VERSE COVER UP	
☐ Bring sticky notes.	☐ Sticky notes

Memory Verse

Genesis 50:19–20 Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."

➤ **Pace your lesson!** You can use the provided clocks to indicate the time each section should be completed to keep the lesson on schedule. While teaching, you can compare your anticipated times with the actual time and shorten or drop sections as necessary.



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Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Before beginning your lesson preparation this week, prepare your heart and your mind by reading Genesis 37:1–36.

The history of Joseph, beginning in Genesis 37, is a fascinating biblical account demonstrating God's sovereignty and orchestration of circumstances to fulfill His plan. The characters are colorful; the plot takes amazing twists and turns; and we see the full gamut of human emotion and experience including favoritism, envy, remorse, impatience, perseverance, temptation, self-control, resentment, hatred, lying, deceit, reconciliation, and faithfulness. But in the midst of it all, we recognize God at work accomplishing His eternal purposes, in spite of the sinful and deceitful nature of man.

In Genesis 35, God called Jacob to move from Shechem to Bethel. Bethel was the very place God had appeared to Jacob in his vision of the ladder (Genesis 28:12, 28:19).

It was in Bethel that God changed Jacob's name to Israel and again confirmed that he would become a great nation and would inherit the land of Canaan (Genesis 35:1, 35:10–12). God changed the names of several people in the Bible (Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Peter). Some believe this was to let these servants of God know that they were now marked for a life completely dedicated to Him and to His purposes.

God blessed Jacob with 12 sons—six from Leah, two from Rachel, two from Bilhah (Rachel's maidservant), and two from Zilpah (Leah's maidservant). Jacob loved Rachel more than he loved Leah (Genesis 29:30), and he favored the two sons she bore to him—Joseph and Benjamin—above the others. Jacob's obvious favoritism toward Joseph provoked the dramatic and grief-filled accounts of Joseph's early life.

It was Jacob's evident fondness for Joseph that led him to give Joseph a coat of many colors—just one more event to provoke his brothers to envy and hatred (Genesis 37:3).

Joseph's humiliating dreams were the last straw for his brothers. His description of these dreams, inferring that one day his family would bow down to him, further enraged his brothers. They were more than ready to take advantage of the opportunity to be rid of him when he joined them on the plains of Dothan. There they seized him and flung him into a pit (Genesis 37:22). This, of course, was all according to God's perfect plan and timing. A caravan of traders came by at this point and Joseph was sold to them as a slave and was on his way to Egypt (Genesis 37:27–28). God was moving men to accomplish His great purpose. And precisely because of Joseph's seemingly hopeless circumstances, the nation of Israel would be preserved during the coming famine. Our God's plans cannot be thwarted, and His counsel will stand forever (Psalm 33:10–11). He will use even the evil actions of men to fulfill His promises (Acts 2:22–23).

APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

While we understand and accept the Bible as true history, inspired and preserved by God, it is helpful to know that there are historical and archaeological evidences that confirm the Bible's history. The Scripture passage we are studying this week tells us that Joseph's brothers were pasturing their flocks near Dothan (Genesis 37:17). Joseph traveled from Hebron to Shechem (about 60 miles) in search of his brothers, only to learn that they had moved on to Dothan (about 15 miles from Shechem).

The city of Dothan is identified with modern Tell Dothan in Israel. It lies along the ancient trading route called the *Via Maris*. This is no doubt the route the Midianite traders were taking when Joseph's brothers encountered them. This important route led from Damascus in the far North, across the Jordan River, and then along the seacoast to Egypt—where Joseph would be enslaved according to God's plan.

In Tell Dothan today, archaeological evidences of old buildings and two ancient cisterns have been discovered. One of these may have been the very cistern Joseph was tossed into. The land is still rich for pasturing flocks, and a natural spring supplies water to the area. It would have provided a great place for Jacob's sons to feed their flocks. These details lend support to the biblical account and once again confirm the accuracy of Scripture.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The covenant God made with Abraham more than 200 years earlier (Genesis 12:1–3), reaffirmed with Isaac (Genesis 26:1–5), and then proclaimed to Jacob (Genesis 28:13–17) was continuing through history to its fulfillment. God had woven His plan through generations and through His ordained circumstances to

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this point in history—Joseph's enslavement in Egypt—in order to continue leading His people to the Promised Land.

