

Lesson 25: God Provides for the Israelites in Famine

Genesis 41:46 - 44:34 (pg. 50-51, Gospel Story Bible)

Teaching Points:

Joseph had faith in God's plan — As we saw last week, Pharaoh was so impressed with Joseph's wisdom that he put Joseph in charge of all Egypt. Pharaoh even said that the wisdom of Joseph's plan and his ability to interpret dreams came from God (Genesis 41:38–39). Joseph didn't trust himself, he trusted God.

Because he believed and trusted God, Joseph was able to plan wisely for the famine and diligently carried out the plan. Every city in Egypt stored away a huge amount of grain. Then, when the famine came, Egypt was the only country that was prepared; it was the only country that had food to spare for others, including the Israelites. Everything happened just as God said it would.

Joseph's brothers won't repent — There is much to see in this long but fascinating passage. Joseph's dreams of many years earlier—dreams that his brothers would bow down to him—literally come true. The brothers spend three days in jail, and guilt over selling Joseph rises up in them. They clearly see that their betrayal of Joseph is the worst thing they have ever done. They can admit that to each other. They can even see that God has been the author of the events involving Joseph. But when they go home they still hide from their father that they had sold Joseph. Because of their fear, they still do not repent to God of their past sin against Joseph or confess it to their father.

Joseph's brothers keep on lying — When their food runs low in Canaan, Joseph's brothers return to Egypt to buy more grain. This time they bring their brother, Benjamin. As they prepare to depart for home with their grain, Joseph has a silver cup stashed in Benjamin's grain sack.

Once they sold their brother as a slave, Joseph's brothers started a pattern of lying to keep out of trouble. They were afraid to tell the truth then and that sin has grown. The brothers are brought back to Joseph and accused of stealing. Even then, they keep telling the lie about how their missing brother was killed by an animal. Though they sense they are being judged by God (Genesis 42:22), they still do not admit their guilt. When we are trapped by our sin, we can be tempted to act as if telling a lie over and over again actually makes it true!

Where is the Gospel?

How does today's Bible story fit into God's greater plan of redemption?

Read Acts 7:9-10.

The story of Joseph's kidnapping, slavery, and imprisonment is tragic. But in it all, God was at work saving his people. Because of Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph knew Egypt needed to store grain for the coming famine. This is the grain that Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to purchase, so that Abraham's descendants would not die off. That way, one day Jesus could be born as one of Abraham's far-off great-grandchildren.

Story after story points to God as a God who saves. Through Jesus, God would ultimately save his people from spiritual hunger and death. Jesus offered himself as the "bread of life" (John 6:35) to all who are spiritually hungry.

Bible Truth:

God's
promise is
preserved
in drought
and sin.

Object Lessons:

1. Retell the Story (Grades K-2)

Supplies:

- a cup (to represent a silver cup to be put in Benjamin's sack)
- paper bags (to represent burlap sacks)
- a bag of rice, or something to put in the sacks (or just pretend there is something in them)

Retell the story. Have students act out the parts of Joseph, the soldier, Jacob, and the brothers. The brothers will come once, bow down, and share the conversation. Simeon is arrested. The brothers head home and find grain and the silver in their sacks. They tell Jacob what happened. When they finally return with Benjamin, they eat with Joseph. He sends them back with the silver cup in Benjamin's sack. When accused, the brothers come to Benjamin's defense. (Don't share Joseph revealing himself. That is the next lesson).

2. All Gifts are from God (and) God's Greater Plan(Grades 3-5)

Supplies:

- newspaper, a trash can, a little prize

Enlist the class in helping to crumple up the newspaper into balls. Give a ball to each person in the class. Explain to them that you are going to have a contest to see who is the most gifted shot in the group. Line up the students and have them toss the newspaper ball into the waste can from increasingly further distances. Declare the best thrower as the champion and give him or her a little prize.

Then ask the class the following questions:

- **Ask the winner how it is that he or she did so well.** (See if they give God the credit for their ability.)
- **Is God the giver of all gifts, even the ability to toss paper balls into trash cans?** (Yes, God is the giver of all of our gifts.)

- **What is the purpose of our gifts?**

(1 Corinthians 10:31 says that whatever we do we are to do to the glory of God).

- **Do our gifts play a bigger role in the plan of God?**

(Yes, Philippians 2:13 and Ephesians 1:11 teach us that all things work according to his plan.)

- **What was the greater plan of God served by Joseph's ability to interpret dreams?**

(God's plan to redeem Israel was the ultimate plan of which Joseph was a part. God used Joseph to preserve Israel, the people out of which the Savior would one day come.)

(If additional time) Have the children take turns reading aloud Acts chapter 7. Then have them write an answer to the following question:

- **How was Joseph used by God in his greater plan of salvation for all?**

(If it had not been for Joseph, Israel would have been lost. It was through Joseph that Israel came to Egypt and prospered. Later, when they were enslaved, Moses came as another picture of Christ to deliver Israel from bondage. This picture of redemption, which is so meaningful to us today, was possible because of the way God used Joseph.)

A Little Bit More (grades 3-5) - Israel

God first gave Jacob the name Israel in Genesis 32:28; God later confirms this name change in Genesis 35:10. Between these two pronouncements of God, Israel became the name of the land in which the offspring of Israel (Jacob) settled (see Genesis 34:7). It was a common practice to name the land after the one who settled it.

The descendants of the twelve sons of Israel carried the name of their ancestor; their land was called by that name as well; i.e., the land of Judah. God calls his people Israel when speaking to Moses (see Exodus 3:9), and after this, the people of God are referred to as Israel.

In the New Testament, we learn that one doesn't have to be a descendant of Jacob to be a part of Israel. God's chosen people, both Gentiles and Jews, comprise the true Israel (see Romans 9:6-8).