

## August 2024 – God doing things differently

Please note Bible stories and themes may occasionally differ from this overview.

This month we address some difficult topics while we see how God does things differently. God speaks through the dreams of Pharaoh – with the help of Joseph's interpretation. We also see Joseph, the trickster, displaying God's kindness using a hidden identity and a 'stolen' silver cup. A bizarre turn of events leads to a royal upbringing for the baby Moses. A burning bush calls Moses into leadership, and a series of disasters causes Pharaoh to change his mind. This month's material is sure to provoke many questions from children as they wrestle with how Scripture understands God's past activity.

### Session 1 Aug 3/4

Session Aim: To learn how God used Joseph to help Pharaoh

Bible Ref: Genesis 41: 1-43

#### Today's fruit

God's goodness towards Joseph enables Joseph to show goodness towards Pharaoh.

#### God speaks through dreams

*This week's outline has been provided by Hayley Still, UK Engagement Co-ordinator for The Salvation Army International Development.*

Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, experienced two disturbing dreams. He dreamt of seven fat cows coming out of the River Nile, then seven more who were thin. The thin cows then ate the fat cows.

His second dream was similar. There were seven ears of corn which were growing well, ripening and turning golden, but then seven more smaller shrivelled ears of corn sprouted up and swallowed the golden corn.

Pharaoh wants to find peace by understanding these dreams, and his butler remembers Joseph, the Hebrew slave, who had been locked in the dungeon for two years. Joseph had interpreted dreams before and might be able to do so again.

After listening to Pharaoh, Joseph felt God had given him this interpretation: Egypt was to have seven years of excellent harvests, then seven years of failing crops and famine.

It would be wise to hire someone to oversee Pharaoh's kingdom, collecting and storing one fifth of Egypt's grain for the next seven years. In this way, grain could be stored away to share in the hard times so that people wouldn't starve. Pharaoh gave this position to Joseph.

#### Think about

Do you ever have dreams which trouble you, and do you ever talk to someone about them? Has a dream ever been significant for you, or even one which felt like God giving you direction?

Can you remember why Joseph had been locked away by the ruler of Egypt? I wonder how the butler knew about his special gift of interpreting dreams?

Notice that Joseph isn't interested in getting all the glory. He says in verse 16, 'I am not able to explain the meaning of dreams. God will do this for the king.' Is this something you might say and when or why might you say it?

Sometimes, saving up, planning ahead, or sharing with others is known as 'stewardship'. How would you do this? Perhaps with pocket money when you are saving for a long-term purchase?

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## Session 2 Aug 10/11

**Session Aim:** To know the story of Joseph's reunion with his brothers

**Bible Ref:** Genesis 44:45: 1-5

### Today's fruit

Joseph had every reason to be angry or seek revenge, but instead chooses to show kindness.

### Joseph tricks his brothers

Joseph grew to have power in Egypt, second only to the king. Seven years passed and the crops failed, just as Joseph said.

Starving people came to Egypt's full warehouses, including Joseph's brothers from Canaan; the same brothers who had sold him into slavery more than 20 years earlier. But the youngest brother, Benjamin, had been kept at home by their father Jacob. Jacob could not face losing another son, as he believed Joseph had been killed.

Without letting them know who he was, Joseph gave the brothers grain, but sent them home for Benjamin. He kept his brother Simeon as a prisoner (as security) to guarantee the brothers would return. When they did, Joseph gave them a feast, but also played a trick on them by placing a silver cup inside one of their sacks to make them look like thieves.

Finally, after all his tricks and clever ways of demonstrating forgiveness, Joseph admitted who he was. Jacob was reunited with his son, and the whole family went on to live in one of the lushest parts of Egypt.

### Think about

It is amazing to see how events turned out for Joseph – 20 years later. Have you been waiting a long time for something to work out for good?

Joseph could have punished all the brothers, but instead chose to forgive and show great kindness. How would you react if someone showed this level of kindness to you, particularly a brother or sister?

In chapter 45 Joseph reflects upon God's greater purpose that has come from a bad situation: 'Now don't be worried. Don't be angry with yourselves because you sold me here. God sent me here ahead of you to save people's lives' (v5).

### 12 August: International Youth Day

Discuss ways in which kindness could be shown by young people to each other or within families.

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## Session 3 17/18 Aug

**Session Aim: To explore how God works in some difficult situations**  
**Bible Ref: Exodus 2:3-10**

### Today's fruit

Despite Pharaoh's aggressive command, the princess shows gentleness by caring for Moses.