Jacob was 91 years old when Joseph was born in Haran to Rachel (Genesis 30:22–24). Joseph lived with his large family in Haran for another six years until finally Jacob fled from Laban, his father-in-law. After 20 years of servitude, Jacob returned to Canaan (Genesis 31:20–21).

On his return to Canaan, Jacob was reconciled with his brother Esau (Genesis 33:4). And then he at last made his way to Shechem, in the land of Canaan, where he erected an altar and worshipped the God of Israel (Genesis 33:18–20). God's Word tells us of another altar built here generations earlier—when Abram first entered the land of Canaan and also worshipped the Lord (Genesis 12:7).

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.

BEFORE THE THRONE

Father, you have orchestrated events in the lives of men of the Bible to fulfill your promises and to make them more like you. I thank you for being in control of the events in my life too. I pray that you will help me and my students understand your ways and trust you more through the hardships of our lives.

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COME ON IN

As students arrive . . .

- They will mark today's study passage in their Bibles with paper bookmarks—Genesis 37.
- They will sing the Twelve Sons of Jacob Song to the tune of "Skip, Skip, Skip to My Lou." (Song sheet is on the Resource DVD-ROM.)

After all the students arrive, pray with them before beginning the lesson.

REVIEW

Using the Lesson Theme Posters provided with each lesson, quickly review the previous lesson(s) with your students. Take 5 to 10 minutes to reinforce the important truths the students have heard so far in your class.

Ask the children questions about the previous lessons as you display the Lesson Theme Posters. Reflect briefly on the passages you read, bringing the objectives and themes back into focus. This will refresh the truths in your students' minds and maintain continuity as you teach through the lessons.

Studying God's Word

READ THE WORD

God always keeps His promises. However, Jacob didn't live to see some of these promises completed. God's promise to bless all nations through one of his descendants didn't happen until long after Jacob died. The fulfillment of that promise was Jesus Christ—who was a great, great, great . . . grandson of Jacob. *Show the time between Jacob and Christ on the Seven C's Timeline.*

It was a very long time. But God is faithful to keep His promises. He sent His blessing to all nations through Jesus.

Today, we'll be reading the beginning of Joseph's life story from Genesis 37.

As the passage opens we learn that Joseph, who was Jacob's eleventh son, was 17 years old and lived with his family in the land of Canaan; they worked as shepherds. The Bible tells us that Jacob loved Joseph more than all his children because Joseph was born to him in his old age. In fact, Jacob made Joseph a special tunic or coat. Usually this kind of honor was given to the oldest son, who would one day inherit the father's estate. But Joseph was the second to youngest son. As you would expect, his big brothers didn't like that he got special treatment. The Bible says, "They hated him and could not speak peaceably to him." The situation was bad, but it was about to get worse. Let's find out why.

Let's read Genesis 37:5–11 first. *Students follow along as the teacher reads aloud.*

Genesis 37:5–11

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EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

Refer to the Bible Study poster to remind your students how to dig deeper into God's Word by asking the right questions.

? OK. Look at verse 5. Who had a dream? *Joseph.*

? Who did he tell his dream to? *His brothers.*

? How did they act when they heard it. *They hated him even more.*

? How many dreams are mentioned in this passage? *Two.*

The first dream is about sheaves of grain. A sheaf is just a bundle of a grain like wheat, which looks like tall cut grass. Farmers would cut the wheat they had planted, gather a bunch of it together, and tie it in the middle to keep it together so it could stand upright in the field to dry. *Do one of the following: show the little bundle of gathered and tied grass you brought to class, show a picture of a sheaf, or draw a sheaf on the board.*

➤ If necessary, re-read the appropriate verses as you ask the questions to allow children to answer from the text.

? What happened in this dream with the sheaves? Read verse 7 again and see if you can figure it out. *Or you can read the verse to them for better comprehension. Joseph's sheaf stood up while the brothers' sheaves bowed down to it. Show the Sheaves Dream illustration from the Resource DVD-ROM.*

? What did the brothers think the dream meant? Read verse 8 again. *Joseph would reign over them.*

? What happened in the second dream? See verse 9. *The sun, moon, and 11 stars bowed down to Joseph. Show the Stars Dream illustration from the Resource DVD-ROM.*

? Joseph's father, Jacob, scolded him this time; what did he think the dream was describing? Look at verse 10. *Joseph's father, mother, and brothers would all bow down to Joseph.*

? What does verse 11 tell us about how Joseph's brothers and father felt about his dreams? *His brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind.*

These dreams seemed to mean that one day Joseph would rule over his brothers—they would bow down to him. And even his mother and father would bow down to him. But right now this was hard to believe. And we'll see why!

