



4

Joseph in Egypt

Key Themes

- God is sovereign over all things.
- God rewards faith and obedience.

Key Passages

- Genesis 39–50; Romans 12:19

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Recognize God's sovereignty through all the circumstances in Joseph's life.
- Identify how God rewarded Joseph for his obedience.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, "Can God use evil to bring about good?"



Studying God's Word

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God was with Joseph throughout the trials of enslavement and imprisonment in Egypt. God used those circumstances to save many lives as well as to reward Joseph's faith and obedience.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Use the Egypt to Canaan Board Work on the Resource DVD-ROM to recreate the chart on your board before the lesson.
- Go Before the Throne.



Activity 1: Joseph's Blessings

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Students will look for God's hand of blessing on Joseph's life—even in the presence of many hardships—and how Joseph reacted to the circumstances God brought to him.

- Print one Joseph's Blessings worksheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.



Activity 2: Sequence of Events

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Teams of students will put the Sequence of Events cards in the proper order.

- Print one set of Sequence of Events cards and one Game Board from the Resource DVD-ROM for every 3–4 students. Place each set in an envelope. Keep the answer key for your use.



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

In order to prepare your heart and mind for the lesson this week, read Genesis 39–50.

Throughout the life story of Joseph as recorded in Genesis, we see that in spite of amazingly adverse circumstances, Joseph remained obedient and God remained faithful. Although Joseph's arrival in Egypt was extremely traumatic (sold as a slave by his own brothers), we know that God was with him (Genesis 39:2).

After purchasing Joseph, Potiphar quickly realized that the Lord was with Joseph and that the Lord made all he did prosperous. Because of this, Potiphar made Joseph the overseer of the house (Genesis 39:3–5). While Joseph served there, God orchestrated another difficult situation for him when Potiphar's wife accused him falsely of immoral behavior. This false accusation landed Joseph in prison (Genesis 39:20). But once again, God showed His faithfulness to Joseph by looking favorably at the situation and arranging for Joseph to become the administrator of the prison (Genesis 39:21–22).

While in prison, Joseph explained the dreams of two fellow prisoners—the Pharaoh's former cupbearer (butler) and baker (Genesis 40). He correctly described what these servants' dreams meant, and nearly two years later he was summoned to use this unique gift again—this time for Pharaoh (Genesis 41:14–15). After giving God the credit and the glory (Genesis 41:16), Joseph was able to explain Pharaoh's dreams, declaring that seven years of plenty would be followed by seven years of famine in the land. Impressed by Joseph's interpretation and the advice he offered, Pharaoh appointed him over all the land of Egypt (Genesis 41:41).

When the famine hit, it affected not only Egypt but Canaan as well. Joseph's family came from Canaan to purchase grain, and Joseph recognized them. After several tests and several trips to Canaan and back, the family was reunited in Egypt. It was this devastating famine that God used to reconcile Joseph with his brothers and his father, Jacob.

God's sovereignty in all situations is confirmed throughout this account and was summarized by Joseph when he told the very brothers who sold him

into slavery, "And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt" (Genesis 45:7–8).

APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Over the past several years there has been a revolution in Egyptology (the study of ancient Egypt), particularly as it relates to the chronology of Egyptian dynasties. More and more a new, shorter chronology is being accepted, which confirms many of the dates and details regarding the Israelites' time in Egypt.

Some conservative biblical scholars identify Pharaoh Sesostri I as the pharaoh who appointed Joseph over Egypt, with Joseph himself possibly being identified as Mentuhotep, Sesostri's vizier or prime minister. This was during the Egyptian period known as the Middle Kingdom.

