

Middle/High School Sunday School Lessons by

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Year 1: Session 3 – Moses and the Israelites exit Egypt

Class 7: Exodus 1:1-12, 22; Exodus 7:14-25 – *The 10 Plagues*

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- (Briefly) Cover the 400 years that pass between Joseph’s life and Moses’ life; Introduce Moses
- Explore second chances to help think about what the 10 plagues offer Pharaoh and the Israelites (opportunities to live God’s better way)
- Note “natural consequences” vs “interventionist God”
- Compare pollution to the plagues (how a decision by one person is felt/experienced by many people)

Materials needed

1. Video clip (from *The Simpsons* and available on rfour.org)
2. Electronics that show the movie
3. Writing utensils
4. Notecards to write on
5. Questions for the activity (listed in the activity section of the lesson)
6. A way to display answers (during the activity) to the whole class – see “note to teachers” after “EXPLAIN ACTIVITY” section for more details

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- For the opening question for today’s class, I [the teacher] will ask the question, and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.
- Once I answer the question, we’ll go around the circle.
- When it’s your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- *Here’s this week’s question:* What consequence (positive or negative) usually changes your mind or behavior?

TRANSITION to ACTIVITY

- We start a new session today. The three stories that we’ll read all happen in succession.
- These three stories happen about 400 years after Jacob and Joseph lived.
- Some quick history: Jacob’s family stayed in Egypt after it moved to be close to Joseph.

- Over those 400 years, it kept growing.
- Do you remember Jacob’s new name? (Israel)
- So Jacob’s family has become so large over 400 years (100 years longer than America has been a country) that they are considered “a people” who are referred to as Israelites (and sometimes as Hebrews)
- But before we talk any more about what happens, we’re going to do an activity that helps us think about stubbornness, as well as opportunities to change our mind.

EXPLAIN ACTIVITY

- We’re going to get into 2 teams
- Once the teams exist, each team must choose their team’s first captain. The captain is the person who will give the first and then the final answer for the team. Each team’s captain can and should change for each question.
- Once captains are chosen, a trivia question will be asked
- Captains will discuss with their team, write down an answer and turn it in – You’ll have 30 seconds to do this
- The host of the activity (one of the teachers) will then write down the two answers from the teams as well as one other answer
- Of those three answers, ONE of them will be correct
- Once you see the displayed answers, if you think your team answered incorrectly, you will, at this point, be able to, as a team, to change your answer, but remember, your captain gets the final say. You’ll have 20 seconds to decide if you wish to change your mind. If the host doesn’t receive an answer in 20 seconds then the answer stays as it was.
- **SCORING:** If you do NOT change your answer and get the correct answer, your team will receive 3 points. If you DO change your answer and get the correct answer, your team will receive 2 points.
- Team with the most points at the end of the activity wins.
- Any questions?
- Let’s begin!

NOTE TO TEACHERS

- You’ll want to display the answers in a way that doesn’t let one team know what the other team answered.
 - One way to do this is to have a laptop connected to a TV or monitor. Simply type the two team answers in as well as provide your own answer in a word processor program and then display the three answers on the TV screen
 - Another way to do this is to write the three answers in a big way on a 8.5x11 piece of paper and then display it by holding it up, taping it to a wall, or some other fixture.
- How to know what answer to add: If one or both teams gives you the correct answer, then the third answer that you provide should be an incorrect answer. If **both** teams give you **incorrect** answers, then you need to provide the correct answer.
- If the teams want to talk to each other – go ahead and let it happen. If they ask you if they can talk to each other, just say, “You have 20 seconds to give me an answer” or something else that is non-committal)

DO ACTIVITY

Questions to ask during activity:

1. How much does it cost to buy a railroad property in Monopoly? (A: \$200)
(Incorrect options: \$175)

2. Pure gold is how many carat(s)? (A: 24)
(Incorrect options: 10)
3. Each player begins with this many pieces in a game of chess? (A: 16)
(Incorrect options: 20)
4. Pi is a non-repeating decimal. What is the next number in pi: 3.14159_? (A: 3)
(Incorrect options: 7)
5. What is the larger number in the binary system? (A: 1)
(Incorrect options: 0)

ASK

- *[If any team at any point changed answers]:* When you changed your answer, why did you decide to do so? (because we didn't know the right answer, but once we saw other answers, we thought one of those were more likely to be right)
- *[If any team at any point did NOT change answers]:* When you didn't change your answer, why did you decide to stay with your first choice? (thought that our answer was right; wanted the 3 points)
- As a team did you ever disagree about an answer? (yes – most likely)
- But even if the team disagreed, when the team got the answer wrong, did the whole team get no points? (yes)
- So in other words, some of you got no points because of the decisions of others, right?
- When your team picked an incorrect answer, did any of you ever think, "God just punished our team"? (No!)
 - Why didn't you think that God was punishing you? (Because we made the wrong choice – God had nothing to do with it)

TELL

- We're going to do things a little bit differently today.
- We're going to read one section, pause for some explanation and then read another section.
- So to begin with – let's see what happens in the 400 years between Joseph's life and the birth of Moses.