After Joseph had the dreams, something terrible happened. Joseph's brothers were caring for the family's sheep. Jacob sent Joseph to find them and see how they were doing.

When Joseph reached Shechem, where he expected to find his brothers, they weren't there. A man noticed him wandering around and told him his brothers were in Dothan. *Show students these locations on the Trade Route map.*

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? Now do you remember how Joseph's brothers felt about him? Look back in Genesis 37:5 for the answer. *Allow the students to look up the verse if they don't remember. They hated him.*

? Why did they feel that way? Do you remember? *Jacob, their father, loved Joseph more than the other brothers and made him a special coat of many colors.*

That's right, they were envious of him. And before Joseph could even get to Dothan, his brothers were planning to get rid of him.

As we read about it together, we are going to make a list on the board of the different evil plans we see—and we will find that the final plan was far different from the original plan. OK. Ready?

➤ Print the Lesson Board Work outline from the Resource DVD-ROM for easier planning.

Let's read Genesis 37:18–20. We will write what happened on the board. *Students follow along in their Bibles as you read aloud.*

Genesis 37:18–20

? What was the first evil plan? *They wanted to kill him! Write on the board the heading, "The Evil Plans Against Joseph." Under the heading write, "1) Kill him."*

Let's keep reading Genesis 37:21–24. *Read the verses.*

Genesis 37:21–24

? What were the next plans? *Not to kill him—put him in a pit. Write on the board, "2) Don't kill him—put him in a pit."*

? What did his brother Reuben hope to do? It's in verse 22. Look carefully. *Reuben planned to rescue him. Write on the board, "3) Reuben wanted to rescue him."*

Genesis 37:25–27

Let's read on in Genesis 37:25–27. Will there be any more plans? *Read verses.*

Genesis 37:28–35

? What was the fourth plan? *Sell Joseph into slavery in Egypt. Write on the board, "4) Sell him into slavery."*

I'm going to tell you what happened next. Listen for the fifth evil plan.

While Joseph was still in the pit, traders came by on their way to Egypt. Joseph's brothers saw the opportunity to get rid of him and make some money! They sold him for 20 shekels of silver, which was the common price for a slave. The traders then forced Joseph to go with them far away from his brothers, his home, and his father, to the land of Egypt. *Point out Egypt and the trade route on the Trade Route map.*

Reuben apparently wasn't there when the brothers sold Joseph. And the Bible says when he returned to rescue Joseph, he discovered that Joseph was gone—sold!

The brothers then came up with another evil plan to try to cover up their sin. They took Joseph's colorful tunic, killed one of the goat kids that they were supposed to be shepherding, and spread its blood on Joseph's clothes. Later they showed it to their father, pretending to have just found it somewhere, and asked if he recognized it. Jacob knew that it was Joseph's coat and thought that a wild beast had attacked and killed him.

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Thinking that his son was dead, Jacob cried for many days. The rest of the family tried to comfort him, but he couldn't be comforted. His heart was broken.

? What was this fifth and final evil plan the brothers had? *They planned to hide their sin by lying and tricking their father. Write on the board, "5) Hide sin and trick father."*

Discover the Truth

? Do you remember the dreams Joseph had at the beginning of the lesson? What were they? *Refer to the Joseph's Dreams illustrations. Sheaves of wheat bowing down to one sheaf; the sun, moon, and stars bowing down to Joseph.*

? What did the dreams mean? *Joseph would rule over his brothers and even his mother and father.*

But Joseph's brothers got rid of him. He was now a slave in Egypt. It sure didn't look like these dreams were ever going to come true.

We know that God was in charge of the entire situation. God is sovereign. And even though things looked really bad for Joseph—being sold into slavery—we can be confident that God's plan would work out perfectly. God wanted Joseph to end up in Egypt—and guess what? He did! It wasn't quite the way you would want to go, was it? You wouldn't want to be sold as a slave by your own family because they were jealous of you.

