

***Genesis 1; 2:1-7*****AIM OF LESSON**

To help make the children aware of the greatness of God's power and the wonder of creation, and to highlight the uniqueness of man as the climax of God's work.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Exodus 20:11; Psalms 8; 33:6-9; 90:2; 104; 148; Proverbs 8:22-31; Hebrews 11:3; 2 Peter 3:3-5.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Here is an ideal opportunity to explain the truth and beauty of creation. You may have studied the creation and may have views of their own; it is best not to raise controversial issues yourself, though you will need to be prepared with questions and doubts which the children may raise. That God is the Creator should be presented as the positive basis of Christian truth.

There was a time when the earth, as we know it today, did not exist. That which became the earth was a dark, empty waste, until God began to work on it. At the beginning of the lesson you should try to help the children imagine the kind of intense darkness in which nothing can be clearly defined, the formless mass of the earth, the vastness of space and the great power necessary to give to it shape, beauty and purpose.

You might start by talking to the group very quietly, creating the right atmosphere by the use of the voice. Ask the children to close their eyes and cover them with their hands. Prompt them to imagine that all is darkness and emptiness and that there is no light, no colour, no blue sky, no grass, no people, nothing living. Next ask the children to cover their ears, while still keeping their eyes closed, in order to try and appreciate that, at the same time, there was no sound. Let the children talk about the impression this creates. Go on to discuss what it is like on a really dark and misty night, trying to identify an ill-defined object such as a large building, which appears as a vague outline which cannot be distinguished from the darkness around it. This is as near as the children can get in imagination to the state described in Genesis 1:1, before the mighty power and energy of the Lord God formed the earth out of a shapeless mass.

Give the children a brief outline of each day's events in terms they can understand. You might prepare some simple illustrations to help the class recall the sequence. It is important to note that the first thing God did on **day one** was to cause the rotating earth to be lit by the light of his glory, three days before the sun was created. You should use the words "And God saw that it was good" at this point, and after describing each day's events.

In the account of creation, the element of water is very significant. Its arrangement occupied the **second day**. Explain that God arranged that water not only covered parts of the earth but was also present in the sky (cloud mass). Any children who have been on a sea voyage will be able to imagine the scene.

Emphasize the immense change that came about on the **third day**, with the emergence of the land and the creation of all plant life. At this point, involve the class in a description of a wide variety of shapes and colours of flowers and trees, and draw particular attention to the concept of the reproduction of plants by seeds "each according to its kind". Quote examples from the children's own experiences.

In describing the events of **day four**, convey in some measure the part played by the sun and moon in controlling our times, seasons and tides. Mention also the importance of light and warmth, without which nothing can grow. The earth was now, therefore, prepared to accommodate living creatures, God having provided air, water, light, warmth and food.

In recalling the creation of the birds, insects and all marine life on **day five**, impress upon the children the astounding variety of their size, form and colour, with the aid of pictures. Encourage the children to express their appreciation of this beauty by giving examples from their own experience.

Extend the discussion to the creation of the animals on the **sixth** day and ask the children to name different kinds, i.e., small, large, graceful, clumsy, plain and patterned, etc. Reiterate the important fact that all creatures were provided with the means of reproducing themselves "according to their kinds", so that creation became a continuing process. Remind the children of the contrast between the procreation void and the transformed scene on the sixth day. The earth was now bright, beautiful, alive and full of sound, scent, texture and colour. God surveyed the results of his creative work and "saw that it was good".

The children will recall, if questioned, that the picture was not yet complete; the formation of man was to mark the climax of the creation. Give a clear but sensitive account of the means by which God made Adam, and brought him to life. Point out the unique characteristics of this being, whom God blessed with the five senses that enabled him to appreciate the beauty around him. He was also given the power of intelligence and reason, by which he could recognize the hand of God in all he saw, and respond by praising him. To man was given authority over all other living things. God saw how "very good" was all that he had made.

Although the sixth day is the climax, the **seventh** is very significant. God rested from his work and decreed the seventh day to be a "holy day", so setting a wise example which men would later be instructed to follow.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

When you look at the wonderful things that God has made, do they make you ask what God is like? What does creation tell us of the character of God? What kind of God do you think made our world? (Great, powerful, wise, life-giving, good, active, caring). Since we are created by God, what should we feel towards him?

## **WORKSHEETS**

The code reads 'On the seventh day God rested'.

## **PRAYER**

We thank you and praise you, Lord God, for making the world so beautiful, and for making us so that we can enjoy it. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

"And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31).

***Genesis 2:8-25; 3*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how disobedience brought punishment, and how God in his mercy made a great promise.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:21-23; James 1:14-15; 1 John 2:15-17. Study the location of Eden, and consider the perfection that prevailed.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Recall the previous lesson by discussing with the children Adam and his environment. Create an impression of the beautiful and luxuriant garden in which peace and happiness reigned and involve the children in a discussion about the birds, animals, flowers, trees and fruit that abounded there. All the living creatures came freely and fearlessly to Adam. His was the pleasure of naming them all, and his the responsibility for caring for them and for the garden. There was but one thing forbidden to Adam - the fruit of a particular tree.

Ask the children how Adam might have felt, and try and help them to appreciate the joy and pleasure of living in the garden but also to recognize his loneliness. Something was lacking - he needed another human being with whom he could share his life. God was sensitive to Adam's need and created a woman. The unique method of her creation should be described simply, the significance being that she was part of him, and their close affinity was a great blessing, which was to foreshadow God's ordinance of marriage. How happy Adam must have been when he woke to find her standing by him. Just as the animals needed no clothes, so also Adam and Eve (as he was later to call her) were naked and felt no embarrassment. Eve his wife could share his experiences, talk with him, and give him the companionship he needed. Adam and Eve were superior to the animals, for they alone were capable of thinking, making decisions, developing attitudes, expressing voluntary praise, and worshipping their Creator. The pleasure of working in the garden was increased now that it was shared. The work was not hard because the ground was fertile. There were no weeds or diseases, and Adam and Eve benefited from their work, eating the food they produced. God had made it clear to them both that they could eat everything, except for the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They were warned that if they disobeyed, the punishment would be death.

Describe what took place when first Eve, and then Adam, was tempted. Ask the children, at the appropriate point, what Eve's response should have been to the serpent's suggestion. As the story proceeds, ask the children once more what Adam's response should have been when Eve brought the fruit to him. Emphasize that the serpent lied to them and questioned their faith in God's wisdom and goodness. His suggestion appealed to them on three counts: they had seen that the fruit was desirable, they realized that it would be good to eat, and they were attracted to the idea of becoming like God.

Having disobeyed God, the feelings of Adam and Eve underwent an immediate change. The fruit itself had no special, harmful properties; it was the conscious act of disobedience that desecrated them. They knew they had done wrong and felt very guilty. Their shame led to embarrassment and fear. Their first reaction was to cover themselves, as if that might hide their sin. So they made clothes by sewing together large, strong fig leaves. On becoming aware of God's presence, they felt they could

not face him and endeavoured to hide. Convey their replies to God by putting their excuses into modern idiom, showing how immediately each put the blame elsewhere. Discuss with the children how wrong their attitude was, and ask them what should have been their response to God's challenge.

Put into plain words the punishments meted out by God, upon the serpent, upon Eve, upon Adam, and the curse that was put on the earth. Although Adam and Eve deserved to die for what they had done, God was merciful, and the sentence was not carried out immediately. They were given time to raise a family and had the opportunity to live more faithfully. However, life was never to be the same again. They were banned from the beautiful garden, which was guarded by angels and a flaming sword, in order to prevent them returning and eating the fruit of the tree of life. Outside the garden, the weeds and rough ground made the work of producing food a constant struggle. For the first time animals were killed so that their skins could be used to make clothing. The sense of shame continued, and Adam and Eve were to know pain and sorrow. However, verse 15 leads us to believe that there is still hope for mankind and that one day someone will come who, having destroyed sin, will restore the world to what God intended when he created it.

### RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES

Every day we have a choice, to do right or wrong. The idea of doing wrong things can come from our own thoughts, or from the suggestions of other people. Can you think of examples of things we are tempted to do, but which we have been told are wrong? What can we learn from Adam and Eve's wrong actions about the way to deal with temptation? What should we do when we know we have done wrong?

### WORKSHEETS

The solution to the puzzle is:

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### PRAYER

Dear Lord God, help us to see the difference between right and wrong, and help us to choose the right way to behave. Amen.

### MEMORY VERSE

"... of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Genesis 2:17).

***Genesis 6:5-22*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show Noah's great faith, demonstrated in obeying God in a world filled with wickedness.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Genesis 5:28-32; Matthew 24:37-39 and 42; Hebrew 11:7; 2 Peter 2:5 and 9. Consult recommended books for factual details.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

This lesson will probably be very familiar to the children, and they will be eager to contribute to the telling of the story. This should be encouraged, because it will enliven the lesson and give opportunity for correcting any misunderstandings. However, the facts and details of the narrative are of less importance than the message of salvation. The important thing is to explain the purpose of the ark - to save people who believed and trusted God absolutely - and to demonstrate that God stands for goodness and will not tolerate evil. This is a lesson that provides you with the opportunity to show the children how God reacts to the behaviour of people. Show how God was distressed to see the wickedness of the world and the misuse of his creation.

