

Part of God's Plan



Topic

God's plan

Theme

God's plans are always good because He orders them according to His perfect nature and for the accomplishment of His perfect will.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will praise God for His goodness and working to bring about good.

Materials

- Resources 1, 15, and 16
- Puzzle (200-piece or greater)

Scripture Focus

Genesis 42–50

Summary

God used a famine to take Joseph's brothers to Egypt, where they bowed before Joseph and requested grain. Through a series of tests, Joseph determined that his brothers felt guilty and sorry for the evil they had committed against him. He forgave them and instructed them to bring Jacob and all their family members and possessions to Egypt. Thus God used Joseph to keep His people and the messianic hope alive.

Outline

I. The Brothers' First Trip to Egypt (42:1–38)

- A. Joseph accuses his brothers (42:1–23)
- B. Joseph keeps Simeon (42:24–38)

II. The Brothers' Second Trip to Egypt (43)

- A. Jacob's reluctance to let Benjamin go (43:1–14)
- B. Invitation to Joseph's home (43:15–34)

III. The Brothers Turn back to Egypt (44:1–45:8)

- A. Joseph tests his brothers (44:1–13)
- B. Judah's plea for Benjamin's freedom (44:14–45:8)

IV. Jacob's Trip to Egypt (45:9–47:12)

Memory Verses

"And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive"
(Genesis 50:19, 20).

GETTING STARTED

The Big Picture



The Bigger Picture

Display resource 15 with every part of the picture covered except for the area inside the box.

ASK: What conclusions might you draw based on what you can see in the picture?

Reveal the entire picture.

ASK: Evaluate your conclusions in light of the big picture. How right were your conclusions?

This lesson brings the story of Joseph to a close. He, his brothers, and his father finally saw the big picture of God's plans for the growing nation of Israel. Joseph's story ended rather neatly, but we don't always get to see the larger picture of God's plan. Regardless, we need to learn to trust that God's plans are always good because He orders them according to His character and for the accomplishment of His will.

The Picture on the Box

Secure a puzzle that has at least two hundred pieces. Give each learner one piece of the puzzle, but don't let learners see the picture on the puzzle box.

ASK: Based on your puzzle piece, what do you think the puzzle looks like?

Show the learners the picture on the puzzle box.

ASK: Is the picture on the box what you expected it to be? What is different from your expectations?

This lesson brings the story of Joseph to a close. He, his brothers, and his father finally saw the big picture of God's plans for the growing nation of Israel. Joseph in particular had to learn to trust God through the difficult circumstances God led him through as part of God's plan.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. The Brothers' First Trip to Egypt (42:1–38)

A. Joseph accuses his brothers (42:1–23)

During a severe famine, Jacob's sons heard there was plenty of grain in Egypt, so they went there to purchase what they needed to stay alive. But Jacob would not allow Benjamin, his youngest son, to accompany his brothers. Jacob was still hurting from his loss of Joseph and did not want to risk losing Benjamin too. Benjamin was the only son left that Rachel had borne to him, or so he thought (42:1–5).

The brothers arrived in Egypt and bowed before Joseph, the very person they had despised and wronged twenty years earlier (42:6).

READ: Genesis 37:6–8 and 42:6. **ASK:** What connection do you see between Joseph's first dream and the first appearance of his brothers before him?

(Q3) They are bowing to him as the provider of their needs. The dream pictured grain sheaves bowing to Joseph's sheaf. The brothers' lives depended on Joseph.

Would Joseph seize the opportunity to take revenge? No! His many years of suffering had not quenched his love for his brothers; he was eager to forgive them and to provide for their welfare. First, however, he had to discover if they were penitent. He also wanted to know how they felt toward Benjamin, their younger brother, and Jacob, their father.

ASK: Why couldn't Joseph just reveal his identity and then ask the brothers how they felt about Benjamin and their father? *(Q4) They most likely would put on a front and act like they were penitent even if they weren't. Joseph wanted to see their true colors.*

The brothers did not recognize Joseph. He was dressed in Egyptian clothing and spoke to them through an interpreter. He accused his brothers of being spies. They insisted that they were honest men, all sons of one father. They explained that they had numbered twelve but that the youngest was at home and that another is *not* (42:7–13).