### Moses is raised as a royal

Around 400 years after last week's happy events, this week's events are violent and painful. An Egyptian king became so worried about the increasing numbers of Israelites (Hebrews) living in Egypt that he ordered them to be turned into slaves. But numbers still grew, so he eventually ordered the killing of every newborn Israelite boy.

To keep her son a secret, one Hebrew mother placed a baby boy in a basket which floated away on the River Nile. However, when the Egyptian princess came to bathe, the baby was discovered. She took pity on the hungry, helpless Israelite child. She named him Moses and adopted him as her own son. This action went against the Pharaoh's command to kill all the baby boys at the time.

### Think about

Pharaoh might have been worried that the Israelites would become such a large group that they might defeat Egypt's rulers. Why is it not always a good idea to make decisions when we are worried?

Today's story is the start of the life of Moses, who would become a great leader of Israel. Why did Moses' mother have to leave him and what were the risks of doing this?

The chances of Moses being discovered, but then cared for in the wealthy Egyptian palace, were very slim. Talk about how God works to bring good from some difficult situations.

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## Session 4 24/25 Aug

**Session Aim:** To reflect on how God might equip us  
**Bible Ref:** Exodus 2:11-12,15, 23-25; 3:1-8,11-14

### Today's fruit

Although Moses was heading into a challenge, knowing God was 'I AM' gave him peace.

### God speaks through a burning bush

Moses grew up in the Egyptian palace but knew he was one of the Israelites. He witnessed an Egyptian guard who was treating an Israelite slave badly; he became so angry he killed the guard.

Moses had to run away, so he fled to Midian and started a new life as a shepherd. Looking after his flock one day, he noticed a bush on fire which was not burning up.

A voice came from the bush telling Moses that the Egyptian slaves would be rescued and return to Canaan. It was God's voice, telling Moses to lead the Israelites and to demand Pharaoh to release them.

Moses seriously doubted that he could do this task, but God assured him that he would always be with him. God's name would be 'I AM' – not 'I was' or 'I will be' – showing that God would be present with people and know every detail of their lives as they happened.

### Think about

Which group of people do you most closely connect with? How do you feel when someone within the group is mistreated?

Why do you think God appeared to Moses as a burning bush? Are there ways in which we can hear God or get a sense that he is communicating with us?

Do we ever experience feelings of self-doubt when a task needs to be done? In Moses' case, God was asking him to fight the injustice of slavery. Where do you see injustice and what do you feel you can do about it?

What names would you give to God? 'I AM' sounds unusual but it makes the point that he is with us. Are there times when you feel this to be true and times when our feelings should not always be trusted?

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## Session 5 31 Aug/1 Sept

**Session Aim:** To explore the many events leading to Passover  
**Bible Ref:** Exodus 7:1-5,8-13,20-21; 8:5-8,16-19,24; 9:1-7,8-9,15-19; 12:12-13

### Today's fruit

It had been a very long time, but Moses' patience eventually paid off and Pharaoh changed his mind to set the Israelites free.

### Stubborn Pharaoh is eventually changed

With his brother Aaron to support him, Moses asked Pharaoh to free the Israelite slaves. Aaron even performed a miracle, as Moses' staff became a snake. But the king remained stubborn.

Then there were many demonstrations before Pharaoh to prove that God was with Moses and Aaron: the River Nile turned to blood for seven days; frogs appeared from every river, pond and stream in Egypt; gnats swarmed all over Egypt. Pharaoh would beg Moses to make it stop and promised to set Israel free – before changing his mind again.

Next came clouds of flies covering Egypt; a dreadful disease affecting horses, camels, oxen, goats and sheep; boils breaking out on every person and animal except for the Israelites, and then a hailstorm that was strong enough to kill.

In this long list of terrible events, the last to arrive were swarms of locusts which destroyed crops and fruit from trees, before a darkness covered Egypt for three days.

The final straw for stubborn Pharaoh was the plague over Egypt where every first-born child would die. The Israelites were saved from this disaster by cooking lamb and painting their doorposts with lamb's blood, a night which became known as Passover (and is featured elsewhere in *Explore it*).

### Think about

There are many Bible references this week because many events took place in order to change Pharaoh's mind. Eventually, after they had been 400 years in slavery, he set the Israelites free to head home.

In which situations do we need to be patient with God? Does this story seem a long way from your own experience? What sort of proof do you look for to know that God is real or with you?

Have you experienced someone who breaks a promise, like Pharaoh, and how did it make you feel?

When have you shown patience to somebody else? In what ways does God show patience with the world today?

It often seems that Jesus was very different from the God we discover in the Old Testament. What questions would you have for Jesus?