Explain to the children that many years had elapsed since God had created the world. People had become richer, more civilized, and had built cities; but in so doing had ignored God and pleased only themselves. Their selfishness had led to quarrelling and violence, and this grieved God. Sin had spread like a terrible disease and the people had become so wicked that God decided to destroy them all.

There was one man, however, who pleased God, and whom God chose to save. Try to impress upon the children the strength of character of Noah who, although all his neighbours behaved immorally, remained good and steadfast in his obedience to God. In fact his relationship with God was such a close one that it is said "Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:9). This made him different from those around him, and over the years he had learned to ignore the temptations and the jibes of his contemporaries. Because Noah loved God, he was also distressed by the corrupt state of the world and when God revealed to him his plan of destruction Noah did not argue. He listened carefully to the detailed instructions, and without doubt or hesitation, set himself the task of carrying them out.

Emphasize the strength of Noah's faith and courage in the face of continuous ridicule from many people over many years. How the people must have laughed and mocked when they saw him building a huge boat miles from the sea. Patiently he would have tried to warn people of the judgements that were to come, but no one believed him. In order to bring the characters to life, suggest the exchanges which might have taken place. He was described as a "preacher of righteousness", but nobody really listened. It seems that the only people who shared his confidence in the coming flood were his wife, his three sons and their wives.

Paint a verbal picture of the immense preparation and continuous hard work that was involved in felling the timber, allowing it to season, cutting it to size, assembling and waterproofing it. There were to be three decks with a large number of compartments or small rooms, and a (no doubt large) door.

Gradually the huge vessel began to take shape. As it grew daily there was evidence that Noah surely believed what he was preaching. He openly demonstrated his faith in God.

You should talk a little about the dimensions of the ark. Try to relate its size to something within the children's experience, e.g. one-and-a-half times the length of a football pitch, and one third as wide, and twice the height of an average two-storey house. The enormity both of the vessel and of the task of building it will impress the children. The latter included not only the construction of the ark but the organization of accommodation for themselves and the animals, with adequate supplies of food which were to sustain them for more than a year. The important thing, however, is that Noah witnessed and obeyed.

This lesson is suitable for dramatization, and this can be used as a means of reinforcing the lesson.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Noah had learned not to be upset by people who mocked him for being different. They were being cruel, but he did not allow their cruelty to hurt him. He knew for certain that he was doing the right thing, so what foolish people said did not matter to him, and he probably felt sorry for them. Can we learn a lesson from this?

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, thank you for the example of Noah. Help us to show our faith so that we will be known as people who believe in you. Help us not to be upset when people tease us unkindly. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:9).

***Genesis 7; 8; 9:1-17*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show the judgements of God on the wicked and his mercy towards those who love and obey him.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Isaiah 54:9; Luke 17:26-27; 2 Peter 3:3-13. Find a map showing the position of Ararat, and refer to commentaries on the flood.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Refresh the children's memory regarding the preparation and work of building the ark and the steady persistence of Noah and his family in carrying out God's detailed instructions, despite the incredulous taunts of men, women and children. Ask the class to imagine the completed ark standing on dry land, and miles from the nearest stretch of water. It was so massive as to be awe-inspiring and to look, to the unbelievers, rather ridiculous. Rainfall as such had perhaps not been experienced before (see Genesis 2:5-6).

Then God spoke to Noah again, and made it clear that the time had come to put an end to man's wickedness. He outlined his plan to save all his creatures: Noah was to assemble a male and female of every type of animal, bird and insect, and seven pairs of certain animals which God had designated (the significance of this differentiation can be omitted), and bring them into the ark. Birds and animals still migrate in a seemingly miraculous way and perhaps it was this ability that God used to bring the animals to Noah at the right time. Imagine how the crowds would assemble and the news spread when vast numbers of creatures, from a tiny spider to a great elephant, headed unerringly for the ark. For seven days the procession continued - an incredible sight. How busy Noah and his family must have been, placing this wide variety of living things in their appropriate places. Ask the children what the reaction of the onlookers might have been. Did they laugh heartily - or nervously? Were they still secure in their indifference? At what point did they begin to feel uneasy?

On the seventh day, the loading completed, God shut the door of the ark and sealed it. Read together chapter 7, verse 16. It was now too late for anyone else to enter. On that very day, the storm clouds gathered, and water began to fall from the sky. But not only did it rain continuously. Cataclysmic events released millions of gallons of water from subterranean reservoirs, and the level of water rose rapidly, becoming increasingly turbulent. The great bulk of the ark stirred, then floated and was carried away by a swirling tide. Although it is important to make it clear that the judgement of God came on the people because of their wickedness, the horrific nature of the situation, as they rushed to escape to higher ground, should not be dwelt upon nor described too graphically. Concentrate rather on the experience of Noah and his family.

In order to convey the period of time and the sequence of events, it is suggested that a diary or calendar be introduced, either of your own making or a manufactured one marked for the purpose. An example is given on the next page. Obviously present-day months are not accurate equivalents, but will serve the purpose of explaining the duration of the flood to the children in a way they can understand. (If the children find this detail interesting, you may like to tell them that the months were probably lunar months, and Noah would count the new moons to measure the passage of time. The

150 days of Genesis 7:24 take us from the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the second month to the 17<sup>th</sup> of the seventh – five thirty-day months).

Describe the regeneration of the earth as Noah and his family, with all the living creatures, emerged into a cleansed world. Emphasize Noah’s act of worship and God’s blessing and covenant, the guarantee of which is still visible today.

**RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN’S LIVES**

Every time we see a rainbow it should remind us of God’s promise and his faithfulness in keeping all the promises he makes. Noah was confident that God would bring him safely through the terrible experience of the flood, and when it was over his first thought was to thank God. When we realize we have escaped great danger or trouble, what should we do?

**WORKSHEETS**

The code reads ‘Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood’.

The people leaving the tower of Babel are saying ‘I’m getting away from here’, ‘How amazing’, ‘I don’t understand this’, ‘Let’s find somewhere else to live’, and ‘I think everyone has gone mad’.

**PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, thank you for saving Noah and his family from the great flood. Help us to remember that if we put our trust in you, we too shall be cared for, no matter what may happen. Amen.

**MEMORY VERSE**

“While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease” (Genesis 8:22).

**CHRONOLOGY OF THE FLOOD**

<b>Date</b>	<b>‘Equivalent’</b>	<b>Events</b>	<b>Genesis</b>
1st month	January	Building completed; ark stocked	7:5
2nd month	February		
10 <sup>th</sup>		Animals began to enter	7:8
17 <sup>th</sup>		Noah entered ark; door shut; rain began	7:9
3rd month	March	40 DAYS CONTINUOUS RAIN	7:17
27 <sup>th</sup>		Mountains covered	
	April		
	May	EARTH COVERED FOR 5 MONTHS	7:24
	June		
7th month	July		
17 <sup>th</sup>		Water began to decrease; ark rested (Ararat)	8:3
	August	FLOOD WATERS RECEDE	



	September		
10th month	October		
1 <sup>st</sup>		Mountain tops seen	8:5
11th month	November		
11 <sup>th</sup>		Raven and dove sent out; dove returned	8:7-9
18 <sup>th</sup>		Dove sent again; returned with leaf	8:10-11
25 <sup>th</sup>		Dove flew away	8:12
	December	LAND UNCOVERED	
1st month	January		
1 <sup>st</sup>		Part of roof removed; earth free of water	8:13
2nd month	February		
27 <sup>th</sup>		Earth dry and firm; ark vacated	8:14-16

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## ABRAM CALLED BY GOD

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***Genesis 11:27-32; 12:1-9; 13:2-18***

### AIM OF LESSON

To show that Abram had such faith in God's promises that he was prepared to leave his home and go wherever God led him.

### BACKGROUND STUDY

Hebrews 11:8-10. Find information about the ancient civilization of Ur, customs, worship, houses, etc. Find a map of the journey.

### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Talk about promises and their importance. Ask the children whether they have made any promises, and whether they have kept them. Have others made promises to them? Discuss people's feelings when promises made to them are broken. Point out that promises are made to be kept and should be reliable.

Now build a picture of Abram's life in Ur. Archaeologists have established that Ur was a cultured, civilized and wealthy city where people learned to read and write, to trade and to build. Outside the city walls lived the shepherds with their tents, flocks of sheep and numerous camels, scattered across the plain. City-dwellers and herdsman alike worshipped the moon. Nearby would be the ziggurat - a huge artificially constructed 'mountain' with a stairway leading to the top where the altar, surrounded by blue tiles to represent the sky, was dedicated to the moon god. Such idolatry was abhorrent to God,

but in that city he saw one man whom he knew would respond to his call. When God comes into a man's life many things change, and this was the case with Abram. God commanded that Abram should leave Ur, and he made some promises to him dependent upon his obedience. Let the children find these in chapter 12, verses 1 to 3. Each one can be written on a chart as it is discovered:

1. I will make you a great nation
2. I will bless you and make your name great
3. I will bless those who bless you and curse him that curses you
4. In you shall all families (nations) of the earth be blessed.