Details of Joseph's time in Egypt as recorded in Scripture compare well to details known of this time and place through other sources. Some of these include:

- Potiphar's purchase of Joseph (Genesis 39:1)—There was private ownership of slaves in ancient Egypt.
- Joseph purchased for 20 shekels (Genesis 37:28)—The price of a slave during the Middle Kingdom period was about 20 shekels.
- Joseph served as Potiphar's house steward (Genesis 39:4)—House stewards oversaw the finances and agricultural holdings of their masters.
- Joseph thrown in prison (Genesis 39:20)—Egypt was one of the few nations in the Ancient Near East that had prisons.
- Joseph cleaning and shaving before seeing Pharaoh (Genesis 41:14)—Egyptians of the Middle Kingdom were very concerned about personal cleanliness and the removal of all facial hair.
- A gold chain given to Joseph (Genesis 41:42)—

This was a customary Egyptian reward for services rendered.

While we don't look to external evidence to try to "prove" the Bible, historical and archaeological evidence such as this does provide confirmation. It can also be useful for showing others that the Bible's history can be trusted, just as its gospel message can be trusted.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Through the remarkable events recorded in Genesis 39–50, the promise given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was kept alive as God placed Joseph in a position to preserve His people during the time of famine, allowing for the line of the Redeemer (through Joseph's brother Judah) to be preserved.

Many have asked if there is any historical evidence for these seven years of famine. While there is no direct evidence for it, there are several events that may refer to it.

In the cliffs of Beni Hassan, about 230 miles south of Cairo, tombs have been found from the Egyptian Twelfth Dynasty—about the same time Joseph was in Egypt and Pharaoh had set him over the land (Genesis 41:44). One of the tombs belonged to Ameni, a provincial governor in the time of Sesostri I. On the wall of his tomb he wrote,

No child of the poor did I afflict; no widow did I oppress; no landowner did I displace; no herdsmen did I drive away; from no small farmer did I take away his men for my works. No one was unhappy in my days, not even in the years of famine. For I had tilled all the fields of the nome of Mah, up to its southern and northern frontiers. Thus I prolonged the life of its inhabitants and preserved the food which it produced. No hungry man was in it. I distributed equally to the widow as to the married woman. I did not prefer the great to the humble in all that I gave away.

The famine mentioned here meets the criteria of Joseph's famine in four major aspects:

1. The approximate date of the famine recorded in the tomb corresponds with the time of Joseph's service in Egypt.
2. The famine lasted several years.
3. Preparations were made in advance to meet the needs of this disaster by gathering food.
4. The food was distributed during the years of famine.

Also, there is a canal that runs from the River Nile to bring water into the Faiyum Oasis. It is known as "Joseph's Canal" and was dug during the Twelfth Dynasty, possibly at Joseph's orders in preparation for the expected famine.

While we can't expect archaeological confirmation for every detail of biblical history, God often provides confirmation for His Word through extra-biblical discoveries. However, we must always rely on His Word first as the basis of our worldview. It is the history book of the universe, written by the only eyewitness to all the events recorded—God Himself!

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



BEFORE THE THRONE

Father, I rejoice that ordinary people like me can know you, the one true, sovereign God. Thank you for revealing your character and accurate world history through Genesis. Help me to recognize more clearly that you sovereignly manage every detail of my life—just as you did for Joseph. Lord, even the things that bring sorrow, distress, pain, and heart-break are brought from you and used by you to draw me closer to you through faith. Please open the hearts of the students in my class to see that you are the only one on which they can depend. Transform and strengthen them to stand bravely and obediently for you within their culture as Joseph did.

► **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.



Review

In last week's lesson we walked through the early years of Joseph's life. His brothers had sold him to a group of Ishmaelite slave traders and Joseph wound up in Egypt serving Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh.

Although it might seem like a desperate situation for Joseph, we know that God is coordinating the events of history. God had given Joseph two dreams that pointed to Joseph ruling over his family. Today, we are going to see how God continues to

guide Joseph toward the fulfillment of that leadership.

We will be covering a very large portion of Scripture today, Genesis 39–50, so there will be a lot of summarizing of the events. I would really encourage you to take time this week to read through that entire section to fill in the details we won't be able to cover today.



