Lessons in Economics From the Bible

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Our Project

- Teaching principles of economics concepts through stories from sacred texts.
- Inclusivity: Old Testament stories familiar to many Jews, Christians and Muslims.
- Applicable to undergraduate econ courses and in faith-based private high schools.
- Includes lesson plans with Kahoot quizzes and discussion questions.



Noah's Ark

Genesis 6-9

Cost and Profit Maximization

- Sunk costs
- Exiting the market

Noah's Ark by Edwin Hicks (1846)

- Explain in economic terms why Noah's family decided to follow him in the ark.
 (Concept: Incentives)
- Why didn't Noah build more arks and save all animals? (Concepts: scarcity, allocation of resources)
- God flooded the Earth for 40 days. What are the consequences of such disasters on production? Use the Production Possibilities Frontier (PPF) to show the impact of flooding on output. (Concept: Production Possibilities Frontier)







Joseph and His Brothers

Genesis 37

Labor Markets, Asymmetric Information, Game Theory

- Game Theory
- Institutions
- Trade
- Value of information

Joseph sold into slavery by Cornelis van Poelenburgh (1594 – 1667)

- Joseph's brothers originally wanted to kill him, but then changed their minds when they saw the caravan of Ishmaelites. What made them change their mind and sell him into slavery instead? (Concept: Profit)
- What was different about the world in this time that allowed Joseph's brother to sell him into slavery? (Concepts: Institutions)
- Why didn't Reuben speak up about wanting to save Joseph and instead try to rescue him in secret? (Concept: Game Theory)





Joseph and Pharaoh

Genesis 41-46

Fiscal Policy, Supply, Demand, Equilibrium, Monopoly, Labor Markets

- Taxes
- Govt. spending
- Limits and dangers of fiscal policy
- Human capital

Joseph Overseer of the Pharaoh's Granaries, by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1874)

- How was Joseph able to rise into such prominence in Pharaoh's service?
 (Concept: Human capital)
- What impact do you think the famine would have had on the economy of Egypt? Explain fully. (Concept: GPD)
- How did Joseph organize the resources he collected to help fight the effects of the famine? (Concept: Fiscal policy)





Moses and Pharoah

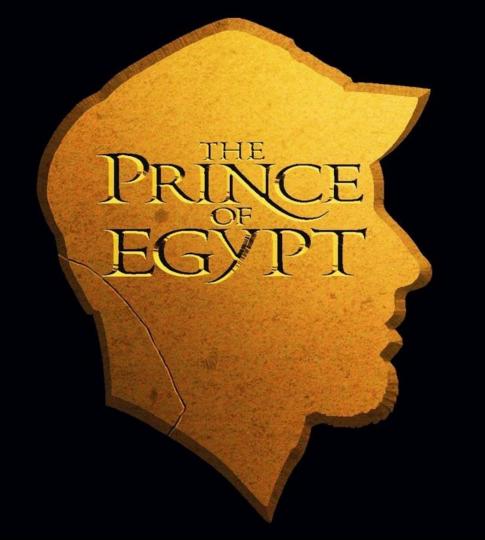
Exodus 1-14

Labor Markets, GDP

- Macroeconomics
- Economics of slavery
- Immigration
- Population growth
- Labor force
- Production possibility frontier

Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh: An Allegory of the Dinteville Family (1537)

- Why did the Egyptians fear the increased population of Israelites in Egypt?
 What modern parallels do you see in the United States? (Concept: Labor markets)
- Why did Pharaoh not want to let the Israelites go? What impact would all of the Israelites suddenly leaving together have had on the Egyptian economy? (Concept: GDP)
- If someone is enslaved by another, should the enslaved person be considered part of the labor force? Why or why not? (Concept: Employment)





Moses and the Ten Commandments

Exodus 20:1-21

The Importance of Institutions

- Role of authority
- Formal vs. informal institutions

Moses Breaking the Tablets of the Law by Rembrandt (1659)

- What impact do you think if most people follow the Ten Commandments, will this have a positive or negative impact on the economy of Israel? In what way? Explain your answer fully. (Concept: Institutions)
- If people are not allowed to steal from or lie to others, what other options do people have for making themselves better off? (Concept: Trade)
- The Bible says that the Israelites "stood away from the thunder and flashing of the mountain" and feared God. Do you think this fear made them more likely or less likely to follow they Ten Commandments? Why? (Concept: Incentives)



Conclusion

- These are stories many students will already be familiar with.
- The stories are short enough that students not familiar with them can absorb them quickly.
- The economic concepts provide a new way to think about these stories.
- Lots of historical art and popular culture (including music) connect to these stories.
- These and other Biblical stories provide a fertile ground to explore economic concepts.

Questions or Comments?