Help the children to realize that Abram, Sarai and Lot were real people with feelings of sadness and joy, anxiety and excitement. Lead them to imagine what it must have been like for the family to leave the security and comforts of the city and everything familiar, and venture into the unknown and a completely new way of life.

Discuss the preparations for the journey and the mode of travel. With the aid of a map, show the route they took, through part of the fertile crescent, close to the Euphrates. Abram was so convinced that he was doing the right thing that he persuaded his father, Terah, to go with him, even though Terah was an old man and (as events were to show) nearing the end of his life.

At this point introduce the names of Abram's wife and nephew. The younger children will find it easier to understand that Abram was Lot's uncle than that Lot was Abram's nephew. The journey would be long and arduous (try to estimate the duration), and perhaps fraught with danger, but they persevered, confident of God's guiding hand.

On the way they came to Haran, another city in the fertile plains, where they stayed for several years and prospered. Here Terah died, and then the journey recommenced. The text suggests that God's call was reiterated and that, when the family set out once more, they took with them many servants and many possessions.

Describe how Abram, on arrival in the promised land, showed his belief in and gratitude towards the one God by building an altar for the purpose of sacrifice and worship. It is suggested that the incident in Egypt is omitted so as not to detract from the aim of the lesson, though you may wish to include it.

Help the children to imagine Abram alone on the hilltop. From such a place he could enjoy a panoramic view of the country on every side. Consider Abram's feelings as he stood looking over the land that was promised to him and his children. Dwell upon the invitation to explore the land and upon the repeated and expanded promises, adding the new points to the list:

5. I will give all this land to you and your descendants for ever
6. Your descendants will be so numerous, it will be impossible to count them

Emphasise to the children the importance of these promises to Abram and Sarah, and to all the Jewish people.

Make it clear that, although Abram was now living in Canaan, ownership of the land was not yet his and he continued to live a nomadic existence. In thankfulness for God's favour, Abram again built an altar and worshipped the Lord. He was grateful for having been called out of Ur and Haran and brought to this special land where he could worship the true God in peace.

## RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES

Because he trusted God, Abram left his home at God's command, without even knowing where he was to go. Do people in authority - our parents, teachers, the police, and others - instruct us to do things without always telling us the reason why? Should we readily obey such instructions? Why? (Try to evoke a response such as, "because we *trust* the people who give the instructions".)

## WORKSHEETS

The hidden sentences are 'God always keeps his promises' and 'Always keep your promise too'.

## PRAYER

Dear Lord God, please help us to love you more than all our possessions, and to trust in the promises you have made. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

"The Lord said to Abram ... 'Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you'." (Genesis 13:14 and 17).

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## ABRAM - LOT AND HIS WIFE

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***Genesis 13:1-13; 18:16-33; 19:1-3 and 15-29***

### AIM OF LESSON

To learn from the unselfishness and faith of Abram, and from Lot's experiences, that to choose the easy way can often lead to other problems and difficulties.

### BACKGROUND STUDY

Matthew 16:26-27; Luke 17:28-29; Colossians 3:12-13; 2 Peter 2:6-8. Look up geographical and archaeological details about the cities of the plain.

### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Begin the lesson by talking about arguments and quarrels. Move on from particular instances that some of the class may be willing to describe (such as harsh words about the biggest piece of cake, or whose turn it is to go first) to general principles. Establish that quarrels are caused by jealousy, greed or selfishness.

Describe and compare the two main characters in this lesson, Abram and Lot, being careful not to be too scathing about Lot. You should always have at the back of your mind, as you talk about Abram's nephew, what the New Testament judgement is. Lot, a member of Abram's family and treated as a son in the household, would have been taught Abram's beliefs and values. He would know of the reasons for leaving their old home. He had grown rich and now had his own workers, flocks and family to care for.

Abram had also become very rich, and as the two men moved about Canaan it became increasingly difficult to find sufficient pasture and water in one place for the combined flocks. The searing heat and the shortage of water led to frayed tempers and bitterness among the herdsman. Quarrels and fighting broke out as each group tried to secure adequate supplies for their respective flocks. Both groups became selfish, jealous and short-sighted, concerned only with the immediate needs.

When Abram heard of the quarrelling, he said that it must stop. He approached Lot to try to settle the matter and suggested that they should separate, since all the land was open to them. As head of the tribe, Abram had the right to make the first choice, but he gave Lot the privilege. The Jordan valley was fertile, lush and inviting, the ideal place for rearing flocks and herds - Lot couldn't resist it. Perhaps he was also attracted to the nearby towns, wanting to share their social life and security. Maybe he was impetuous, too, inconsiderate of the guidance, training and protection he had received for so many years. Was it Lot's impatience for possession as he looked at this "promised land" which caused him to be blind to the possible dangers? Note the ominous tone of chapter 13, verse 13. Lot did not foresee that the evil of Sodom would affect his life so greatly and lead to distressing circumstances. Ask the children to consider the alternatives which faced Lot, and to say what choice they would have made and for what reasons. An understanding of Lot's possible motives will help the children to appreciate more readily the point of the lesson.

Abram, the peacemaker, accepted Lot's choice without question and prepared, as he had promised, to go in the opposite direction. Remind the children that it was on this occasion that God renewed his promise to give Abram all the land. Abram, for his part, confirmed his trust in the Lord and worshipped, building an altar in the new area to which he moved.

Discuss the effects of Lot's choice upon the two men. Whose life was richer as a result? Lot soon discovered that his choice brought him many anxieties and problems. He was surrounded by people whose way of living was evil and objectionable and it distressed him greatly. The apparently easy way of comfort and wealth seemed important when he made the choice but he found that peace of mind and happiness, which could not be bought, were far more important. His family was influenced by their neighbours and, whilst he prospered, his children grew to be like the violent, godless people of the city. Abram, whilst keeping clear of the cities, nevertheless was compassionate towards the people. Even when he knew of the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, he pleaded God's mercy for the sake of those who were righteous.

When the warning came, Lot's own family was divided. Although he urged them to leave, only his wife and two daughters left with him, and then only under protest. The sons-in-law stayed behind, having no faith in Lot's prediction. His wife, too, was heedless of the instructions they had been given and, because of her disobedience, was destroyed. Describe the enormity of the catastrophe, probably of seismic origin. No doubt God was using natural forces to bring about his will.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

When you listen to the news, or hear what is happening day by day in the big cities, can you think of any ways in which people today might be like those of Lot's time? Are they violent? Do they use unpleasant speech, and behave badly towards others? Are people too greedy for money? How can we stop ourselves becoming like this? What can we learn from Lot's mistake?

## **WORKSHEETS**

The mixed up words are 'IMPATIENT' AND 'UNSELFISH'.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, in our daily lives, please give us the strength and courage not to join in with unpleasant talk or bad behaviour, but to please you in all we say and do. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

“For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?” (Matthew 16:26).

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## **ABRAHAM’S FAMILY - THE PROMISE OF A SON**

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**7**

***Genesis 17; 18:1-15; 21:1-8***

### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show how Abraham was prepared to believe God, even when God’s promise seemed impossible.

### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Romans 4:16-24; Hebrews 11:11-12; 13:2.

### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Introduce the lesson by discussing the promises that God had made to Abram, pointing out what had already been fulfilled and what was still to come. Make sure the children understand that the promise concerning the great nation that was to come from Abram necessitated the birth of an heir. Tell the children that Abram and Sarai had now been in Canaan many years, were very old (older than the scholars’ own grandparents) and they had no children. Make the point that women do not usually have babies beyond the age of about fifty. Explain that this is all part of God’s plan; that parents should be strong and able to care and provide for their children until they grow up. By now Abram and Sarai were well aware that it would no longer be possible for them to become parents.

However, God again repeated this remarkable promise: “You shall be the father of a multitude of nations”. Read God’s words aloud to the children (17:4-8). Explain that Bible names have particular meanings and that Abram is formed from two Hebrew words, meaning “exalted father”. To confirm the promise he had made, God now changed his name to Abraham, which means “father of a multitude”. Sara’s name was also changed to Sarah, which means “princess”, a title of honour for “a mother of nations”. Abraham’s immediate reaction was one of incredulity, because of their great age, but the angel went on to specify that Sarah would indeed give birth to a son the following year, and indicated that he should be called Isaac, which means laughter - showing the joy he would bring to his parents.

Regarding the rite of circumcision introduced in this chapter, whether this is mentioned at all depends on whether you feel able to discuss it easily, whether the composition of the class is such as to accept it naturally, or whether questions arise which require straight answers. Should you find it appropriate to deal with the subject, it should be explained briefly, and in a matter-of-fact manner.

In describing the events of chapter 18, make full use of the opportunity to present a visual picture of the tent: Abraham seated at the opening, the burning heat of the midday sun, the shade of the oak

trees, Sarah attending to her work in the tent, and the sight of three weary travellers approaching. Convey the busyness of the old couple and of the servants in generously providing for the needs of these total strangers. Explain that it was the custom in those times to offer hospitality to travellers in need of rest and refreshment.