- Write on the board, "Can God use evil to bring about good?"



Studying God's Word

READ THE WORD

Genesis 39:1–23

Let's read Genesis 39:1–23 together to pick up with Joseph's life in Egypt.
Have someone read the passage aloud.

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.

- Students should turn to page 29 in their Student Guides.
- Look for repeated phrases in a passage.

- ? **Where did Joseph find himself after being sold in Egypt?** *Serving in the house of Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard.*
- ? **Did Joseph find success in his service to Potiphar?** *Yes.*

- ? **What reason was given for Joseph’s success?** *The Lord was with Joseph and made all he did to prosper.*
- ? **When Joseph was put in charge of Potiphar’s entire house, what did Potiphar’s wife do?** *She tried to seduce Joseph, who was handsome in form and appearance.*
- ? **How did Joseph respond to her advances?** *He refused and told her it would be an offense to Potiphar and a sin against God.*
- ? **How often did Joseph reject her advances?** *Verse 10 says it was happening “day by day.”*
- ? **How did Joseph wind up in prison?** *Potiphar’s wife stole his garment and accused him of attempting to lie with her, so Potiphar had him thrown in prison.*
- ? **How did the keeper of the prison treat Joseph?** *Joseph found favor in the eyes of the prison’s keeper, who put Joseph in charge of the affairs of the prison.*
- ? **Why was Joseph treated so well by the prison keeper?** *The Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy by giving him favor in the eyes of the keeper.*
- ? **Are there any phrases or words that are repeated in this passage?** *“The Lord was with Joseph” is mentioned in verses 2, 3, 21, and 23.*
- ? **What does the passage tell us about God?** *God was intimately involved in the life of Joseph and blessed all that Joseph did. God provided a means of grace for Joseph while he was in very trying situations.*

Discover the Truth

Joseph found himself in a very difficult situation. But in all of this it seems that he sought to obey his masters and God. The only order he refused was one that would be a sin against God—to lie with Potiphar’s wife.

God rewarded Joseph’s obedience by causing Potiphar and the prison keeper to recognize the blessings on Joseph’s life. They placed him in charge—despite his status as a slave and a prisoner. God’s sovereignty is abundantly clear in this passage as the good things that happened were attributed to God causing them—whatever Joseph did, the Lord made it prosper.



SOVEREIGN
(Refer to Attributes poster)



Joseph's Blessings (Part 1)

MATERIALS

- Joseph's Blessings worksheet for each student
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

Use the worksheet to review how Joseph responded to his circumstances and the blessing that resulted. This activity worksheet will be used again later in the lesson, so do only the first three entries for now.

- ? Joseph has faced several difficult circumstances so far in our passage. Why do you think he was able to respond so well in these difficult situations? *It is clear that God was with him, giving him grace and showing him mercy.*

Take a few minutes to think about these circumstances. For the first three references on the worksheet briefly describe the situation Joseph found himself in, the response he had, and the blessing he received. *Monitor the students as they complete the first three rows.*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

- ? In Genesis 39:1–6, what were Joseph's circumstances and how did he respond? *He was a slave in a foreign land and he served his master (v. 4)*

so well that he was appointed over the entire household. The whole household, including Joseph, was blessed by God and prospered.

In this case, Joseph's obedience resulted in blessing from God and favor in Potiphar's eyes.

- ? In verses 7–20, Potiphar's wife repeatedly tried to seduce Joseph. How did he respond? *Joseph refused her advances, saying that it would offend Potiphar and be a sin against God (v. 9).*
- ? What was the result of Joseph's right response to sin? *He was thrown in prison on allegations of attempted rape.*
- ? How did Joseph respond to being in prison? *He served the keeper of the prison and oversaw the other prisoners.*

God responded to Joseph's situation by showing him mercy and blessing all that he did in the prison.

