

Exodus 15:22-27; 16; 17:1-7

Aim of Lesson

To show how God provided for his people in the wilderness, although they were faithless and complaining.

Background study

Genesis 2:1-3; Deuteronomy 8:2-3; Psalm 78:15-32; John 6:31-58.

Find a map showing Marah, Elim and Sinai, and photographs of the terrain. Consult a Bible Dictionary on quails and manna.

Suggested outline of lesson

Begin the lesson with a general discussion about food, moving from what the children like to eat and the amount needed every day, to the planning and provision of food for a journey or holiday. Go on to point out that food and water are vital for survival.

After the Israelites' celebration, which followed the crossing of the Red Sea, the people moved on into the vast wilderness. Show the children a map of the route taken and compare the distances with journeys within the children's own experience. Show also pictures of the type of land through which the children of Israel were travelling, and describe the heat, the dust and the rough ground. How hot and weary they would become, and how thirsty. How eagerly they would approach the first sign of water which they had seen for three days. What a blow it must have been to find that the water was undrinkable. Paraphrase the account to convey their disappointment and anger. God, recognizing their need, heard Moses' prayer and provided a solution. God used this miracle as an object lesson to demonstrate his healing power, and he promised that he would keep them free from disease if they would follow his instructions. At Elim they were fully refreshed.

Remind the children that when God's people left Egypt they had complied with his instructions and had taken only unleavened bread with them. They had had no bread after this had run out. After six weeks of travelling they became anxious about the shortage of food and turned on Moses and Aaron with their complaints. It was at this point that they began looking back and imagining they had been better off in Egypt. Again God heard them and promised to supply their need. Moses explained that, in spite of their grumbling about God's seeming neglect, he was about to provide them with meat and bread, to convince them of his omnipotence. What a pleasure it must have been for them that evening to feast on meat, without the effort of having to hunt for it.

God's mercy extended not only to making natural food available, but to creating a special food which had never been known before. Everything about the manna was miraculous. It appeared only when God said it would, and kept fresh only as long as God ordained. Whatever quantity was gathered proved sufficient, and any that was left was melted away by the sun. Although the manna would not normally keep overnight, it lasted an extra day for the sabbath and it kept perpetually in the ark as a reminder of God's provision. The collection of the manna was a lesson in obedience, moderation and trust. The instructions were clear and were to be obeyed. Disobedience and greed resulted in suffering and disgrace.

An important instruction concerned the sabbath. This was the first time that the nation was shown the importance of setting aside the seventh day as a day of rest. Remind the children that this was not a new idea but had been established by God at the time of creation.

So began a forty-year period, through which God kept the whole nation alive by providing daily food and all the other physical necessities.

But in spite of all the miracles they had witnessed, the people complained again as soon as things became difficult. Ask the children to try and imagine how Moses felt at having to put up with their ceaseless complaints. As always, Moses cried to the Lord and immediately complied with God's instructions. The impact of the miracle of water from the rock should have made a lasting impression upon the elders of the tribes who witnessed it, and Moses renamed the place to commemorate the occasion.

All the incidents of the wilderness journey should be described as vividly as possible to help the children picture the scenes and to appreciate God's miraculous power at work.

Relevance to the children's lives

Whenever the Israelites were faced with a problem they grumbled and complained. When things go wrong for us, or present us with difficulties, do we moan or grumble? Does it help if we do? What should we do instead?

Worksheets

These should be self-explanatory.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we thank you for our daily food. Teach us not to be ungrateful grumblers, but help us always to be cheerful and thankful. Amen.

Memory verse

"The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, until they came to the border of the land of Canaan" (Exodus 16:35).