

Exodus 25; 26; 35:20-35; 36:1-7

Aim of Lesson

To describe the design and construction of the tabernacle, in which God chose to manifest his presence.

Background study

Exodus 29:43-46; 40:33-38; Hebrews 8 and 9. A study of all the chapters concerning the tabernacle, i.e. Exodus 25-40, will provide extensive knowledge from which significant details can be selected for the lesson.

Suggested outline of lesson

Faithful Moses returned from his communion with God on Mount Sinai, carrying with him God's law written on two slabs of stone. Among the many instructions which he had received from God were the details of a special tent, which was to be the centre of worship for the nation. Discuss the necessity for plans to be drawn up prior to the construction of any building. The design of this building was not to be left to men, but was given by the Creator himself and had to be carried out exactly as instructed. The materials needed to be light in order that they could be carried from place to place, and yet strong enough to withstand frequent erection and dismantling. The covering had to be weatherproof. The workmanship had to be of the best, and all the furnishings were both beautiful and deeply significant.

Read from Exodus 35:4-9 with the children: these verses list the materials required for the construction of the tabernacle. Stress that gifts were only acceptable if donated willingly, and describe how the people responded gladly and wholeheartedly, searching among their belongings for the materials which were needed. The women gave their jewellery and ornaments which could be melted down and used again, precious stones, pure linen and rich fabrics, oils and spices. All these riches had been brought out of Egypt, when their neighbours had showered them with gifts. Now, in turn, the people offered them to God. The goats' hair and rams' skins would be available from their own flocks. The response was so overwhelming that there was more than enough.

The work itself was under God's control, for he appointed skilled craftsmen, Aholiab and Bezalel, to put his designs into effect and to teach the necessary skills to those who desired to help. The acacia trees had to be hewn and the wood cut into shape, and much of it overlaid with gold or silver. Large quantities of precious metals had to be melted down and fashioned into fastenings, implements and vessels. The women had to spin and weave, sew and embroider. All the people were actively involved in this great project, conscientiously and harmoniously working for God.

An essential visual aid for this lesson is a model or suitable illustrations to show the design and contents of the tabernacle. A model is particularly valuable, as it can be presented in stages to show, firstly the construction, secondly the compartments and thirdly the furniture it contained. Explain the significance of the most holy place, behind the exquisite veil, and the ark of the covenant which was the most sacred item of all, since it was where God's glory was to be manifested. Briefly refer to the appointment and work of the priests, and the unique office of Aaron, the high priest. The Levites had the responsibility for the care and erection of the tabernacle. But all the people came to the tabernacle to worship and to offer sacrifices at specified times.

All the time and hard work that went into constructing the special tent of meeting was meaningless if the Israelites did not appreciate the reason for having it in the middle of their camp. Everything that was done was intended to remind the people of their particular relationship with God and their dependence upon him. Here was tangible evidence of God's nearness at all times. Over the tent rested the pillar of fire at night and the pillar of cloud by day; and within the most holy place the high priest saw the light of God's glory. Whenever the people travelled the tent was erected as soon as they reached the next camping place. To every faithful Israelite this must have been a great source of strength and comfort: it was the focal point of their holy way of life, the appointed place at which the people would meet with their God.

Relevance to the children's lives

Imagine the people of Israel busy and happy in the work they had to do. They would be very careful to do their best and make no mistakes, because they were doing it for God. When we are asked to do something, are we happy to do it? What use is it to say: "Well, I'll do it if I have to, but I don't really want to"? Willing workers are what God wants to see.

Worksheets

The code reads 'The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle'.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, give us strength, so that whatever we do we may do it well in order to please you. Amen.

Memory verse

"Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord" (Colossians 3:23).