

1 Samuel 13:1-7 and 19-23; 14:1-23

Aim of Lesson

To show that Jonathan had more courage and faith than Saul, his father, and trusted that God would deliver the Israelites from their enemies.

Background study

Find out about the Philistines' constant threat to Israel, and their monopoly of iron weapons. Find maps showing the division of the land at that time, and the physical geography of the area.

Suggested outline of lesson

Introduce this lesson by asking the children to name the first king of Israel. Go on to talk about Saul, and explain that very soon after his coronation his shortcomings became apparent. Because he failed to obey God and to heed the advice of Samuel, the prophet, his people began to suffer at the hands of their enemies. Remind the children that God had said that they would prosper only as long as they kept to the laws and way of life that God had given them when he established them as a nation. Their king was subject to these laws, too, and had the responsibility of leading the people in the right way. This Saul failed to do.

At this point introduce Jonathan, the prince. He was a good man, obedient to God, loyal to his father and true to the people. Explain that because Saul's leadership had misdirected the people and displeased God, the Philistines were a continual threat to the Israelites who struggled in vain to subdue them. Show, by referring to maps, the territories occupied by the two sides. Describe the terrain of a mountain pass, with craggy rocks, sparse vegetation and steep escarpments, and ask the children whether they have visited such places. A picture of mountainous country will help them visualize the scene. In this rugged land Saul and his army had become very fearful of their Philistine neighbours, and they hid in caves and rocks, as guerrilla fighters do today. Convey the feeling of helplessness felt by the people of Israel, and the fearful indecision of Saul in the face of continuing Philistine attacks with their superior numbers and weapons of war. In this desperate situation Jonathan took matters into his own hands, without informing anyone of his plan or seeking the support of reinforcements. Read together chapter 14 verse 6, and emphasize Jonathan's confidence in the power of God to give victory in spite of seemingly overwhelming odds. This can be compared to David's trust in God's help as he approached Goliath.

Describe the cautious and dangerous approach of the two brave men, climbing the enemy's side of the jagged gorge, and build up the atmosphere of tension and apprehension. Despite the knowledge that their position was vulnerable, both men were dauntless because of their confidence that the Lord would work for them. Explain that Jonathan did not doubt God's aid, but sought sanction to proceed with the mission by asking for a sign. Having received a favourable answer, he pressed on unhesitatingly, his faithful armour bearer with him.

When news of the fighting reached the king, he assumed that a party of his soldiers must have left his camp and made an attack on the enemy. But a hasty search revealed that only Jonathan and his armour bearer were missing. At last the king was spurred into action, and he rallied the people. His remaining men, those who had retreated into hiding, and even those who had defected to the other side, converged to re-form the army of Israel. One brave act of faith resulted in a complete reversal of the Israelite position, and the Lord delivered Israel that day.

Relevance to the children's lives

Jonathan and his servant were alone and had something new and unpleasant to face. Have you ever been afraid when you have had to do something alone, or face something new, perhaps a change of school or moving to a new neighbourhood? Jonathan asked for God's help and went on, knowing that God was with him. Talk about how you could ask for God's help when you are worried about doing something on your own.

Worksheets

These should be self-explanatory.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we know you are very powerful and loving, so please help us to realize that we can do all things through your strength. Amen.

Memory verse

"It may be that the Lord will work for us; for nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few" (1 Samuel 14:6).