

Bible background

Exodus 13:17-22; Deuteronomy 8:1-9; Exodus 19 and 20

Aim of lesson

To help the children understand the experiences of the Israelites on their journey to Canaan, and the rules God gave them to help them live.

Preparation required

- (a) Find pictures of the mountains of Sinai and the surrounding area.
- (b) Make a shape for a 'pillar of cloud and fire', using cardboard or fabrics with one side white/grey and the other side red/orange. Collect and prepare small pieces of white/grey and red/orange fabric to be stuck on.
- (c) Prepare a memory game by sticking the worksheets onto plain card, then cutting the card into squares. Use the worksheet for each child in the class. (d) Take a large blanket and some washable glue.

Suggested outline of lesson

1. Help the children to stick the fabric pieces to the 'pillar of cloud and fire', and put it aside to dry.
2. Ask the children about their homes - do they live in houses, flats, or does anyone live in a tent? Would they like to live in a tent? Remind them of last week's lesson when they learnt about Moses leading the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. God had promised that he would take them safely to a new place to live, but until they got there they were to experience a very different kind of life from that they were used to. Discuss the differences with the children, drawing from their ideas of living as a 'nomad'.
3. Help the children to use chairs and a blanket to set up a tent for everyone to sit in. Encourage them to pretend they are an Israelite family (you could be a parent!) talking together about their experiences of a week of life in the wilderness. Feed in the information from the Bible record about food, drink, clothing, wild animals, insects, darkness, temperature, the responsibilities of caring for flocks and herds, etc. There may be some grumbling about this new kind of life and its difficulties! Emphasise the great promises God gave about the new land they were going to. Have one child outside the tent holding the 'pillar of cloud and fire' and discuss its significance with the children.
4. At this point you could get the child outside to begin to move, and the tent could be dismantled and folded up, and the children follow the 'cloud' to another part of the room where you have your pictures of Sinai. Settle the children around the 'cloud' and discuss the pictures with them.
5. Explain that this was the place God chose to meet Moses and give him some rules for how he wanted the Israelites to behave as his people. Discuss the idea of rules with the children, especially those with which they are familiar, such as safety rules of various kinds involving their own safety and the need to help others to be safe. God had to give the Israelites rules that would help people of all ages to live a clean and healthy life, and to care for each other and the things they owned in the same way as God cared for them.
6. Help the children to say the ten commandments with you. Use the cards prepared from the worksheet to play 'Memory'. The game is played as follows:
 - (a) Spread out the cards upside down on a flat surface.
 - (b) The children take turns to turn one card over and read out the caption, with help if necessary. Take the opportunity to discuss with the children the meaning of each.
 - (c) If the child already has the card, he/she puts it back upside down in the place it came from. If not, it is kept for that child's set.
7. The game ends when each child has collected a full set of ten cards, and the children should take their set of cards home with them.

Alternative activities

1. Use sets of the worksheet cards to play snap, pairs or lotto.
2. If you don't have room to make tents, as suggested in the lesson notes, try making a model of the Israelite camp. Use a large sheet of card, a cloth or a tray as a base. Tents can be made of folded paper or play dough. Animals can be made from play dough or you can use pictures stuck on to cardboard stands or toy animals. People can be made from pipe cleaners, card or play dough or you could use small toy figures. Add some crumpled paper, play dough or pebbles for rocks, plants, made from card or play dough and a pool of water, made from a piece of foil or a small amount of water in a shallow container). You can also make large pillars of fire and cloud by sticking coloured paper and cotton wool to a couple of cardboard stands.
3. If you have room, make tents as suggested in the lesson notes and extend the activity with dressing up and role play of domestic tasks.

Relevance to the children's lives

We live now in a very different way from the Israelites in the wilderness. Discuss the differences. Can God still be with us as he was with them? How does God protect and guide us? What can we do to help ourselves? God's basic rules for them and for us were explained by Jesus - to love God with our whole being, and to love one another as we love ourselves.

Prayer

Ask the children to imagine the sort of prayer they would make to God if they were in the Israelite situation, and build a prayer for today from each child's ideas.

Verse

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' Matthew 22:37.