Joseph was trying to find out if his brothers had changed when he accused them of being spies. He was creating a conflict that would give him leverage to insist that Benjamin come to Egypt. The brothers could prove themselves innocent of being spies by bringing their youngest brother to Egypt. Joseph put them in prison for three days to give them time to ponder their past and to awaken their consciences. The plan worked. While in prison, the brothers remembered Joseph's cries of anguish in the pit (42:14–21).

READ: Genesis 42:21–24. **ASK:** What did the brothers admit as they sat in custody? *(Q5) That they were guilty of selling their brother into Egypt.*

Listening to them admit wrong, Joseph wept. But he was too wise to let them off easily. He wanted to be sure that a radical change had taken place in their lives.

B. Joseph keeps Simeon (42:24–38)

No longer insisting that one man fetch Benjamin while the others remained in Egypt, Joseph bound Simeon and kept him in prison (42:24). Joseph ordered that every man's purchase money be placed in his sack of grain, because he wanted to increase his brothers' consternation, making his test of them more severe. He would find out what kind of men they had become. In response they asked, *What is this that God hath done unto us?* (42:28). Their consciences were awakened, and they were conscious of God.

Upon arriving home, the brothers told their father the entire story. Jacob was distraught.

READ: Genesis 42:36. **ASK:** What did Jacob conclude as he thought about the report? (Q6) *All these things were against him.*

ASK: What did Jacob mean when he said, “All these things are against me”? (Q7) *He blamed the sons before him for the loss of Joseph and Simeon and the possible loss of Benjamin. The money in their sacks actually meant he might lose them all.*

God’s plan of making Jacob a great nation seemed in jeopardy, and there wasn’t much Jacob could do to stop the unraveling. He was at the mercy of the man in Egypt. Jacob’s perception told him that things were going terribly wrong.



RESOURCE: Display resource 16. **ASK:** Why is our perception inadequate for drawing conclusions about our life and about God? (Record or reveal answers.) (Q8) *Because our perception is limited. We can't see the whole picture like God can. God is acting according to His plan (the big picture), not ours.*

Benjamin certainly would not go down to Egypt; if anything happened to him, it would kill Jacob. He wondered how much more he could take. He did not know that he was close to the happiest surprise of his life. It is always wrong to evaluate our situations by what we can perceive. God’s will is good even when we perceive that it is not.

TESTIMONY: Share a time when your perceptions about God and His plan were wrong. (Q9)

II. The Brothers’ Second Trip to Egypt (43)

A. Jacob’s reluctance to let Benjamin go (43:1–14)

Had Jacob been free to choose, he never would have sent his sons to Egypt again. But he was not free to choose. God made it impossible for him to keep his sons at home. When what we know is too limited for us to make the proper decisions, God will make them for us. He will push us in the right direction by circumstances. Because the famine was great and Jacob’s family faced starvation, the sons of Jacob *had* to go to Egypt again.

The sons insisted on taking Benjamin because the man in Egypt said he would not see them again if they came without Benjamin. This made Joseph upset. He questioned why in the world they would tell the man in Egypt they had another brother. The sons replied that they had had no idea the man would ask them to bring their brother with them the next time they came to Egypt (43:1–7).

Judah reminded his father that they had delayed their return to Egypt as long as they could, and he personally guaranteed—as much as it was possible for him to do so—the return of Benjamin to Canaan (43:8–10). Jacob ordered a small gift of Canaan’s delicacies for the man in Egypt. He also ordered his sons to take the money they had found in their sacks, plus some, and to take their brother.

READ: Genesis 43:11–14. **ASK:** What did Jacob admit in his farewell to his

boys? (Q10) *That the matter was ultimately in God's hands. If God chose to take his boys, then there was nothing he could do.*

Jacob evoked *El Shaddai*, meaning *Almighty God*, the name for God often used in accounts where God is especially merciful (see 28:3; 35:11). Jacob was leaving the matter in God's hands. He was resigned to the fact that he might indeed lose his sons.

The gift of delicacies Jacob sent with his boys was meant to help the situation by convincing the man that no one meant him any harm. But Jacob didn't put his faith in the delicacies. His hope was ultimately in Almighty God.

