

**WEEK 1**  
**Relationships**  
**with his Family**

**PREPARATION**

Genesis 37:1-36



**LESSON AIMS**

To discover what happens when relationships go wrong.



In returning to Canaan to be with his father, Isaac, Jacob had faced the anger of Laban (Genesis 31:26) and the fear of revenge by his brother Esau, but through all this he was aware of God's presence in his life (Genesis 31:5-7). God was protecting and blessing him, fulfilling the promise he had made to Abraham (Genesis 12:7; 35:9-12).

In the years following his return to Canaan Jacob moved around from Succoth to Shechem to Bethel, etc. Rachel died giving birth to the last of his 12 sons, Benjamin (Genesis 35:18), and Jacob and Esau were reunited at the deathbed of Isaac (Genesis 35:29). Family relationships within Jacob's household were strained. Joseph was becoming an increasing irritant to his brothers, doing nothing to play down the favouritism his father showed towards him. He probably saw it as his duty to report the slothful service of his 4 half-brothers to his father (Genesis 37:2), but his action only increased their resentment.

The brothers appear to be morally undisciplined, immature and cynical (see also Genesis 35:22), whereas Joseph is portrayed as being spiritually aware yet needing to learn humility and wisdom in the ways of the world.

Jacob had learned nothing from his own early experience of favouritism. Yet from these tensions of a family in crisis God was to forge a nation set apart for his own purposes, in fulfilment of his promise to Abraham.

37:2 Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob but the first-born of Rachel, the wife Jacob had loved (Genesis 35:24).

Joseph's brothers, the sons of the 2 maidservants, were probably sensitive about their position, bearing in mind what had happened to Ishmael, the son of Sarah's maidservant Hagar (Genesis 21:9-21).

37:3 A tunic with long sleeves indicated the position of the wearer. He was not expected to do manual work - the long

sleeves would have got in the way. It was a sign that Joseph, the first-born of the favoured wife, was Jacob's heir, even though he was younger than 10 of his brothers.

37:4 Favouritism led to jealousy and to hatred.

37:10 Jacob took offence, not knowing that Joseph's dominion over him would operate within the context of the family's sojourn in Egypt and would not involve any usurping of his patriarchal authority.

'Your mother' - Rachel was already dead (Genesis 35:19), so this probably referred to Leah.

37:11 Jacob's experience of God had taught him to allow for God's hand in affairs and for God's right choice among men. See also Mary's response in Luke 2:51.

37:12 Shechem was approximately a day's journey from Hebron.

37:15-17 Joseph was concerned about proper obedience. His brothers were not where they should have been, so he could have returned home and reported this to his father. Instead he looked for them.

37:18-20 Hatred led to attempted murder.

37:21 Reuben was the eldest son, and was therefore responsible for his brother's welfare.

37:25 Ishmaelites were the descendants of Ishmael. The term is interchangeable with Midianites in this context (v.28). The Midianites were also descended from Abraham (Genesis 25:1-6). They inhabited desert areas east of the River Jordan and were traders.

37:28 20 pieces of silver was the going rate for a slave.


37:29 Reuben was absent whilst this was going on.  
37:31-32 The lie is implied even though it is not spoken.  
37:34 Sackcloth was made from goat's hair and was an irritant. It was worn as a sign of mourning.

37:35 Jacob's reaction showed how disjointed family relationships had become; all his other children were no comfort compared with the loss of his beloved son, Joseph.



## QUESTIONS

1. Bearing in mind Jacob's youth and his own experience of favouritism (see Genesis 25:27-28; 27:41) why is he a 'disappointment' in terms of what he should have learnt and obviously had not?
2. Trace the results of Jacob's favouritism shown in this passage, e.g. v.4,8,11,18ff. What were the effects of favouritism on the relationships between Joseph and his brothers and Jacob and his sons?
3. Joseph's brothers were 'economical with the truth' when they took Joseph's coat to their father. Why did they tell lies? What can we learn about our own behaviour by this?



## VISUAL AID

A map of the area is helpful - see page 10.