READ Exodus 1:1-12; 22 (The enslavement of Israel)

(recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse)

1 These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: **2** Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, **3** Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, **4** Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. **5** The total number of people born to Jacob was seventy. Joseph was already in Egypt. **6** Then Joseph died, and all his brothers, and that whole generation. **7** But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them. **8** Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. **9** He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. **10** Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." **11** Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. **12** But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites.

V22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

PAUSE READING and TELL introduction about Moses

- From when Joseph was alive to when Moses is born about 400 years pass by.
- When Moses is born, his mom hides him in a basket that floats on the Nile (instead of being drowned).
- Baby Moses is found by an Egyptian princess who raises Moses as a prince.
- After Moses grows up, it seems that Moses knows that he's an Israelite because he tries to help some of the Israelites out, but ends up killing an Egyptian over-seer.
- Scared of getting caught/being punished, Moses runs away and lives in the wilderness.
- Moses' life is split up into three sections of 40 years.
 - His first forty years, he's an Egyptian prince.
 - The next forty years, he's a shepherd in the wilderness.
 - In his last forty years, he helps God free the Israelites from the Egyptians and then leads the Israelites to the promised land.
- Moses becomes aware of his call to free the Israelites due to a prayer experience in the story of "Moses and the burning bush."
- In that prayer experience, God tells Moses to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go.
- After that prayer experience, Moses goes back to Egypt to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go
- Not surprisingly, Pharaoh says no. Thus begins a long process / conversation between Moses and Pharaoh.
- We're now going to read one small part of that conversation Moses has with Pharaoh.

CONTINUE READING - Exodus 7:14-25 (The first plague)

(recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse)

14 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go. **15** Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water; stand by at the river bank to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was turned into a snake. **16** Say to him, "The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you to say, "Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness." But until now you have not listened. **17** Thus says the Lord, "By this you shall know that I am the Lord." See, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall be turned to blood. **18** The fish in the river shall die, the river itself shall stink, and the Egyptians shall be unable to drink water from the Nile.' " **19** The Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, "Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt—over its rivers, its canals, and its ponds, and all its pools of water—so that they may become blood; and there shall be blood throughout the whole land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.' " **20** Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and of his officials he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the river, and all the water in the river was turned into blood, **21** and the fish in the river died. The river stank so that the Egyptians could not drink its water, and there was blood throughout the whole land of Egypt. **22** But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts; so Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said. **23** Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart. **24** And all the Egyptians had to dig along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the river. **25** Seven days passed after the Lord had struck the Nile.

ASK

- Ch 1 Verse 2, do you recognize some of the names?
- Ch 1 Verse 5, how many were born to Jacob? (70 -- most likely this means children AND grandchildren)
- Ch 1 Verse 6, what happens to Joseph and his brothers? (time passes and they die)
- Ch 1 Verse 8, Egypt gets a new king – what's his view of the Israelites (v9 and 10 – he's afraid of them)

- Ch 1 verse 11 – what’s the first approach the Egyptians use to control the Israelites? (give them lots of work)
- Ch 1 verse 12 – what’s the result of the Egyptians approach? (the Israelites get stronger; keep growing)
- Ch 1 verse 22 – what’s the second approach the Egyptians use to control the Israelites? (drown the Israelite baby boys)
- Ch 7 verse 16 – what does the Lord tell Moses to tell Pharaoh (“Let my people go”)
- Ch 7 verse 20 and 21 – what happens because Pharaoh doesn’t let the Israelites go (the water in the Nile river turns to blood)
- Ch 7 verse 23 – what effect does this have on Pharaoh? (none at all)
- What do you think about God turning the river into blood?
- Are you surprised that Pharaoh doesn’t change his mind? Why?
- What do you think about everyone who would receive water from the Nile being punished for Pharaoh’s decision?