B. Invitation to Joseph's home (43:15–34)

Continuing to scrutinize and test his brothers, Joseph brought them to his home. That frightened them. Was the man in Egypt about to accuse them of theft, confiscate their animals, and make slaves of them? Eagerly they defended themselves to the overseer of Joseph's house, but there was no cause for alarm. Simeon was restored to them, and they were invited to dine with Joseph (43:15–25).

Joseph received their gifts and asked, *Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive?* Seeing Benjamin, he asked, *Is this your younger brother, of whom ye spake unto me? . . . God be gracious unto thee, my son.* Then choked with emotion, he hurriedly found a room where he could weep (43:26–30).

At dinner Joseph tested his brothers further. They were astonished to find themselves seated according to their ages, the eldest first and the youngest last. In addition, Benjamin was served five times as much food as his brothers (43:31–34). Joseph knew what he was doing; he knew how jealous the men had been when his father favored him. Would they feel the same toward Benjamin in these circumstances?

III. The Brothers Turn back to Egypt (44:1–45:8)

A. Joseph tests his brothers (44:1–13)

Joseph tested his brothers further to discover whether they would sacrifice Benjamin to save their own skins and thereby deeply wound their father again. The brothers departed, not knowing that Joseph's silver cup had been hidden in Benjamin's sack. Overtaken by Joseph's steward a short distance away, they tore their clothes in astonishment and grief when the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. They refused to accept the steward's offer to go free while Benjamin was detained. They all went back to the city; they were not about to desert Benjamin (44:1–13).

READ: Genesis 44:11–13. **ASK:** What did the brothers perceive was wrong? (Q11) *They thought they were going to lose Benjamin to the man in Egypt after all.*

Again, the brothers had a limited perception. They thought God was working against them when He was actually working to save them all along.

B. Judah's plea for Benjamin's freedom (44:14–45:8)

When Joseph offered freedom to all but Benjamin (44:14–17), Judah made a passionate plea for Benjamin's release. Joseph had insisted that they bring

Benjamin, Judah reminded him, even though they had told him that their father would die if he lost Benjamin. With great reluctance, their father had allowed Benjamin to go, lamenting that of the two sons Rachel had given him, one was dead, torn by wild beasts. How could he then give up the other one? If evil befell Benjamin, the old man would surely die. Judah pleaded with Joseph: *Let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren. For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father* (44:18–34).

ASK: How had the brothers changed from the day they sold Joseph into Egypt (37:18–20) to the day they stood before Joseph in Egypt? (Q12)

They went from a complete lack of concern for Joseph to a desperate concern for Benjamin. None of them acted on their chance to run and leave Benjamin to fend for himself.

Joseph could not restrain himself any longer. Judah's plea had unhinged his self-control. After ordering the Egyptians to leave, he stood alone before his brothers and wept uncontrollably. He wept so loudly that the Egyptians and the household of Pharaoh heard him (45:2). He revealed his identity and asked, *Doth my father yet live?*

Speechless and afraid, the brothers thought their lives were in jeopardy (45:3). Would Joseph avenge himself?

No, he would not. Joseph had thoroughly tested his brothers and found that they had changed. They were obviously sorry for what they had done to him, and they had demonstrated great concern and tender love for both Benjamin and Jacob. Come near to me, said Joseph. *Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves* (45:4, 5). Joseph explained that they had sold him but that God had sent him before them to preserve for them descendants in the earth and to save their lives by a great deliverance (45:6–8).

READ: Genesis 45:4–8. **ASK:** What three words would you use to describe God's working in the lives of Joseph and his brothers? (Q13) *Perhaps incredible, perfect, and amazing.*

IV. Jacob's Trip to Egypt (45:9–47:12)

Joseph told his brothers to hurry to his father (whom he was eager to see) and tell him that God had made his son Joseph lord of all Egypt. Tell him to tarry not. Joseph said, *Go up to my father, and say unto him, . . . Thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast: And there will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty* (45:9–11).

Joseph embraced Benjamin, and both of them wept. He kissed all of his brothers and wept (45:14, 15). Their fellowship had been restored.