I think you can see that Joseph looked past his situation and responded in a way that honored God. In return, God granted Joseph mercy and showed kindness to him in what must have been an exceedingly difficult set of circumstances.



READ THE WORD

While Joseph was in prison, Pharaoh's chief butler (cupbearer) and baker offended the king and they wound up in prison under Joseph's care. Joseph found both of them in a dejected state one morning and asked them the reason. They both shared that they had had dreams, to which Joseph replied, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell them to me, please" (Genesis 40:8).

The butler and baker told Joseph their dreams, and Joseph interpreted them; the butler would be restored and the baker would be put to death. After three days, the dreams were fulfilled, but the butler forgot about

Joseph's plight for two full years and the baker was hanged before he could commend Joseph.

At the end of two years, Pharaoh had two dreams which none of his magicians or wise men could interpret. The butler remembered his pledge to Joseph, and how he had correctly interpreted the dreams. The butler told Pharaoh, and Joseph was summoned to the court—after a shave and a bath, of course.

(Activity Part 2) Let's add this to the worksheet in the fourth row (Genesis 40:1–23). In the circumstance column: Joseph had the opportunity to serve his fellow prisoners. In the response column: Joseph credited God with the ability to interpret the dreams. In the result column: Joseph spent two more years in prison.

Now let's read Genesis 41:14–41 together and see how Pharaoh dealt with Joseph. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Genesis 41:14–41

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? What did Pharaoh suggest about Joseph and the dream? *Pharaoh suggested that Joseph could interpret his dream.*
- ? How did Joseph respond to Pharaoh's suggestion? *Joseph made it clear that only God could provide the interpretation, not Joseph alone.*
- ? What was the interpretation of the dreams? *There would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine.*
- ? Why was the dream repeated? *It was to happen soon and was certain.*
- ? Who would cause the seven years of plenty? *God (vv. 25 and 32).*
- ? Who would cause the seven years of famine? *God (vv. 25 and 32).*
- ? What advice did Joseph offer Pharaoh? *He suggested that the grain be gathered and stored for seven years so that it could be used during the famine.*
- ? How did Pharaoh respond? *He recognized the Spirit of God in Joseph and appointed Joseph to oversee the process, making him second in command over all of Egypt.*
- ? Look at verse 16. Who was in control? *God.*
- ? Look at verse 25. Who was in control? *God.*
- ? Look at verse 28. Who was in control? *God.*
- ? Look at verse 32. Who was in control? *God.*
- ? What does the passage tell us about God? *It was God who gave the dreams, provided the interpretations, and brought about the events. He was sovereignly controlling all of the events described in the passage.*

► The theme of interpreting dreams is repeated throughout Joseph's life.

SOVEREIGN

Discover the Truth

- ? So, who was in control? *God.*
Yes! God was in control with Joseph. And God is still in control today.
- ? What is that attribute? The one that tells us that God is in control of everything? *Sovereign.*

As Joseph came before Pharaoh, he was quick to tell him that it was God who would give the interpretations of the dreams and it was God who would cause all of the things spoken to come about. God's sovereignty is clearly demonstrated by all that happened.

(Activity Part 3) Look at your worksheet again and let's fill in the next row. In the circumstance column: Called to interpret Pharaoh's dream. In the response column: Recognized God's sovereignty over interpretation and events. In the result column: Given the second command in Egypt and a wife (verse 50).



READ THE WORD

We know Joseph was about 17 years old when his brothers sold him (Genesis 37:2) and that he was 30 when Pharaoh gave him command of Egypt (Genesis 41:46). During the seven years of plenty in Egypt, Joseph married an Egyptian woman and had two sons—Manasseh and Ephraim. Joseph clearly recognized God's role in his circumstances and the names of his sons reflect this (Genesis 41:50–52). As we pick up the story, the seven years of plenty have passed and Joseph is at least 39, since his brothers came to him two years into the famine (Genesis 45:6).

