

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: February 17, 2019
Lesson Title: "Opportunity Knocks"
Lesson Passage: Gen. 41:15-21,33-40

ABOUT THIS LESSON

This lesson chronicles a significant turning point in the career of Joseph. He interprets two of the Pharaoh's dreams, revealing that Egypt will enjoy seven years of prosperity followed by seven years of famine. Subsequently, Pharaoh makes him the second most powerful ruler in the land, commissioning him to carry out a plan for coping with the impending years of famine.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Describe Joseph's plan for sustaining Egypt during the years of famine. (2) Explain how this development contributed to God's on-going purpose in the world.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Begin by noting that, in ancient Egypt, dreams were taken quite seriously, because they were thought to be messages created by supernatural powers. And some people were thought to have insight into the meaning of dreams. They compiled "dream books," collections of symbols that often appeared in "night visions," to assist them in interpreting dreams. Joseph's ability to interpret the dreams of the Egyptian ruler elevated him from the status of an imprisoned slave to the position of a powerful government official. This lesson is based on that story.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Let a class member (previously enlisted) summarize the dreams related by Pharaoh in Gen. 41:17-24. Emphasize these points: (1) The seven "poor" cows were so thin and emaciated that Pharaoh had never seen anything like them. (2) Contrary to what one might expect, the thin cattle were not fattened when they ate the fat cattle; rather, when they had eaten them, they were as thin as ever (vv. 20-21). (3) The bad ears of corn are described as "withered" (i.e. "hard dried"), thin, and blighted by the east wind" in v. 23 (RSV).

2. Ask the class to scan Gen. 41:25-32, where Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams is given. ILLUSTRATION: To dramatize the horrors of seven years of famine in Egypt, refer to the agonies suffered by the people of Ethiopia and Somalia, on the Horn of Africa, in recent years. There, the effects of the terrible Sahel drought (1972-1981) were intensified by internal warfare that crippled international relief efforts. Observers told of the unbelievably

pathetic conditions brought about by famine in these lands: Mothers who could produce no milk for their nursing babies. Old people who went blind for lack of basic nutrition. Children with skeleton-like bodies and enlarged bellies. Whole families whose daily food allowance was contained in a small wooden bowl; and less fortunate families who didn't even own a bowl. And thousands of refugees whose only drinking water was polluted and disease-ridden. *Observe that Pharaoh had reason to be worried about seven similar years of famine.*

3. Examine Joseph's proposed solution to the impending disaster in Gen. 41:33-36: (1) Joseph recommends the appointment of a director-general over the entire land (v. 33). He will work through regional overseers (v. 34). (2) These officials will direct a program in which one-fifth of the food produced during each of the seven years of plenty will be put in storage (v. 34). If rationed properly, these stores of food should provide an adequate supply for the population during the seven lean years (v. 36).

4. Discuss the nature of Joseph's new position in the Egyptian government as the class examines Gen. 41:37-44: (1) He was put in charge of Pharaoh's household (v. 40). The instructions, "All my people shall order themselves as you command," included the whole royal court. (2) He will be second only to Pharaoh in rank and authority (v. 40b). (3) The signet ring (v. 42) was Joseph's symbol of authority, for any decree sealed with it would carry the authority of the supreme ruler of the land. (4) The garments of fine linen and the gold chain (v. 42) constituted a "uniform" befitting Joseph's high office. (5) In public appearances, Joseph would ride in a chariot second in rank only to Pharaoh's, and runners would go before him shouting, "Bow the knee." (6) Verse 44 describes absolute bureaucratic authority. Joseph would regulate all behavior in Egypt. (7) When he was given the hand of Asenath in marriage (v. 45), he married into a powerful and influential family; for, as priest of On, Potiphera held one of the most prestigious positions in Egypt.

5. Comment on Pharaoh's attribution of Joseph's discretion and wisdom to "the Spirit of God" (vv. 38-39): (1) While this does not imply that Pharaoh was a worshiper of the God of Israel, it does indicate his belief that Joseph was a divinely gifted person. (2) The Egyptian ruler spoke more truth than he knew; for the hand of God was in all these events. Joseph's elevation to a position of power was essential to the preservation of God's covenant people, for they, too, would come to Egypt to escape the ravages of famine (Gen. 46). This would be a key component in the chain of events that would subsequently unfold in biblical history.

CLOSING THE LESSON

Closing discussion: Would Joseph's plan for preparing for the famine in Egypt provide a workable model for famine-wracked countries today?