Something the men said to Abraham made him realize they were no ordinary travellers. Help the children to understand something of the surprise that Abraham felt when these “men” gave him a message from God, and in so doing revealed that they were angels. Use this occasion to demonstrate that angels are not necessarily as they are commonly depicted by artists (i.e. ephemeral creatures with wings) but have often appeared as ordinary men. The writer to the Hebrews (Hebrew 13:2) refers to this incident, to commend Abraham’s kindness, and to use it as an example of how believers should behave.

The messengers seemed particularly concerned to confirm to Sarah herself what God had already promised Abraham - that she should give birth to a son within a year. Later she was ashamed of her disbelief, for the angel had reminded them that nothing is too hard for God, who is the giver of all life. Refer to Romans 4, verses 20 and 21 to confirm Abraham’s trusting acceptance of this assurance.

Ask the children to imagine the happiness shared by this childless couple when Sarah discovered that she was indeed expecting a baby as promised. Build up the feelings of excitement and expectancy. Describe the household busy with the preparations for this great event, the birth of the child wanted so desperately for such a long time. What an appropriate name Isaac was. Sarah had laughed at the prospect of becoming a mother but now she could laugh with the pure joy of fulfilment and motherhood.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN’S LIVES**

How did God prove, in this story, that he can do the impossible? Why wasn’t it impossible for God? Abraham learned never to doubt God. Can we learn from this story how important it is to believe that God means everything he says?

### **WORKSHEETS**

The code reads ‘Is anything too hard for the Lord?’

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we praise you for your power, knowing that nothing is impossible for you. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

“ is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Genesis 18:14). “For with God nothing will be impossible.” (Luke 1:37).

***Genesis 22:1-19*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how Abraham's faith withstood a severe test. He was prepared to obey God's instructions without question.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Galatians 3:6-9; Hebrews 11:17-19; James 2:21-23. Find a map of Canaan in patriarchal times, showing the location of Moriah.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Talk about the childhood of Isaac who grew up under the care of loving and watchful parents. Contrast Isaac's way of life with that of children these days, pointing out his unique position in the household, his aged parents, and his nomadic existence. His family lived in tents, travelling on camels or donkeys, tending flocks and having no experience of modern housing, schooling, transport, entertainment or technology. Picture father and son together, with the still very active Abraham teaching Isaac about God, about God's promises and his own special place in God's plan, and at the same time passing on to him all his skill and knowledge as a master herdsman. The bond between them strengthened.

By the time he reached manhood, Isaac had developed physically, mentally and spiritually, and was very close to his father. Abraham must have been content, and confident that God's plan was being worked out. His son, whom he loved, was to continue with God's work for he (Abraham) soon must die.

Having painted an idyllic picture of the life they were leading, describe the shock to Abraham when one day he received a directive from God. Read the words of chapter 22 verse 2 together in class and make clear to the children what was meant by them. What was Abraham to think? What was he to do? God had given him this son in his old age for the express purpose of continuing the line and had stated specifically that through him the family would increase. Abraham would be perplexed. However, read together the subsequent verse, emphasizing the wonder of Abraham's firm resolve to do God's will. He never doubted God's goodness and wisdom.

Describe the quiet yet urgent preparations for a long journey being made in the camp whilst it was still dark. Provisions would have to be packed by the two servants and loaded on the donkey, together with a supply of kindling wood. Without disturbing the others, the party of four set out from Beersheba, northwards towards Mount Moriah. It would be necessary to camp out in the open each night, and possibly to rest in the shade during the hottest part of the day. Speculate about the thoughts that might have run through Abraham's mind during the three days' journey. His apprehension must have increased as they came within sight of the appointed place and, having instructed the servants to wait for them, the two of them went on alone. Isaac, the strong dutiful son, carried the heavy bundle of wood, while the old and resolute Abraham held the other necessary items.

Bring out the poignancy of Isaac's question, which must have momentarily disconcerted Abraham. But his quiet and wise reply provided the necessary reassurance and revealed his continued trust. It would appear that up to this point Isaac was unaware of his father's intention, but there was no mistaking the plan when the final preparations for the sacrifice were made. It tells us a great deal

about the character of Isaac that he allowed himself to be bound and was prepared to obey his father even at the expense of his own life. Build up to the climax of the story, always conscious of the traumatic nature of the incident and the sensitivity of children. Do not detract from Abraham's complete readiness to make the sacrifice, for it was only at the eleventh hour that his hand was stayed.

Having built up the tension to this point, the children should feel relief that Isaac's life was spared. (We know that Abraham believed that, were Isaac to die, God could raise him up again). How joyfully and with what feeling of thanksgiving would Abraham have offered the captive ram. After worshipping at the altar, he named the place "The Lord will provide", which testifies to the whole point of the lesson and demonstrates the depth of Abraham's understanding of God's purpose. Abraham had been tested and had proved himself worthy of God's favour. An angel now expressed God's approval and again reiterated the promise of the everlasting inheritance.

How different would be the homeward journey from the heavy-hearted outgoing one. The bond between father and son would be even closer, and Isaac would have learned from the powerful demonstration of Abraham's faith and God's faithfulness that he, too, must fear and trust the Almighty.

Besides being true, the story is also a picture prophecy of another incident, which was to happen hundreds of years later, when another only son beloved of his Father showed complete obedience to his Father, carried wood on his back to an appointed hill and was sacrificed. On that occasion the son, Jesus, did die. Help the class to try and recognize the parallels between the two accounts. Jesus made the supreme sacrifice in obedience to God, to give hope of live everlasting to the world. He was then raised to life again and united with his Father.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Abraham knew what God wanted him to do. What God asked of him was very difficult, but he was ready to do it. Are we asked to do difficult things for God? What might these things be? (Where children are not forthcoming, you should make suggestions for discussion such as owning up and facing punishment, doing right when others are doing wrong, forgiving someone who has wronged or hurt us, forgoing events which could clash with Sunday School, etc.)

### **WORKSHEETS**

The letters on the altar make the sentence 'Abraham trusted God'.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, thank you for the example of Abraham. Help us to have the faith that he had, so that we will be obedient to you commands. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you" (Genesis 22:16-17).



**Genesis 24****AIM OF LESSON**

To show the wisdom of Abraham, the providence of God and the trustworthiness of Eliezer in choosing a wife for Isaac.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Genesis 15:2; Genesis 23; Proverbs 18:22; Proverbs 19:14.

Study the wedding customs of the time, the route of Eliezer's journey and the importance of wells in village life.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Talk to the class about friendship. Discuss what makes a friend, drawing out the value of companionship, trust, interest in the same things, similar ideas and values, and reliability. Friends should be selected with care. Go on to point out how much more important it is that a wife or a husband is carefully chosen.

Abraham was growing old and he knew how important it was that the heir of God's promises should have a good wife who would share his hopes and ideals. He was aware that God would not approve of a Canaanite wife for his son. The local people did not share his faith in the one true God and behaved in ways that were not acceptable. Children will find it interesting and fascinating to learn that it was the parents' duty to choose marriage partners for their sons and daughters. In the absence of Sarah, who was now dead and who was very sadly missed, Abraham felt it incumbent upon him to make arrangements for Isaac to be married. As in all things, Abraham sought God's help and believed that God would help him.

Remind the children that Abraham was a very wealthy man and in command of a number of servants. The chief of these was Eliezer whom Abraham knew to be a trustworthy, God-fearing man. Abraham took him into his confidence and enlisted his support, insisting upon his solemn promise to carry out his wishes. It would appear that the placing of the hand under the thigh made the vow binding. Abraham assured Eliezer that the matter was in God's hands and that he was merely the instrument to accomplish God's will.

At this point in the story, having divulged Abraham's instructions to choose a wife from his family in the land where he used to live, ask the children by way of revision where this might be. Use a map to reinforce the answer. Describe the preparations for the journey, the animals being loaded with provisions and gifts, and then the departure of the caravan of ten camels. The journey would be long and tiring with many overnight stops at villages or oases. Describe Eliezer's arrival, just as the sun was going down outside the city of Nahor. It was during this cool part of the day that the young women of the city came out to the well to draw water. As he watched the familiar scene, he wondered how he would know which one God had chosen. He prayed for God's guidance and asked for a sign. Ever aware that kindness would be a quality required in the one he was seeking, he realized that he would recognize her in the response he received to his request for refreshment. This surely reveals the profound influence of Abraham upon his servant.

Help the children to picture the scene in their mind's eye and, in describing the meeting, show how Rebekah was not only young and beautiful but kind, generous and alive with enthusiasm. Once again we see the hospitality offered to travellers, in her assurance that he would be welcome in her father's house. Thankfully, Eliezer praised God for blessing his mission. He had been guided to the right woman for she was related to his master (the granddaughter of Abraham's brother Nahor). Narrate the eager recital by Eliezer of the fortunes of his master, and the purpose of his visit. Many questions would be asked and answered, and Bethuel's family would recognize that God's influence was at work. Because of this they had no hesitation in agreeing that Rebekah should go with him.