TELL

- First, remember that Moses was raised as a prince. This means he probably knows Pharaoh and vice versa. If they didn’t know each other, then they probably knew OF each other when they were growing up (a royal family can be quite large).
- Second, one of the reading parts that we’ve skipped over is that the Israelites are not too enthusiastic about being free of the Egyptians. Living a certain way for about 400 years is a LONG TIME to live a certain way. It’s hard to break a habit.
- Third, this is the first of 10 plagues that all of Egypt experiences because Pharaoh won’t let the Israelites go. Here’s a quick list of those plagues:
 1. Water to Blood
 2. Frogs (everywhere)
 3. Gnats / Lice
 4. Flies
 5. Killing of livestock
 6. Boils
 7. Thunder and hail
 8. Locusts
 9. Darkness for three days
 10. Passover / Death of the first born (we’ll talk about that next lesson)
- There are a number of ways to think about these plagues.
 1. As the most powerful person in the most powerful country, no one tells Pharaoh what to do. Pharaoh won’t ever think he doesn’t know the correct answer. Whatever Pharaoh says IS the right answer. So, in order to show Pharaoh that he needs to change to his mind, the plagues are a way to show him that he is NOT the most powerful force in the world. In other words, Pharaoh is not going to follow a command unless Pharaoh understands that he is receiving the order from a more powerful individual
 2. The Israelites have to see that Pharaoh is not the most powerful person as well. They have to see that God, who is calling them to leave Egypt, is more powerful than Pharaoh and Egypt. They need to see this so that they can entrust themselves to God and God’s call to leave. Even though things are hard for them, the idea of being on their own is probably more terrifying to them than staying – in this case, what they don’t know is more terrifying than what they do know.

3. Finally, re: the entire country experiencing the plague (and not just Pharaoh) would've been an indicator of a power at work in Pharaoh's territory, which would be distressing to someone who thinks he's the most powerful person in the world that he can't even control what's happening in his own land.
- The story is pretty unequivocal that God causes the plagues. But this doesn't really fit with how we see God in today's world or even in other Bible stories (especially New Testament stories).
 - a. God doesn't tell us what to do and then turn our rivers to blood when we don't listen. However, this doesn't stop people from saying, "This hurricane/this tornado/this volcano, etc., happened because God is punishing the region for blah blah blah."
 - b. But if God was such an interventionist God, why does God need Moses at all in this story? Why not just kill Pharaoh with lightning so that the Israelites can go free? A simple answer: **Because God doesn't force us to do anything.** We are given choice. However, we are *designed* to live a certain way, and when we live outside of God's design, we experience natural consequences – which allows us to reconsider and possibly change our minds. Or, we could decide to not change. Just like our game – where you had opportunity to change your mind or not. I would also like to remind you, that when you lost at it, you did not think it was God's fault...
 - One current day way to think about the plagues is to think about pollution. There are certain ways that nature deals with waste. But the way that we use energy and dispose of waste puts a stressor on our environment in ways that it can't handle very quickly and thus *our* health gets threatened.
 - In addition, as with most types of pollution, there are a few people who make certain decisions that then lead to pollution that a large amount of people must suffer the consequences of those decisions.
 - To help us think some more about how pollution affects all of us even when there are only a few certain individuals making the decisions, let's watch a clip from the TV show, the Simpsons

WATCH VIDEO CLIP

ASK / TELL

- What effect were the people experiencing in the clip? (their water was catching on fire)
- What decision caused the water to catch fire? (fracturing or fracking)
- Who made that decision? (Mr. Burns)
- So did he change his mind when Lisa and Bart told him to stop? (Nope, not at all)
- So what was Lisa's plan? (to ask a senator for help)
- So in other words, one powerful (aka rich) person was making a decision that was affecting everyone's water and when that one powerful person was told to stop, he didn't listen. The next step, then, was for the people (aka Lisa), to go looking for someone who would be powerful enough to make Mr. Burns change his mind.
- So what do you think? Does that sound similar to the Bible story we just read?

TELL

- Well, the movie clip is even more similar to the story we read when you consider this: The reason fracking exists is because we *like* some of the things that fracking gives us: We like the energy that natural gas provides, and we especially like it when that energy is *cheap*.

- This is the same reason why Pharaoh didn't want to let the Israelites leave Egypt: The Israelites were cheap energy and as far as Pharaoh was concerned, the cheap energy was a better thing to have, even if it meant that the water would be less healthy for everyone.
- But, as we see in the story, God doesn't give Pharaoh (or us) just one chance to change our minds – God has created a system that gives us lots of chances and lots of warnings to let us know that there are other options available, including God's better way.
- Although the story at first seems like God is being super-tough on Pharaoh and the people of Egypt, as we think about it more, we start to see that it's the exact same story that continues to be lived out today: Where there are increasingly visible signs that living outside of God's design for us hurts us which provides us ample opportunity to change our minds and actions before we go too far outside of our design.
- Next class, we'll see if *anything* can change Pharaoh's mind.

CLOSING PRAYER