Genesis 42:1–13, 42:21

Let's read Genesis 42:1–13 and 21 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? Why did Jacob send his sons to Egypt? *To buy grain because the famine had spread to Canaan.*
- ? Which brother stayed behind? *Benjamin.*
- ? Did the brothers recognize Joseph? *No.*
- ? How did the brothers respond to being in Joseph's presence? *They bowed down to him.*
- ? What did Joseph remember when he saw his brothers bowing? *He remembered the dreams he had had some 20 years earlier.*
- ? What did Joseph accuse the brothers of? *Being spies.*

- ? **How many brothers were in the group?** 10—they said one is at home with their father and one is no more.
- ? **According to verse 21, why did the brothers think they were facing this trouble?** They believed it was a result of their treatment of Joseph, selling him to the traders despite his pleadings.

Discover the Truth

Joseph's dreams were fulfilled, and his brothers were now bowing down before him. Their lives were in his hands, but he was moved to tears after hearing the discussion between them. Joseph sent them back to Canaan with grain and their money in their sacks, keeping Simeon behind as surety for them to return with Benjamin.

Let's run through this chart to quickly talk about the events that ensued. Refer to the *Egypt to Canaan Board Work*, which summarizes the events from chapters 42 to 47. Encourage the students to take some notes in their *Student Guides*.

Joseph had been sold to Egypt by his brothers and 20 years later all of his brothers except Benjamin traveled to Egypt to buy grain. *Point out the first arrow.*

Joseph accused them of being spies and held Simeon captive while the nine brothers returned to Canaan with grain and their money, though they did not know about the money being placed in their sacks. *Point out the second arrow.*

Benjamin returned with the other brothers with money to buy more grain. At first Israel protested, but after they had run out of food, he consented. *Point out the third arrow.*

Joseph sent all eleven brothers away with grain and their money, but he had a cup hidden in Benjamin's sack to make it look like he stole it from Joseph. Not far along their journey, the brothers were brought back and Benjamin was sentenced to become Joseph's slave. *Point out the two short arrows.*

Judah interceded on behalf of Benjamin, having sworn to Israel that he would be the guarantee for Benjamin's safe return.

At this point Joseph broke down and revealed himself to his brothers; we will look into what he said to them in just a minute.

Joseph then sent all eleven brothers back to Canaan with food and carts to bring back the whole household of Jacob to Egypt. As the 66 people and all of their possessions were brought to Egypt, Pharaoh granted them a place to live in the land of Goshen.

After settling in Goshen, an area in northeastern Egypt, the family grew and when Israel was 137 he gathered his family and offered prophetic blessings to his sons. Most importantly, the line of Judah was blessed to have the Messiah come from it.



► Recreate the Egypt to Canaan Board Work on the board prior to teaching this section.

Genesis 42–47

► If time is short, give a condensed summary of this section.

Genesis 45:4–8,
50:15–21

► God's attributes
are clear in the text.

SOVEREIGN
MERCIFUL

Romans 12:19

READ THE WORD

To understand how Joseph saw all of these events, let's read Genesis 45:4–8 and 50:15–21 together. *Have someone read the passages aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, what did he tell them not to do?** *He told his brothers to not be grieved or angry about selling him into slavery.*
- ? **What reason did Joseph give for his presence in Egypt?** *God sent him there to preserve their lives—he repeated that phrase three times in the passage.*
- ? **Which attributes of God did Joseph point to?** *God is sovereign over the affairs of man and He was merciful to preserve the lives of millions through Joseph's actions.*
- ? **After Israel died, what were the brothers afraid of?** *They feared that Joseph would seek revenge now that Israel was dead.*
- ? **What response did Joseph give them?** *He told them not to be afraid and promised to care for them and their children.*
- ? **What principle, also stated in Romans 12:19 (or Leviticus 19:18) did Joseph use in relating to his brothers?** *He recognized that his role was to love and forgive others and that it was God who would deliver punishment and vengeance.*
- ? **How did Joseph affirm God's good plans even in what seemed like a terrible situation?** *Joseph recognized that what his brothers meant for evil, God used for the good of many people—including Joseph (see Romans 8:28–30).*
- ? **How does this passage point us to Christ?** *Joseph responded in a very Christ-like manner and freely offered forgiveness to his brothers despite the evil they had done against him. This is not unlike Christ's attitude toward those who repent and put their trust in Him after having been in rebellion to Him.*