Now focus on Rebekah as she made her own decision to go to Canaan without delay. Stress what it must have been like to leave home, probably for ever, to promise to marry a man she had never seen, and to go and live in a strange land many miles away. Her preparations were hurried, servant girls were chosen to accompany her, and finally at the moment of departure she received the blessing of her fond parents. Contemplate the thoughts that would pass through her mind as she made the journey to Canaan, and ask the class to suggest what things Eliezer would tell her on the way. The story has a romantic and happy ending which the children will enjoy. God had blessed Eliezer in his choice, and the couple in their devotion to each other. However, this marriage which began so well was to undergo severe trials.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

The story shows us that relationships between people are important to God. Many lives have been ruined by bad friendships. What sort of friends should we choose, if we wish to please God? Do we think about the friends we have and ask ourselves whether we have chosen well?

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, thank you for the happy story of Isaac and Rebekah. We know you are interested in our lives, so we pray that you will guide our choice of friends. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"I am the God of Abraham your father; fear not, for I am with you and will bless you" (Genesis 26:24).

***Genesis 25:19-34; 27*****AIM OF LESSON**

To contrast the characters of Jacob and Esau. To show how deception caused hatred and unhappiness in the lives of several people, and divided a home.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Study the nature of the domestic and social life of the times.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

The picture of family life, which is the setting for this story, must be drawn in a manner readily recognized by the children as having a counterpart in their own experience. The strength of a family and its happiness, rest upon loyalty, honesty and truthfulness among its members. Any favouritism, jealousy or deception brings unhappiness and the ultimate break-up of the family.

Remind the children of the happy marriage of Isaac and Rebekah marred only by the sadness of having no children for twenty years. Faithful Isaac prayed to God about this and his prayer was answered. Rebekah soon knew that she was to have a baby. She experienced more than the usual sensation of kicking and, when she talked to God about her discomfort, she was told that she was to have not one but two babies - twin boys, both of whom would have large families. God told her that he had already chosen the younger boy to be Isaac's heir, contrary to tradition.

From their birth, it was obvious that the boys had distinctly different personalities. Contrast the lifestyles that each boy chose for himself, and describe the different characteristics and outlooks which influenced their choice. Point out also the response of the two parents to their sons, the one favouring the vigorous Esau, and the other the quiet Jacob. Enliven the story by filling in details of the way of life of these nomadic people.

In describing the incident of the selling of the birthright, show how desperately tired Esau would have been after a hard period of hunting, which had probably taken him many days' journey from home. His tiredness was exceeded only by his ravenous hunger. These, together with his impulsive nature, led him to pay an unreasonable price to gratify his immediate needs - a price which gave a moment's satisfaction followed by a lifetime's regret. Explain the meaning of the word "birthright" and the custom of giving the entire family inheritance to the eldest son. All this Esau had foregone.

Show how from that time onward there was no longer harmony in this family. There was hatred and jealousy between the brothers, and Isaac and Rebekah were driven by their favouritism to act in opposition to each other. Rebekah loved Jacob so much more than Esau and was so ambitious for him that she was prepared to go to almost any length to secure the first-born's blessing for him. There can be no doubt that the lies and deception of these two were completely unnecessary and wrong in the eyes of God, who had already promised that the elder should serve the younger, and who would have fulfilled that promise in his own good time. But Rebekah, disturbed by Isaac's intention to bestow the blessing on Esau, thought that quick action was needed to avert this and the result was a plot which played upon the weakness of an old and blind man, who was dependant upon the senses of touch, smell and hearing to recognize the people around him. One wonders how Rebekah, who had been so close and loving to her husband, could so deceive him. In describing the tense exchange

between deceiver and deceived, quote the exact words of the blessing and reflect how the poignancy of the scene was marred by the lies and cruel deception.

Convey the sense of shock and distress felt by Esau and Isaac as the fraud came to light. Nothing could reverse the situation; the blessing was as solemn and binding as a vow and could not be changed. Resentment welled up in Esau to such an extent that he resolved to revenge himself and regain his rights by killing his brother at the first opportunity. Jacob had to flee for his life, and he was destined not to return to his home for many years; Rebekah was never to see her favourite son again, and Esau was alienated from his family and from God's chosen people. All this suffering had resulted from dishonesty and self-seeking, and bears out the point that we do well to place ourselves in God's hands, pray for his will to be done and have the patience to wait for him to work it out.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

We can see clearly from this story the serious results of telling lies. When are we most tempted to lie? (To get ourselves out of trouble?) What happens when we begin to tell lies? (One lie usually leads to another). How can we cultivate the habit of always telling the truth?

### **WORKSHEETS**

The jumbled words are love, trust, lying, jealousy, spitefulness, kindness, forgiveness, anger, sulking, fun, fairness.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, please forgive us for the lies we have told. Help us to be honest with ourselves, with other people and with you, and to love you with all our hearts. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"Putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth" (Ephesians 4:25).

***Genesis 28:1-5 and 10-22; 29:1-14*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how God guided and blessed Jacob and revealed to him the important part he was to play in the divine purpose.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Find maps showing Jacob's route to Haran, and pictures of the land and of wells. Study the history of the phenomena of dreams as used by God to communicate with men.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Remind the children of the situation at the end of the last lesson and of the necessity for Jacob to leave home to escape from his brother's anger. In spite of all that had happened, Isaac gave his son a parting blessing and good fatherly advice. He reminded him that he was chosen of God and must take great care to choose a godly wife, and he directed him to his mother's family back in Haran. Remind the children of the long journey that Rebekah had originally made from her own home in order to marry Isaac.

Jacob listened to his father's advice and followed it - relieved, no doubt, to have some definite place to go. Despite his father's warmth and concern, and despite the prospect of finding a wife and making a life of his own, Jacob left his family and his homeland with a heavy heart. He faced a long, lonely and dangerous journey. Describe his means of travel and the terrain through which he would pass with all its dangers. In those days travelling alone was risky. His journey would probably be along rough paths near to the caravan routes from Egypt to Syria, through sparsely populated country where he might encounter wild animals or thieving attackers. Though lonely, he was soon to be reminded that he was not alone.

In relating the dream, make it clear that it was a vision which came to Jacob while he slept and should not be confused with the sort of dreams which are the natural experience of everyone. Ask the children to try and imagine the loneliness of Jacob as he lay down in the dark, without shelter and far from family or friends. Help the class to appreciate something of the contrast as Jacob was comforted by the knowledge of God's powerful and reassuring presence, first by the sight of angels and then by the sound of God's voice. Quote the exact words of the promise (Genesis 28:13-14) and, by questioning the children, get them to realize how closely these words echo the promises God made years before - to Abraham (Genesis 13:15-17) and then to Isaac (Genesis 26:3-4). It is certain that Jacob knew of these promises and to hear them confirmed at this time would be a tremendous source of strength to him when he most needed it. In addition there was the personal reassurance that God would protect him and one day bring him back to the promised land (verse 15).

Discuss how different Jacob would have felt, on waking, from the way he had felt the night before. He experienced a sense of reverence at having been in the presence of God in that place which now assumed a special significance, and he marked the spot with a simple memorial. He had complete faith that God would keep his promises and he expressed his prayerful response in a vow of dedication to God's service, culminating in a promise to donate a tenth of all his goods to the Lord.

At this point, refer to a map and show the distance and the terrain he had to traverse to reach Haran. Describe what the watering place would have looked like and convey how welcome a sight it must have been for the weary and dusty traveller. Surely God must have guided Jacob to find the very well at which his mother's family watered their sheep. How happy Jacob must have been, after so long and lone a journey, to meet his relatives. Think about the exchange of greetings that would have taken place, and what questions would have been asked and answers given, as he made himself known to them. They would be eager to learn what had become of Rebekah and whether she was well and happy. There is no doubt that Jacob was immediately attracted to Rachel and that she was kindly disposed towards this young man who had so willingly helped her with her task, and who had greeted her with such emotion. Without Jacob realizing it, God's recent promise had already started to come true.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

In the middle of the night, Jacob was alone and afraid. After the vision, he was no longer afraid for he felt the presence of God though he could not see him. In fact, God had been with him all the time and Jacob had only to realize it. What, therefore, should we always remember?

### **WORKSHEETS**

The code reads 'I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go'.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, thank you for today's story of Jacob. Help us to know that, just as you cared for him, you will also care for us, if we are faithful. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"I fear no evil; for thou art with me" (Psalm 23:4).

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## **JACOB AND RACHEL**

**12**

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### ***Genesis 29:15-30***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show God's continuing care for Jacob.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Genesis 30 and 31. Refer to the customs of the day regarding marriage.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Remind the children how happy Jacob was to be welcomed into Laban's household, and that from the start he felt a great affection for Rachel, the younger daughter. It had been almost love at first sight, and Jacob soon realized that here was the woman he wanted to marry. The depth of his love for her

was confirmed by his willingness to agree to work for such a long time before the wedding could take place.

