

Teaching Plan  
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: February 3, 2019  
Lesson Title: "Accept It"  
Lesson Passage: Gen. 37:5-11,19-27

ABOUT THIS LESSON

Joseph's older brothers hated him, probably with some justification, for in his youth he was his father's favorite son. (In today's jargon, he might even be called a "spoiled brat.") When the opportunity arose, his brothers treated him cruelly and sold him into slavery. Years later, when Joseph was a powerful ruler in Egypt, their father Jacob died, and the brothers feared that Joseph would at last seek revenge for what they had done to him. But Joseph's forgiving response was a testimony to his commitment to the will of God.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Describe the interpersonal relationships between Joseph and his older brothers. (2) Recount the story of their vengeful treatment of Joseph and his ultimate response to their cruelty.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

*Begin by recalling that, in 1995, the biblical story of Joseph appeared as a popular mini-series on national television. This series attracted a great many viewers, because Joseph's life story has all the ingredients of a compelling drama--hate, conspiracy, violence, lust, wealth, power, alienation-and-reconciliation and love. Ask class members to watch for these themes as they take another look at the life of Joseph.*

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. *Suggest that, if we set aside our knowledge of the fact that Joseph became one of the heroes of biblical history in his adult life, we might understand why his older brothers grew to dislike him. To illustrate the point, ask someone to read Genesis 37:2-4. Then continue the thought by pointing out that, even as a teenager (v. 2) Joseph claimed superiority over his brothers and parents (read Gen. 37:5-11). Observe that the biblical story reveals three things that made Joseph unbearable to his brothers: [1] He was a tattletale (v. 2b). No one likes a talebearer, even when the tales are true, especially if the tattler is a kid brother. [2] He was his father's favorite (v. 3), probably because of Jacob's affection for Rachel, Joseph's mother. NOTE: Jacob had other wives, because polygamy was common in those days, but Rachel was the one and only woman he ever loved. And, after her death, Jacob gave to her living son the devotion he had given his mother. This was demonstrated by the special*

garment he bestowed upon Joseph. The KJV calls it a "coat of many colors," the RSV a "long robe with sleeves." Either description could denote a royal garment. Jacob gave his favorite son a robe more suitable for a prince than for a working man. **(3) He reported self-serving dreams (37:5-9).** COMMENTS: [a] The ancients attached a great deal of importance to dreams, believing them to be a message from the gods and a portent of the future. [b] The dream of the sheaves might have been a subtle preview of Joseph's agrarian policy that would later bring about his rise to power in Egypt (Gen. 41:34-40). Suggest that the telling of his dreams (vv. 5-7) might have reflected Joseph's youthful honesty and naivete, more than conceit.

2. Describe the context of the encounter recorded in Gen. 37:12-17: Locate Hebron and Shechem on a map, and note the distance between the two places. Then observe that in such an arid land, it wasn't unusual for the patriarchs to go long distances to find pasture for their flocks. (When Joseph arrived at Shechem, he had to go on to Dothan, 15 miles farther north, before he found his brothers.) *Then share this thought:* The fact that Jacob would send his favorite son out on such a mission suggests that he might have been unaware of the intensity of the hatred that the older sons felt toward Joseph.

3. Ask the class to refer to Gen. 37:19-27 in their Bibles:  
(1) In v. 19, the older brothers refer to Joseph as "this dreamer." But a more literal reading of the Hebrew, "this master of dreams," suggests that they were being sarcastic. (2) Verse 23 tells us that Joseph was wearing the princely robe given to him by his father when he joined his brothers. (This must have been like waving a red flag in front of a bull.) (3) They had already decided to kill Joseph (v. 20), but Reuben intervened (v. 21), suggesting instead that they simply leave him in a pit (probably a dry well) to die of hunger and exposure. (We learn in v. 22 that Reuben planned to rescue Joseph from the pit.) (4) Judah then came up with yet another idea (verses 26-27) as they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites approaching in the distance. (The Ishmaelites were a Bedouin tribe, descendants of Jacob's brother, Esau.) Joseph's brothers could sell him into slavery, thus delivering themselves from the terrible guilt of fratricide (v. 27). (Verse 28 makes it uncertain whether the brothers or the Midianites hauled Joseph out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites. The text simply says "they.")

#### CLOSING THE LESSON

For discussion: Joseph's older half-brothers were understandably irritated by Jacob's favoritism toward Joseph; but, actually, there was nothing in the situation that did them any serious harm. And had Jacob and Joseph been more sensitive to the emotional needs of their older sons and brothers, they could have averted a major catastrophe. But God has a way of turning even our mistakes into blessings.