

Exodus 11; 12:1-36

Aim of Lesson

To show the way in which God brought his people out of slavery in Egypt, and how they were saved from death by obedience to God's commands.

Background study

Deuteronomy 16:1-8; John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8; Hebrews 11:27-28; 1 Peter 1:18-19.

Suggested outline of lesson

Remind the children of Pharaoh's stubbornness and that, despite having suffered the effects of nine increasingly severe plagues and despite the pleas of his own servants, Pharaoh adamantly refused to change his mind. God, however, had decided that his people would be set free and he knew that only one more punishment would be necessary, though this would be far more ruthless than any that had gone before. It was to change the lives of both the Egyptians and the Israelites, and mark a turning point in the history of Israel.

Emphasize that it was God who gave Moses the detailed instructions about the preparations which the Israelites had to make for that night's activities. They knew, unmistakably, that this was to be the night of their deliverance and that it was vital that they obeyed God's word to the letter. They would be excited at the prospect of freedom and at the same time fearful of what was to take place before that freedom was gained. Describe the series of events, beginning with the pledging of gifts of jewellery, silver, gold and clothing by their Egyptian neighbours who would later be anxious to assist in this way.

Give details of the preparations for the meal, the death of the perfect lamb, the vital marking of the door posts and lintel, the manner in which the meal was to be eaten and the solemnity of the whole proceedings. Stress that the people had to congregate in families, or groups of families, and that all the members of the household were to take part. The children were just as involved as their parents and would, no doubt, be wide-eyed with nervous fascination at these strange events and the lateness of the hour. Show how the meal was unusual in that it was to be eaten in haste, with everyone standing in their outdoor clothes ready to leave at a moment's notice, but with the door shut fast. Point out that even the bread was different because they were told to eat unleavened bread. (Unleavened bread and bunches of herbs may be used here as visual aids).

The uniqueness of this special meal would live long in their memories and was to be re-enacted annually to remind them of God's might and mercy, and of their indebtedness to him. Fathers were to teach their children the significance of the feast and they in turn were to teach their children so that the rite would be continued through future generations. (You may wish to point out that practising Jews consider this still to be the most important ceremony in their calendar). This was such an important event that it was to mark the beginning of a new calendar for the Israelites (Exodus 12:2) since it opened a new chapter in the history of the nation. Lay particular stress on the word "passover"; explain its meaning and relate this event to the New Testament references to the passover.

Sensitivity is required when describing the details of this, the last plague. Children will appreciate that this final disaster must of necessity have been the most severe, but to dwell too long on the facts may be distressing for some children. Nevertheless, the scene is a dramatic one and should be treated as such. Take care to ensure that throughout the children's sympathies are with God's people. Suffice it to say that Pharaoh was finally humbled before God through personal loss and that he had brought this ultimate suffering upon himself and upon his people by his pride and stubborn resistance.

Suddenly at midnight the Israelites' waiting was at an end. Now all was haste and bustle. Not only were they to be set free, but the Egyptians were urging them to leave speedily and they thrust great quantities of gifts into their hands. It is impossible to imagine the vast number of people who began this journey, but perhaps photographs of vast crowds will help to impress upon the children the enormity of the exodus. The Israelites went out in faith, with no provisions other than the unleavened dough they had prepared. Read together chapter 12 verses 40-42 by way of conclusion, stressing the people's dependence upon God and the close bond between God and his people.

Help the children to think about the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus was called "The Lamb of God". He, too, was and is perfect; he had to die and his blood was shed in order to save people from death, just as the Israelites were saved from death by the blood of the lamb when the angel of death passed over their homes. Children of this age group will be able to grasp only the simplest of parallels between the two, and you should resist the temptation to develop the theme beyond their comprehension at this stage.

Relevance to the children's lives

God laid down very definite rules regarding the first passover, in order that the people might be saved from the final plague. Did they obey all of these directions? What do you think would have happened to anyone who failed to do what was required, or who changed any of the details to suit themselves? It was God who saved them, but they had to do their part. This is the same God who loves us and wants to save us. Where can his instructions to us be found? What should we do about them?