The fact that Leah, the older daughter, was still unmarried at the end of this time presented Laban with a serious problem. Explain that it was considered a disgrace for a woman not to marry and that, as the older daughter, she must be married before the younger. Instead of being honest with Jacob, Laban resorted to deception, and we can imagine Jacob's distress, disappointment and anger at the end of the wedding celebrations to find that he had been married to the wrong daughter. It will be necessary to explain to the children how different that wedding was from any which the children may have attended, for the groom was not allowed to see his wife's face until after the marriage had been performed.

In those days it seems to have been lawful for a man to have more than one wife. In fact, Jacob gained two wives within a week, although he had to commit himself to working for Laban for a further seven years, and he was powerless to do anything about this as he had no other means of support. However, rather than feeling resentful of the harsh treatment he had received, Jacob's love for Rachel was so great that he was willing and content to do this (quote verse 20 to the children). Ask them to work out how many years altogether Jacob had to work to fulfil the agreement, and to suggest what might have been the individual feelings of the four people involved in this chain of events. Jacob, the deceiver, had been cheated and was trapped in a situation that led to years of hard work. Rachel had had to submit to her father's ruling and take second place to her older sister, but was sure of Jacob's devotion. Leah must have felt hurt, knowing that Jacob did not love her as he loved her sister, and perhaps her father's scheme caused her to feel humiliated. Laban had a duty to his older daughter but, nevertheless, acted dishonourably and made excessive demands upon his son-in-law.

Describe how God compensated Leah by giving her children before Rachel, and tell the children about the twelve sons that were born to Jacob and his wives. Develop the theme of God's providence in the remaining years that Jacob spent in Haran, for he was blessed abundantly in spite of Laban's further attempts to deprive him of success and to keep him dependent on him. Summarize the account of the selective breeding of the cattle and how Laban's greediness was turned to Jacob's advantage by the power of God, the creator and sustainer of all forms of life. The more Laban, in his greed, tried to cheat Jacob out of what was his due, the more Jacob prospered; no man can frustrate the purpose of God.

God told Jacob it was now time to return to Canaan, the land of promise (Genesis 31:3 and 11-13) and repeated that he would be with him as he had been since the vision at Bethel. Knowing his uncle's cunning, Jacob decided to leave in secret - not an easy thing to do with all his flocks and his large family. But he succeeded, and the possessive Laban lost his daughters, his grandchildren and his hard-working son-in-law. Jacob confessed that it was God who had blessed him so abundantly, in fulfilment of the promise, and he returned to his homeland in very different circumstances from those in which he had left.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Throughout this story Jacob appears to be the kind of man who accepted his difficulties without complaint. When he was deceived he did not seek revenge but continued to do what was right. What do you think made Jacob change from being, when he was younger, a deceiver like Laban to a man of honesty and hopefulness? (Refer to the way that Jacob learned, as a result of the vision, to depend not on himself but on God.)

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, help us to put our trust in you as we grow older. We know and believe that you will help and bless us at the right time. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

"If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go ... then the Lord shall be my God" (Genesis 28:20-21).

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## **YOUNG JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS**

**13**

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### ***Genesis 37***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show the cruel outcome of jealousy and hatred.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Acquaint yourself with the patriarchal way of life and the systems of trade, travel and slavery.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Discuss with the class family relationships, particularly between brothers and sisters. Ideally, members of a family should love and help each other, but this is not always the case. Brothers and sisters quite often quarrel and resent any sign of favouritism. Such disagreements can usually be resolved when the parents try to be fair, although parents may treat children differently while loving them equally. The children will be able to recognize that Jacob's favouring of Joseph could lead to trouble. Show how both Joseph and Benjamin had a special place in his heart because they were the children of Rachel whom he had loved best, and who was now dead. Perhaps they resembled their mother in looks or characteristics and so constantly reminded him of her.

As Joseph grew up his brothers became increasingly aware that their father preferred him above all of them. When this was demonstrated very obviously in the gift of the special coat, their jealousy turned to hatred. Make sure the children understand that this was not just an extra present but an honour of great significance, which raised considerably the status of this much younger brother. The wearing of the coat was a continual reminder of their father's favouritism. (Ask the children how they think they would feel if their younger brother or sister were singled out for some special privilege. Would they mind this very much? Wouldn't it depend on how much they loved each other?)

Joseph may have been tactless, but he appears otherwise to have been the innocent victim of his brothers' jealousy; we have no evidence that he courted particular favour. Moreover, the dreams were visual messages from God, foretelling greater honours to come. The fact that Joseph was privileged to experience such revelations from God provoked his brothers to further hatred. It is recorded that they envied him, which implies that they did not disbelieve him but they determined to take action to prevent the dreams from coming true.



That Joseph was an obedient son is evidenced by his undertaking a long and difficult journey to locate his brothers. Meanwhile, the ten brothers had ample opportunity to discuss Joseph's dreams and give voice to their jealousy. This stirred up their bad feelings and united them in a common desire to do him harm. Now Joseph approached, oblivious to the bitterness of their resentment and their evil intentions.

Help the children to try to imagine the shock that Joseph felt when, miles from home and completely defenceless, he realized that his brothers wanted to kill him; he was powerless to resist these ten strong men who had become his enemies - the children will readily identify with the fear felt when being bullied.

One brother, Reuben the eldest, prevented murder being done. Perhaps his plan was to give the others time to reconsider their actions and finally decide against harming Joseph; in fact, this is exactly what happened. When Judah reasoned that it would be wrong to harm their own flesh and blood, all the brothers agreed. They were not averse, however, to disposing of him in a less violent manner, and at the same time making a profit. This transaction was carried out in the absence of Reuben, who, on his return, was horrified. It was too late then for him to save Joseph, and he did not resist the plan to deceive Jacob into believing Joseph was dead. Jacob, the deceiver, was once more deceived.

Point out the insensitivity and cruelty of the sons toward their father, firstly in selling Jacob's most beloved son, secondly in taking home the blood-stained garment and pretending Joseph was dead, and worst of all in being able to watch their father's abject grief and agony of mind - not just for a few days, but for many years - and not tell him the truth. How hard they must have been.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

In our families, what sort of things do we think are unfair? Do we sometimes feel jealous of our brothers or sisters? What should we do about it? (The discussion here may bring to light some child's real problem, and present you with an opportunity to help.)

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank you for our families. Help us to love one another and to be kind. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"He who loves God should love his brother also" (1 John 4:21).

***Genesis 39 and 40*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how Joseph still trusted in God, even when in prison.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

The historical background to life in Egypt.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Consider the sudden change in Joseph's circumstances. He had been uprooted from the position of favourite son of a rich family, and now found himself deprived of everything that he had enjoyed - love, freedom, home, family and comfort. Explain what it meant to be a slave, owned by foreigners whose way of life and beliefs were vastly different from his own. His arrival in Egypt must have been an awesome experience. The noise, pagan temples, mass slavery, civilization and culture contrasted sharply with the rural scene he had left behind. There was no one here to speak his language or share his loneliness. But Joseph did not feel alone. He trusted that wherever he was, God was near.

Explain that knowing that God was with him had two effects upon Joseph. Not only did he gain strength and courage from this knowledge, but also his faith made him behave with integrity at all times. Potiphar was so impressed by this that he placed complete trust in him, and gave him responsibility over the other slaves.

Show how Potiphar's wife was similarly impressed with this admirable young man, but she misjudged his character. In her vanity, she assumed that he would not be able to resist her advances. In addition to this, she had authority over him; as a slave, his duty was to obey. Show how this situation presented Joseph with a dilemma. He had either to offend her or to offend God. Though he must have been embarrassed and distressed by the repeated attentions of his master's wife, which he knew to be wrong, he was prepared to risk the consequences of her spiteful anger, rather than betray Potiphar's trust in him and sin against God.

Help the children to appreciate how unfairly Joseph was treated when Potiphar believed the lies about him. No one came to his defence; and, being a slave, he had no right to appeal against his sentence. He had to bear the hurt of having people think ill of him, when in fact his behaviour had been blameless. Slavery had been a hardship, but imprisonment was a sore test of his endurance. However, he drew strength from the knowledge that God knew the truth, and he continued to behave well. Soon he was again put in a position of trust, in charge of the other prisoners.

God was still working out his purpose in Joseph, and it was no coincidence that he encountered the butler and the baker. For the second time, dreams featured in his life and when God gave him the ability to interpret the men's dreams, he must have been reminded of his own dreams. Perhaps the fulfilment of the dreams reassured Joseph of God's continuing influence and sustained him through a further two years of frustration, wondering whether the butler would ever think of him again.

## RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES

When we are faced with a really big temptation, as Joseph was, how do we decide what to do? Remember that God sees us and knows the truth even when other people wrongly believe ill of us. If we remember that God is watching over us, how should we feel about our troubles?

## WORKSHEETS

The solution to the number puzzle is 'Potiphar was very pleased with Joseph and put him in charge of many things. Potiphar's wife wanted to go out with Joseph and when he refused she lied about him and had him sent to prison.'