Discover the Truth

Joseph gives us an amazing example of recognizing God's mercy and sovereignty working in our lives. Joseph recognized that God was in control of the situation and that God would fulfill His promises. Joseph was also willing to not only forgive his brothers, but also to give them a blessing, committing any vengeance to God.





Sequence of Events

MATERIALS

- Sequence of Events cards in envelopes for each team
- Game board for each team
- Sequence of Events answer key

INSTRUCTIONS

Print one set of Sequence of Events cards and one game board for each team from the Resource DVD-ROM. Cut the cards apart and place sets in separate envelopes. Print one Sequence of Events answer key for your use.

This game is called Sequence of Events. God was in control of all of the events of Joseph’s life. All along the way God was with Joseph and Joseph lived his life in a trust-and-obey way.

Now I am going to divide our class into teams to sequence the events of Joseph’s life in the right order on this game board. *Divide*

class into two or more teams—every 3–4 students. Give each team a game board and an envelope with a set of events cards.

When I say “Go,” each team is to open their envelope and sort the events cards onto their game board in the correct order. When you think your team has finished correctly, raise your hand and I’ll check your board. *If teams should tie, remix the cards for a timed rematch.*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

You discovered that three of the cards described things that happened throughout Joseph’s entire life. God was always in control, He was always with Joseph and Joseph always chose to trust and obey God.



Applying God’s Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

I hope that you can see how God guided the circumstances in Joseph’s life to bring about the end God intended. Throughout all of his trials, Joseph stayed faithful to God. Joseph was rewarded for his faithfulness in the face of the trials even though the reward was often delayed for many years. Joseph is a great example for us to look to as we face trials in our lives.

➤ Encourage the students to read through the entire account during the week to reinforce what they have heard today.

GOD’S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

Many scholars have rejected the fact that there was a seven-year famine in the Middle East, but new archaeological discoveries have produced supporting evidence. *Read the inscription in the Historical Background section if time allows.*

? How should we view this evidence when compared to what Scripture teaches? *We should always look to the Bible first and know that it contains the most accurate*

account. The evidence can support what we already know to be true. We must not let the evidence come before the Bible.

- ? **How can memorizing Genesis 50:19–20 be used in your life?** *As we face trials and offenses from others, we can remember that God is using all of these things to conform us to the image of Christ. Just as Joseph committed all of these things into God’s hands, we can do the same as we trust in God and walk in the Spirit.*
- ? **How might you use Joseph’s account to offer hope to someone facing a trial in their life or doubting God is in control of the situation they are in?** *Use the passages that speak of God’s control to help them understand that He is in control and, despite the outcome, God is working out all things for good. It is sometimes hard to see the good in the middle of the pain, but we must trust God’s faithfulness as Joseph did.*
- ? **God clearly rewarded Joseph for his obedience, but the rewards were often delayed or given under circumstances that were still difficult. What false views of rewards do we need to guard against?** *Many believe that obedience to God’s commands will immediately and surely bring them material benefits or perfect health. This is not the teaching of Scripture. God does prosper and reward those who follow Him, but not in the way that we would typically choose. Ultimately, our reward is to be found in worshipping God in heaven.*



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.”



GROUP PRAYER TIME

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

- Thank God for His sovereign hand in the affairs of man.
- Praise God for His mercy shown even in difficult situations.
- Ask God for the ability to trust in His plans like Joseph did.