Let's look at these first four plans. *Refer to the list of the first four evil plans you listed earlier in the lesson.*

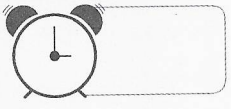
? In which evil plan did the brothers get rid of Joseph? *Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt. Circle #4 on the board.*

sovereign
(Refer to Attributes poster)

That is exactly what God wanted for Joseph. All man's evil plans could not stop God's plan. God is sovereign. He is in complete control of everything and does all that He pleases. And because God is so good and merciful, we know that everything He does is perfect—even though it might not seem like it at the time. *Point to the definition of* sovereign *on the Attributes of God poster.*

This whole lesson reminds me of our memory verse. Will someone read it for me? *Read from the Memory Verse poster. You may want to read it several times.*

In the weeks ahead, we are going to see how Joseph's dreams did come true. God turned all the evil done to Joseph to good and did wonderful things for Joseph and his family.



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1 Sin Can't Stop God

MATERIALS

- ☐ Sin Can't Stop God coloring sheet for each student
- ☐ Crayons

INSTRUCTIONS

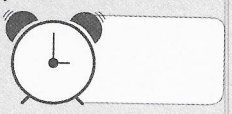
This coloring sheet will help us remember what we learned today. We'll color it and you can show it to someone else to share God's truth with them too.

Let's read the poem on the coloring sheet together. *Read the poem together with the students.*

Great! Our memory verse is there also. Let's say that together.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

The hatred in Joseph's brothers' hearts turned into sinful actions; but sin cannot stop God from accomplishing His sovereign plan. God's plans are always perfect—even when they seem terrible to us at the time.



2 Memory Verse Cover Up

MATERIALS

- ☐ Sticky notes
- ☐ Classroom Memory Verse poster

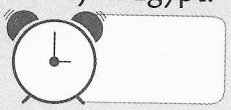
INSTRUCTIONS

Let's see how well we know our memory verse by now. I am going to cover a few of the words with sticky notes, and then we'll try to read it and remember the missing words. *Cover a few words with sticky notes. Repeat the verse as a class, inserting the proper words where the sticky notes are covering them.*

God job! Now I'll cover some more words. Let's try saying our memory verse now. *Continue covering words and reading the verse until most of the words are covered.*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

When Joseph's brothers did the evil deed of selling him off to Egypt, things looked bad for Joseph. But God would one day help many people through Joseph's stay in Egypt. God will always do what He has planned.



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

Now that we have begun to learn about Joseph's life in Genesis 37, we have also begun to see God's sovereignty to organize situations to fulfill His plan.

Jacob favored his son Joseph while Joseph's brothers envied and hated him.

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? What did Joseph's dreams of bowing sheaves of grain and bowing stars seem to mean? *Joseph would one day rule over his family and they would honor him.*

However, Joseph's envious brothers had other evil plans in mind. Joseph suffered their mockery and cruelty until eventually God took Joseph to Egypt.

? Can you tell me the events God used to take Joseph to Egypt? *Refer to the board work. At first Joseph's brothers planned to kill him, then they changed their minds and just threw him into a pit. Rueben planned to rescue him, but the brothers sold Joseph to traders headed for Egypt.*

That is right; then the brothers tried to cover up their sin by deceiving their father, Jacob, into believing that Joseph was killed by a wild animal.

? In all of this we clearly see that man is sinful, but we also recognize something about God; what is that? *God is sovereign over all things.*

Yes, He is at work accomplishing His eternal, perfect purposes, in spite of man's sin and deceit.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

You know, a lot of kids have to live through things that are very hard.

? Can any of you think of hard things kids like you might go through? *Allow the children to answer. Mention divorce, moving, pets or people we love dying, switching schools, and other things.*

We know that things like this are really difficult, and when we are going through them it doesn't seem like there could be anything good in them. I think that is probably how Joseph felt, too—at least at first.

➤ Pass out the Student Take Home Sheets and remind the children to practice the memory verse this week.

But we learned today that God is sovereign and in control of everything. Not only that, but all of His plans are perfect. So when things get bad and we are hurting, we need to remember Joseph. God didn't let his brothers kill him, and God had a perfect plan for him. It sure didn't seem perfect at the time, but we'll see later that it was! Just like our memory verse says, "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."

MEMORY VERSE

Genesis 50:19–20 Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good in order to bring it about as it is to this day, to save many people alive."

GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Ask God to help you trust and obey Him even when others hurt you.
- Thank God for being the best life-planner and for never abandoning His people.

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