When Jacob received his sons at the door of his tent, he must have looked eagerly to see if all of them had returned. Yes, Benjamin and Simeon were both

there with the rest of them. But the things they told him were incredible: Joseph was alive and was ruler over all the land of Egypt! Jacob's heart fainted; what he was hearing was too good to be true. Jacob did not believe that it was true until he saw the wagons Joseph had sent to transport him to Egypt. He decided to leave immediately to see Joseph (45:25–28).

On the way to Egypt Jacob stopped in Beersheba to offer sacrifices to God and to worship Him (46:1). In a night vision, the Lord assured Jacob that he was on the right path. It was God's will for him to go to Egypt, where his descendants would become a great nation. Although Jacob would die in Egypt, his descendants would be brought back to Canaan, the Land of Promise (46:2–4). Four hundred years would pass before the Children of Israel would leave Egypt, but God faithfully restored them to Canaan, the land He had promised to Abraham and his descendants.

At long last Joseph saw his father. He threw his arms around his father's neck and wept a good while. Jacob declared, *Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive* (46:29, 30). Perhaps his contentment prolonged his life, for he lived another seventeen years.

Both Jacob and Joseph spent their final days in Egypt, but it was not the final resting place for either of them. Jacob requested that he be buried in the land of Canaan in the cave of Machpelah, where Abraham and Sarah were buried (49:29–33). Joseph insisted that his bones be carried from Egypt and be buried in Canaan when the time of the exodus came. He said to his brothers, *God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob* (50:24, 25).

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Point to God

Our lives don't always work out so neatly like Joseph's did. God was doing something special in his life and in the history of His Chosen People. We can't always point to the purposes for the circumstances in our lives. And we can't always point to a particular outcome and conclude that everything makes sense.

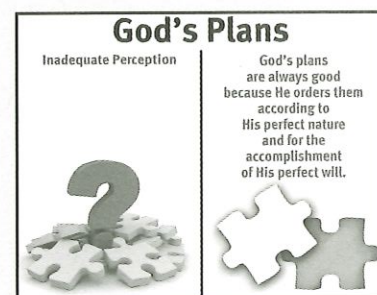
RESOURCE: Display resource 16. Read and discuss the statement on the right half of the visual.

We don't need to always understand everything God is doing. Instead, we need to learn to point to God and trust that He is working out His plan for good even when we can't see the big picture.

ASK: Describe a time when you didn't know why God was bringing difficult circumstances into your life. (Q14)

ASK: How did your trust in God and your awareness of His character help you through that time in your life? (Q15)

ASK: What are you facing now that you don't understand? (Q16)



Take time to praise God for working out His plan for good even when we don't understand how it all fits together. (Q17)

Getting to Know God

Some people become consumed with trying to find a reason for every little thing that happens in their lives, even down to the very mundane. They mull over what God's purpose might be in not being able to find a parking spot or why He allowed them to oversleep and miss an hour of work. They waste time trying to see God's big picture.

We should put our efforts into knowing God and learning to obey and trust Him in all areas of our lives. He is working in and through us to accomplish His will; we don't always get a glimpse of what His big picture is. But as long as we are ready and willing to be used by Him, we know we will be part of His plan.

ASK: What truths about God were reinforced in your mind through studying Genesis? (Q18)

ASK: What is the one life lesson you most want to remember from this study? (Q19)

ASK: What will you do to hang on to that lesson and make it part of your life? (Q20)

Responding to God & His Plan	
1. Understand and enjoy God's revelation of Himself through creation.	8. Fear God.
2. Recognize Christ as the only solution to sin.	9. Expect and accept tests of your faith.
3. Take sin seriously and share God's grace.	10. Seek to know and do God's will.
4. Submit to God's sovereign plan for your life.	11. Live in response to God's presence with you.
5. Be faithful in response to God's faithfulness.	12. Trust God no matter your circumstances.
6. Focus your affections on God.	13. Trust that God's plans are always good.
7. Trust God for He knows all and can do all.	

Genesis
GOD'S PLAN BEGINS

Summary and Memory Verses

RESOURCE: Display resource 1. Add a summary statement for lesson 13 or use the following: Trust that God's plans are always good.

Encourage learners to memorize Genesis 50:19 and 20. Give them an opportunity to say the verses in class next week.