## PRAYER

Dear Lord God, please help us to see clearly what you want us to do when we are tempted to do wrong. Thank you for the life story of Joseph, which is such a wonderful example to us. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

"The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; he is their refuge in the time of trouble" (Psalm 37:39).

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## JOSEPH AT PHARAOH'S PALACE

15

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### *Genesis 41:1-52*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To show how God worked in Joseph's life to bring about his purpose.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

The historical background to life in Egypt – in particular the lives of the Pharaohs.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Ask the children if they remember where Joseph was at the end of the previous lesson. Describe how he would have been feeling, and that Joseph would have no way of knowing what had become of the butler after all this time. Take the children then to Pharaoh's palace to show that the butler was, in fact, still in Pharaoh's service and had, in his own happy state, forgotten his promise to Joseph.

The telling of this story can be made very exciting by developing the pictorial nature of Pharaoh's dream, his anxiety, the butler's immediate shame at the recollection of Joseph's plight and his own broken promise, and the sudden change in Joseph's circumstances, from the depths of a dungeon to the elevated position of advisor to Pharaoh. The change was such that hasty provision had to be made for Joseph to wash, shave and change his clothes before he could appear before Pharaoh.

Point out that Joseph was quick to disclaim any wisdom of his own and to take the opportunity of proclaiming the power of the true God. (By this time Joseph was able to speak Egyptian fluently, for he had been in Egypt for 13 years, and he was now 30 years old).. He had undergone many changes in

his life, yet remained consistently confident in God's providence. He was able to recognize that Pharaoh's dreams were all part of God's plan.

It would be interesting to hear the children's thoughts regarding the feelings of Joseph and Pharaoh at this time - note verses 37-39. Joseph's faith obviously had such an immediate impact on Pharaoh that he felt impelled to believe his interpretation and entrust the future welfare of his whole kingdom to this godly man. It is worth pointing out that, just as Potiphar had had the authority to condemn Joseph without trial, Pharaoh, with his absolute authority, was able to appoint Joseph to the highest office in the land without consulting anyone.

The children will be interested in the meaning of Joseph's new name - "the man to whom secrets are revealed". It would seem that Joseph had been endowed by God with the talent for organizing people, first as steward in Potiphar's house, then as privileged supervisor in prison and now as prime minister; at every stage he had won the respect of everyone with whom he came into contact. The task with which he was now entrusted was an enormous one, to which he applied himself with drive, dedication and skill, sure in the knowledge that God was working through him.

The harvests were not merely good ones, but were so exceptional that it became impossible to record the amount of grain that was gathered. Joseph was additionally blessed with a wife and two sons, whose names convey Joseph's acknowledgement of God's goodness.

Recap the story so far along the following lines: having suffered so many trials, Joseph now found himself very blessed, enjoying family life, wealth, honour and success. Was he now completely happy, or could there be something he still missed?

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Have you noticed, throughout the story of Joseph, how he was able to wait for a long time, without getting miserable or cross? What do we call this quality? (Patience). Is it easy to be like this? Can we think of times when we must try hard to be patient? Does it help if we remember to trust those who tell us to wait?

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, help us not to feel miserable or cross when we have to wait. Teach us how to be patient. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

"Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him" (Psalm 37:7).

***Genesis 41:53-57; chapters 42-44; 45:1-8*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show the quality of Joseph's character and his understanding of God's purpose in his complete forgiveness of his brothers.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Familiarize yourself with the Egyptian way of life and that of the nomadic Israelites, in order to convey the striking contrast between the two.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Remind the children that for seven years Joseph had been busy storing vast quantities of grain from the exceptional harvests. Ask them why this was necessary, and what inevitably followed. Emphasize that all food, even modern convenience food, is dependent upon crops growing. Describe the serious effects of famine in general, and discuss with the children the problems resulting from running out of food. Explain the necessity for the intervention of the government to see that resources are rationed and distributed fairly to prevent illness and starvation. It was now Joseph's responsibility to see that these measures were taken for the good of all the people.

Meanwhile, people in surrounding countries became desperately short of food. They had not been warned of the coming famine and so had made no provision. News spread along the trade routes that there was corn in Egypt. Joseph soon found that he was obliged to respond to appeals from foreign travellers. Suggest, by means of dramatic expression, the sense of shock experienced by Joseph at being unexpectedly confronted by his ten brothers. Although twenty-one years had passed since their cruel treatment of him, their looks and style of dress had scarcely changed. Joseph, however, was now far from being a simple shepherd boy. His speech, bearing and dress gave every indication of a mature, authoritative Egyptian ruler. He was a total stranger to them: a man, so they thought, to be feared. Little did they know what painful memories they had evoked in him.

Since the following narrative is complex in detail, it is suggested that the sequence of events be presented visually, by means of sketches, diagrams, pictures, models or puppets, which will enable the children to distinguish between the two visits, and clarify the development of the story.

In narrating the events which took place, draw out the feelings of those concerned - Joseph's long struggle to sustain his disguise while yearning for the reunion to take place, and his concern about his father's welfare; the brothers' fear of Joseph, their bewilderment at the turn of events, their anxiety for their father and, above all, the conviction of their guilt; Jacob's frailty and anxiety, since he could do nothing but wait. Build up to the climax when Joseph could no longer control his emotion and revealed himself. The immediate response of the brothers was that of horror. What would become of them now? Their fear was greater than ever. They were at his mercy. Joseph had to reassure them of his love and his forgiveness, and help them to overcome their feelings of guilt. He explained to them what he had known all along - that all that had happened had been under the guidance of God for the purpose of blessing his chosen people.

## RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES

What do we usually want to do to people who have been cruel to us? Joseph's reaction was very different from what his brothers expected. How was it different? What was the outcome of his forgiveness? How can we apply this to ourselves?

## WORKSHEETS

The solution to the puzzle is:

F	A	T	H	E	R		S	I	L	V	E	R
A			O									E
M		B	U	Y			C		P			U
I		S				M	O	U	T	H		B
N		T	E	N			P		A			E
E		W			B				R			N
		E			E		J	A	C	O	B	
D		L			N				A			F
R		V			J	O	S	E	P	H		A
E		E			A							M
A			D		M	Y	R	R	H			I
M			I		I				I			L
S	I	M	E	O	N		M	I	D	D	A	Y

## PRAYER

Dear Lord God, when we want to get our own back on someone who has been unkind to us, please help us to forgive them instead, so that we can be friends again. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another” (Ephesians 4:32).

***Genesis 45:9-28; 46:1-7 and 29-30; 47:1-12***

### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show how God watches over the lives of people who trust him, and has a plan for them.

### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Genesis 45-50.

### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

In order to bring home the reality of this story, begin by discussing reunions within the children's own experience and knowledge, and the joy these bring after many years of separation. Such stories are often reported by the media, and recent cases can be quoted. Show how much effort goes into effecting the actual meeting.

Describe the provision Joseph made, with Pharaoh's encouragement and generosity. Even the king shared Joseph's enthusiasm and desire to bring all the family together.

The journey back to Canaan would have taken many days, during which the brothers had ample time to adjust their minds to the recent turn of events, and to prepare themselves to break the news to their father. Whatever they said would involve a confession on their part.

The news was received by Jacob first with shock and then with disbelief. Having mourned his son's death for over twenty years, it was difficult for him to adjust to the idea of Joseph being alive. But the sight of the wagons, gifts and supplies served to convince him that his sons were now telling the truth. It was too late for recriminations; Jacob was a very old man and was anxious not to waste further time. Before he died, he wanted to see his beloved son.

Describe the busy scene and excited anticipation as the family gathered all their belongings together - tents, provisions and skins of water, equipment of various kinds, clothing, etc., and loaded them on to carts and asses. The children would have been running around, some helping and others getting in the way. Flocks and herds would have to be assembled and led. The entire family was emigrating to Egypt.

As the caravan journeyed towards Egypt (show the route on the map), what thoughts were going through Jacob's mind? His foremost feelings were those of thankfulness, which compelled him to offer sacrifices to the Lord God when they stopped for the night at Beersheba. Any apprehension he was feeling was dispelled by God's reassurance: "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt". Jacob had good reason to have confidence in God's assurance, having experienced his protection in his youth when he was far from home. The uncomfortable, tiring, and dusty journey was as nothing compared with the joyful prospect of seeing again his favourite son.

Direct the children's attention back to Egypt, where Joseph could do nothing more than await the arrival for which he longed. From time to time, during the previous few weeks, he must have wondered what progress was being made, and whether all was well. When at last Judah brought the news that the travellers were near, Joseph could wait no longer. He summoned his chariot and hurried to meet them. At this point describe this most moving of incidents as Joseph and Jacob came face to face. Their changed circumstances and appearance were of no consequence now that they were reunited.

They hugged each other and were so overwhelmed with happiness that they cried. Jacob's life was now complete, so that he was able to say: "Now let me die". He knew that there could be no greater happiness for him than he felt at that moment. In fact, he lived another seventeen years and saw the family settled in the land that Pharaoh had given to them. The welcome given to Joseph's family is an indication of Pharaoh's tremendous respect for Joseph.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Let us never take for granted the love and care shown by our parents. Can we think of ways to show how much we appreciate and love them? Do we remember to thank God for our parents?

