

Exodus 12:37-42; 13:17-22; 14; 15:1-21

Aim of Lesson

To show how God set his people free from slavery and by a miracle protected them from the Egyptian army.

Background study

Genesis 46:2-4,27; 50:24-25; Exodus 3:10-12; Psalm 105:37-38; Psalm 136:1-15; 1 Corinthians 10:1-5. Find a detailed map of the region showing the route taken across the Red Sea.

Suggested outline of lesson

Refer to the details towards the end of the previous lesson concerning the vast number of people in the exodus. Humanly-speaking, the moving of this huge crowd of people through a desert to live in a land occupied by hostile people was impossible; but Moses, relieved that his ordeal of confronting Pharaoh was over, applied himself to the task of leading this complex horde of men, women, children and animals in the way God indicated. You might spend a little time discussing the problems of organization and the possible difficulties encountered, in order to convey the reality of the event.

The Israelites went out in hope of returning to the land from which their forefathers had come. Remind the children of the arrival of Jacob in Egypt and of God's promise that his family would grow into a great nation which would one day return to Canaan. Read together in class the words of Joseph, whose faith in this promise was so firm that he gave instructions for his body not to be buried in Egypt but to be taken back and buried in the land of his birth at the time of the nation's return. Now their hopes were beginning to be realized and the people followed Moses, carrying in their minds the vision of the land "flowing with milk and honey".

At this point you should introduce a large, clear map. It will be obvious that the shortest way from Goshen to Canaan lay through the country of the Philistines, a very cruel and fierce people. God knew that the Israelites had been slaves for many years and that if they met the warlike Philistines they would soon lose courage and be glad to return to Egypt. God knew, too, that it would take many years to train these slaves into a strong nation, to educate them in his ways and for them to learn to have a deep faith and trust in him. So the Lord commanded Moses to lead the Israelites through the wilderness towards the Red Sea.

Explain to the children that a flag, lamp or similar signal would have been of little use in directing so large a company and that God himself provided a clearly visible sign that moved ahead of the people and showed them the way. It took the form of a cloud during the daytime, distinctive in the otherwise cloudless sky, and of a fiery light by night (take care that the children understand the word "pillar", if used), so that the people were able to make progress for longer than the normal hours of daylight. In addition to God's presence being shown in this way, Moses also received detailed commands from God which he relayed to the tribal leaders and they to the heads of families. So they were guided to the Red Sea.

Now direct the children's attention back to Pharaoh in Egypt. There had been much mourning over the loss of the first-born children. But the Egyptians, who in their despair had been glad to be rid of these troublesome people, now realized that they had lost their useful slaves and regretted having allowed them to go. Pharaoh, in particular, was filled with rage at having suffered at the hands of Israel's God and he determined to bring back the slaves or to destroy them. They were travelling on foot and he knew their progress would have been slow. With his swift chariots it would be easy to overtake them. How little did Pharaoh understand the might and the will of God for his people.

Stimulate the imagination of the children by describing the approach of the thundering chariots, and help them to appreciate something of the fear of the Israelites at being trapped by the barrier of water in front of them, and the fast approaching enemy behind. There was no escape. Ask the children whether the Israelites had any reason to be afraid. If the children think they had, then remind them of the miracles the people had so recently witnessed and of God's protection which was even then visible in the cloud and fire. In their fear, they forgot that God was all-powerful, but the faith and courage of Moses did not fail. He remembered the promise that God had made to him in Midian and he reassured the faithless of God's salvation. Read aloud his words (chapter 14:13-14).

The progress of the Egyptians was hindered by the apparently dense cloud which God placed between them and his people. Describe the tensions of that night; the strong easterly wind that blew fiercely across the sea, the sleeplessness of the anxious Israelites and the impatient confusion of the Egyptians. The morning was to reveal another of God's great wonders.

In describing the passage of the Israelites through the divided sea, try to convey the terror of the ordeal; the jostling of people to get through as swiftly as possible, the delays caused by heavy burdens and young children, the confusion of the animals, and the seemingly interminable queue of people anxiously fleeing from the threat of pursuit. Before they were all across, the Egyptians were hard on their heels and with the advantage - so they thought - of fast horses and chariots. Fearlessly the Egyptians had followed the fleeing slaves, but their confidence soon turned to dismay as their wheels began to sink in the mud of the sea bed. Then they were terror-struck as they realized that they were now the ones with no means of escape. They were imprisoned in the grip of the supreme power of the Almighty God. The Israelites, who had felt trapped and had feared the might of Pharaoh, found themselves on the other side of the sea, with their enemy totally destroyed. Their miraculous salvation restored their faith and evoked a response of joyful thanksgiving.

Relevance to the children's lives

It seems difficult to understand how the Israelites could so quickly forget the miracles that God had performed in Egypt, and be ready to doubt his care as soon as they faced problems. Yet, we tend to do something very similar. What great things has God done for us? Do we forget that everything we enjoy comes from God? Do we doubt him when things go wrong? What should we do? What did Moses do? (He trusted when faced with danger, and remembered to thank God when rescued from it).

Worksheets

These should be self-explanatory.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we thank you for your great power and thank you for keeping us safe until now. Help us to trust you through every danger. Amen.

Memory verse

“Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today” (Exodus 14:13).