

Deuteronomy 34; Joshua 1

Aim of Lesson

To consider the outstanding character and faith of Moses, and to think about why Joshua was chosen to be Israel's next leader.

Background study

Exodus 17:8-16; 24:12-15; 32:15-18; Numbers 12:3-8; 20:1-13; 27:12-23; Deuteronomy 1:34-40; 3:23-29; 31; 32:48-52; Acts 7:37-38; Hebrews 11:23-28 and 39.

Suggested outline of lesson

Remind the children of the qualities that made Moses such a good leader, emphasizing his strength, his meekness and his unique relationship with God. He was a humble man who was more anxious to be the servant of God than to advance his own status. Many times the people of Israel provoked Moses, and over and over again he had pleaded their cause before God. Indeed, when the people were saved from extermination at Kadesh Barnea and turned back to wander in the wilderness, Moses had to share their suffering and punishment. Throughout the wanderings, he remained faithful to God and continued steadfastly teaching and guiding the people and showing them, by his own actions, how they should obey the law.

Show the children that he also made written records, which we can still read today, thousands of years later. Look at these together and point out that God chose Moses to write about the creation of the world, and record all the important things that happened up to his own day. He wrote down all the laws that God gave to the people, and the instructions for how they were to behave when they arrived in their new land.

In spite of Moses' powerful leadership, the majority of the people failed to develop his kind of faith in their God. They also lacked his vision and were preoccupied with immediate material needs. On one occasion, when they complained about the lack of water, Moses was provoked to indignation and prostrated himself before God. Once more God responded with patience and long-suffering, and gave his assurance that water would be provided from the rock. Recount the events leading to Moses striking the rock instead of speaking to it as instructed. It is not clear whether it was this action that displeased God so much or the fact that Moses said "shall we bring forth water?" claiming for himself and Aaron some of the credit, and demonstrating anger. Whichever it was, he had not done exactly as God had required and because of that he was told that he would not accompany the people of Israel into the promised land.

Picture the scene at the end of the forty years' journey as the new generation of Israel stood and watched the lonely figure of their great leader ascend Mount Nebo. This man had so often been called to commune with God on Mount Sinai, but this was to be his last climb. Moses knew that he would not enter the promised land, and he accepted that the God he worshipped was righteous and just. From the mountain top God showed him all the land. Although he was a hundred and twenty years old he was still fit and able to see clearly. Try to imagine what might have gone through his mind as he looked out over the Jordan valley and across to the Judean hills.

So Moses died and God buried him in a valley in the land of Moab. The Jews like to show people the places where their great men are buried, but no one knows where Moses was buried. The people mourned deeply the death of the one who had led them for so long and realized how much they had depended upon him. He was a very remarkable man, chosen by God for a special task. His education, early experiences, strong character and single-mindedness brought him close to God and fitted him for the difficult work of deliverer and teacher. Read together the tribute added by a commentator at the end of Deuteronomy (34:10-12).

Compare the old man, retiring after a job well-done, with the younger, vigorous, military leader, ready to undertake a new phase of leadership. As a young man, Joshua had taken part in the exodus and had experienced the dramatic events connected with the birth of his nation - the plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptians. Joshua had been made the captain of Israel's army soon after leaving Egypt. Moses had entrusted him with the task of choosing an army and then defeating the Amalekites, which he had done with great skill.

Only Joshua had the honour of going with Moses up Mount Sinai into the very presence of God to receive the tablets of the law, and we can see from this that God was willing to accept Joshua's participation, and an indication of esteem and respect that Moses had for him. They returned to find faithless Israel worshipping the golden calf. The memory of this experience would surely remain with Joshua all the days of his life.

The most outstanding indication of Joshua's wisdom and faith was seen in his favourable report when he and the other spies returned from Canaan. He and Caleb had no doubt that God could deliver the land into their hands, because they trusted him completely. God saw that Joshua was a man of spirit and he commanded Moses to appoint him his successor.

Try to get the children to discuss what makes a good leader. Point out that Joshua was trained in the army, that he was reliable, faithful to God's commands, courageous, commanded respect and was considered by God to be capable of helping to divide the promised land between the tribes of Israel. When God wanted a suitable man to lead the people of Israel into Canaan and conquer it, Joshua's qualities made him able to rise to this most demanding and important task. "Be strong and of good courage". God repeated these words many times to Joshua. He urgently needed that strength and encouragement for the tremendous challenge that lay before him. Read together Joshua 1:1-9. How thrilling it must have been for Joshua to receive God's direct assurance that he would be with him, and strengthen him throughout his life.

Joshua's name means "God is salvation", and for all Joshua's personal qualities of courage and military leadership it was faith in the Almighty which truly marked him out as the man who should take over from Moses.

Relevance to the children's lives

Some people are natural leaders; others prefer to be led. Perhaps you are a leader. How well do you lead and influence others? This is an important question, which needs careful thought. Or perhaps you are one who is led. Think about how far you should allow yourself to be led by others.

Worksheets

The message reads 'Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you.'

Prayer

Dear Lord God, thank you for Moses and Joshua who are such good examples to us. Please help us to accept discipline when we do wrong, and try to follow your guidance throughout our lives. Amen.

Memory verse

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of a good courage; be not frightened, neither be dismayed; for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9).