## FOCUS ACTIVITY

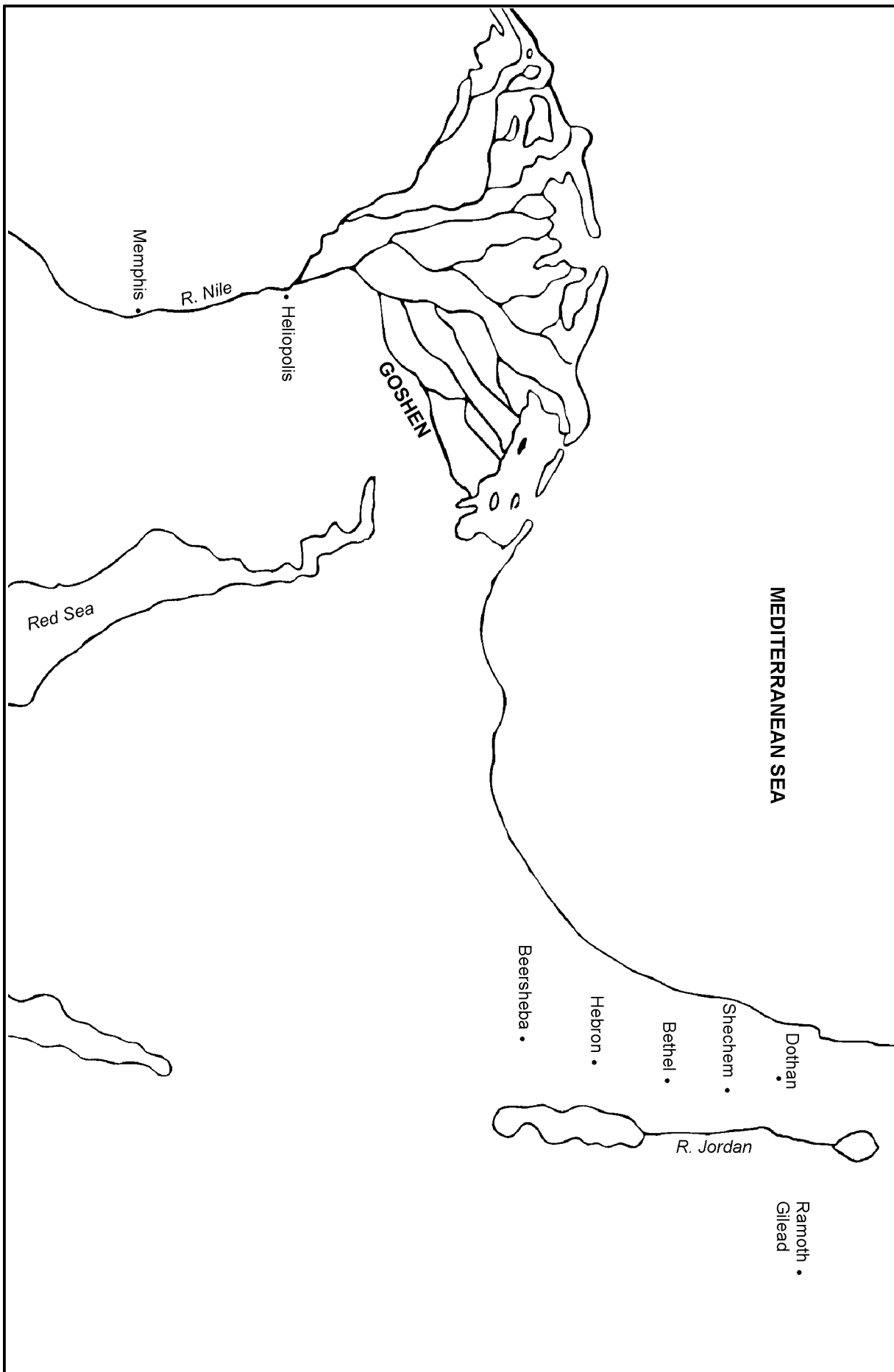
**Spoilt Relationships** Divide into pairs or small groups and ask them to make an alphabetical list of things that spoil relationships, one thing for each letter of the alphabet. The things can be attitudes, behaviour or activities, e.g. anger, betrayal, criticism, discouragement.



## ACTIVITY

Photocopy page 11 for each group member.

Fill in the family tree using the supplied Bible verses.



# Joseph's Family Tree

