

Exodus 19 and 20

Aim of Lesson

To show how God gave Israel their Laws in order to make them a great nation and a particular people for himself, above all other nations.

Background study

Exodus 3:12; Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 4:7-8 and 5; Psalm 119; Matthew 22:36-40; Acts 7:36-38; Romans 13:8-10.

Suggested outline of lesson

Begin by talking briefly about the necessity, in any society, for rules and agreed codes of behaviour. Show how these are provided for the good of all concerned. Point out that the slaves whom God had brought out of Egypt were descended from Abraham, whom God had chosen to be the father of his people. This special people had been cared for, and guided through the wilderness to a particular mountain. This was not a chance stopping place, but the first goal on their journey. It was here that Moses, at the burning bush, had received the call to lead God's people and it was here that God was to appear again to instruct the Israelites in the way they should live. Read to the children chapter 19 verses 3-6 and help them to appreciate that here was a man who communicated directly with God high on the rocky mountain. Moses acted as a mediator and took God's words to the elders, whose ready response was pleasing to God. When Moses met with God again he was given instructions about the preparations that must be made, which impressed upon the people the holiness of their God and the solemn reverence with which he should be approached.

Describe the feverish activity of the next two days, when all the people were required to purify themselves and to wash their clothes. A barrier had to be erected around the base of the mountain and the people warned of the serious consequences of going beyond it. During these preparations a tense atmosphere developed in anticipation of what was to follow. The people were to see both the manifestation of God's presence (though all that they could bear to see was the thick cloud which shrouded God's unapproachable glory) and to hear his voice. They would receive a lasting impression of the majesty of the Lord and be assured that the law which Moses was about to give them would come as the result of an immediate communication from God himself. On the third morning the people trembled at the sound of thunder and a piercing trumpet call. It was with great fear that they congregated at the foot of the mountain. Convey how awesome was their experience.

With the class, draw up a list of the ten commandments, explaining the meaning of unfamiliar words and showing that the first four concerned the people's duty to God. No form of God had been seen and the people were never to attempt to make an image of him. He alone was to be worshipped, and his name was to be spoken with reverence. The seventh day of the week was to be a holy day, devoted to the Lord. The remaining six commandments were concerned with behaviour towards others. Although the majority of the commandments take a negative form, show how the positive law of love for one's neighbour is implicit in them (Leviticus 19:18).

God's direct revelation so terrified the people that they withdrew from the base of the mountain and requested that the rest of the law be given to Moses alone and communicated to them by him. God granted their request. Make sure the children understand that the ten commandments comprise but a brief summary of the whole law, which was given to Moses in great detail. These commandments show a wisdom and insight into human needs, unequalled in any other laws of the time. This was not merely a set of legal rules, but a spiritual code for a chosen, redeemed and adopted people. It was designed to show to Israel God's holiness, and to direct them towards him. It was a code that not only dealt with their present situation in the wilderness but looked ahead to the time when they would be a settled community living in their own land.

Relevance to the children's lives

Wherever we go we find there are rules which must be obeyed (home, school, the street, library, sports, etc.). Is it good to have rules? Why are rules necessary? Who makes them? Why should we obey God's rules?

Worksheets

The number puzzle reads 'If you obey me fully you will be my treasured possession'.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, please teach us your rules and help us to obey them. We know we shall be happy if we do what you want us to do. Amen.

Memory verse

"Give me understanding, that I may keep thy law and observe it with my whole heart" (Psalm 119:34).