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank you that you have given us parents to love and care for us. Please help us to show them that we love them. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food" (Genesis 47:12).

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## **MOSES - HIS BIRTH AND YOUTH**

**18**

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### ***Exodus 1:8-22; 2:1-15***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show the faith of Amram and Jochebed, and how God protected their son. To show the foolishness of acting in anger.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Genesis 46:3; Exodus 6:20; Numbers 26:59; Acts 7:17-29; Hebrews 11:23-25. Study this period in Egypt's history.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Ask the children whether they remember that because of the famine Jacob and his large family had gone to live in Egypt where Joseph held a position of great authority. Pharaoh had welcomed them and they had settled in an area rich in pasture where they could tend their flocks. Fill in the intervening period of history, drawing from the children what knowledge they may have of ancient Egypt, with its fine architecture, Nile-centred development, hieroglyphic writings and the worship of heathen gods. In fact, approximately three hundred and fifty years had elapsed since the time of Joseph, and the



Israelite nation had grown enormously, as God had foretold. Although only seventy men had settled with their households in Goshen, this number had now grown to around half a million.

The government of Egypt had undergone changes, and a Pharaoh came to the throne who had no regard for the work of Joseph in times past, or for the foreigners who lived in his land. He felt threatened by their increasing numbers and their exclusivity. In using them as slaves his purpose was twofold: he hoped to keep control of them, whilst exploiting them in a vast building programme. With the aid of pictures, give the children some idea of the physical cruelty the Israelites had to endure at the hands of taskmasters who hated them. God's people, who had been shepherds, were made to hew stone and haul enormous weights, straining every muscle in the searing heat.

When Pharaoh saw that their numbers continued to increase, in spite of extreme hardship, he devised a very cruel plan which was intended ultimately to halt the nation's growth. When the midwives failed to co-operate, he gave all Egyptian citizens the authority to snatch and drown any male babies. This horrified the Israelites and made them afraid of everyone around them. Their sufferings reached an unbearable level. However, God was not ignorant of their anguish; his plans for saving his people were already beginning to operate.

Describe the actions of Amram and Jochebed as they endeavoured to hide their baby son from the Egyptians. Describe the feelings of tension and anxiety in the household whenever the baby cried. They already had two older children, Aaron and Miriam, whose help they enlisted. In desperation, they put all their faith in God, and hid Moses in the Nile. Here, too, Miriam was courageous and conscientious. Tell this familiar but dramatic story, bringing out the compassion of the princess and the overriding care and providence of God in seeing to it that Moses was nursed by his own mother and adopted into the royal household, perhaps the safest place in the land.

In contrast to the poverty-stricken life of suffering which was the Hebrews' lot, Moses would have enjoyed the luxury of the royal court - rich clothing, nourishing food, a high level of education and increased responsibility. We do not know the details of his boyhood in the palace, but it seems likely that his mother continued to have some influence on his thinking, so that he knew about the God of Israel. When he grew up he knew that he was a Hebrew and he felt great loyalty to his own people.

How tempting it would have been for Moses, the royal prince, to take matters into his own hands. He had been trained in leadership and was used to being obeyed. Having been brought up in luxury and had the best education, it must have been difficult for Moses to understand the hardships suffered by his own people. However, his indignation was instinctive when he saw a fellow Hebrew being ill-treated by an Egyptian. His anger resulted in murder, and suddenly into his life came fear, panic and great loneliness. Perhaps he had thought that as a prince of Egypt he could, by his own hand, deliver his people? Several great lessons awaited him. He who had seemed so privileged and secure became a hunted man fleeing for his life.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Was Moses wrong to be angry at what he saw? Were his actions right? It is so easy to lose our tempers and do foolish things. How can we learn to stop ourselves acting in anger? What should we do when angry feelings arise in us?

## WORKSHEETS

The solution to the puzzle is:



## PRAYER

Dear Lord God, Thank you for the example of Moses' loving and faithful family. Help us to be patient and kind and not to act violently in temper. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

"And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds" (Acts 7:22).

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## MOSES - THE BURNING BUSH

19

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*Exodus 3:1-17; 4:1-17 and 27-31*

### AIM OF LESSON

To show how God revealed himself to the chosen leader of his people and assured him of his powerful presence.

### BACKGROUND STUDY

Exodus 18; Acts 7:30-37. Look up details of the life of the nomadic sheep farmers in Midian, and locate all the places on a map.

### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

By question and answer, help the children to recreate the dramatic turn of events which led Moses, at the age of forty, to flee from Egypt and seek refuge in another land. The prince became a shepherd; the life of luxury in a palace was replaced by the simple life of a Midianite husband and father. God

had prepared a further period of forty years during which Moses was to develop the qualities needed to lead a nation out of slavery. Many lessons must have been learned by Moses as God watched over him during that time, although he was unaware of the purpose for which he was being trained.

Jethro must have influenced Moses during that period. He was a man of wisdom and keen judgement (Exodus 18) whose opinion Moses would no doubt value, and in his company, working as a shepherd, Moses would learn patience, hardiness, humility, quiet strength and responsibility. Although content with his simple life style, Moses' life was to change dramatically.

In response to the pleas of his suffering people, God intervened and called Moses to his service. Describe vividly the strange sight that arrested Moses' attention. The class will appreciate his bewilderment at seeing the bush remain intact whilst appearing to burn. Although it is good that the children should think of God as a loving and gentle Father, it is also essential for them to recognize that our Creator is awesome and very powerful. At the burning bush Moses was shown the authority and holiness of God, and the experience made him afraid. But the message that followed must have convinced Moses of God's great compassion for his people.

From that moment, God's relationship with his chosen deliverer was to develop. The dialogue that follows was to prepare Moses for the great task ahead. You should consider carefully the progression of the conversation between God and Moses. Note that God first made an intensely strong impression upon him by alerting all his senses to the presence of the Almighty. By contrast, his was the humility of a servant who must approach his God with fearful reverence. God revealed his compassion by telling Moses of his anguish at the continuing plight of his persecuted people and his vow to deliver them. He made it clear that Moses was to be the instrument of this deliverance, a statement which filled Moses with feelings of inadequacy for such a challenge.

God's reply was positive and authoritative. A refusal was impossible. In answer to Moses' doubts, God told him that the people would listen to him. He rehearsed with him the words he would speak to Pharaoh, warned him that Pharaoh would not let them go, and promised to punish Egypt until the enslaved people were freed. As Moses demurred, God offered him signs by which he would be able to convince the people that he had been sent by God. Still, this now humble man shrank from the awesome task of challenging the might of Pharaoh and re-entering the political scene which he had left so long ago. To all Moses' protestations God gave an answer, so that Moses finally committed himself to the vocation.

Explain that God had agreed that Aaron, the brother of Moses, should help him when he went to talk to the people and to Pharaoh. Speculate on the atmosphere of the reunion of the two very different brothers, and conclude the lesson with the raised hopes of the afflicted people as they gladly received Moses' assurances of God's plan of salvation.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

How can we show our respect and reverence for God? Do we show this in our respect for parents and teachers? Do we show it in the way we behave in Sunday School? When we have been chosen to do a job are we always willing to tackle it, or do we sometimes make excuses?

## **WORKSHEETS**

The words in the flames are (left to right): holy, fire, flock, burning, sandals, bush, God, Horeb.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we know you love us as a kind Father. Help us also to realize how great and powerful you are. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

“Put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground”. (Exodus 3:5).

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## MOSES - THE FIRST NINE PLAGUES

20

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### *Exodus 5-10*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To show the great power of God actively used against the Egyptians, who defied him, and to show the mercy of God in protecting his people Israel.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

The six chapters will need to be studied thoroughly in order to select the most important verses for this lesson. Seek suitable pictures, e.g. locusts and their effect on vegetation, storm damage, the river Nile, etc., together with pictures of nomads, slaves and Egyptian courtiers. These will help to make the story memorable.

Isaiah 19:5-10; Psalm 105:26-35; Ezekiel 29.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Start by showing a colourful illustration of the enthroned Pharaoh. Describe his absolute authority and his awe-inspiring presence. By contrast present a picture of Moses, a man of eighty, tanned and rugged, dressed in sandals and a simple woollen robe, and carrying a staff. Explain how understandable was Moses' reluctance to stand before the king and give him orders from a God whom he did not recognize. The discouraging reception he and Aaron received, and the cruel punishment inflicted upon the slaves, perplexed Moses and caused him to turn to God again. They went to Pharaoh the second time, reassured of God's firm intention to rescue the Israelites, at great cost to Egypt. Moses was reminded of the power vested in him to prove to the arrogant Pharaoh that God was Lord of all.

Note down a list of the plagues in the correct order. As each of the plagues is described, write them on a blackboard or display sheet. Use descriptive language to help the children to understand what a plague is, and how inescapable are the effects.

The first three plagues affected all the land of Egypt. A map of Egypt will illustrate how vital is the river Nile to the prosperity of the country. The great river was their pride and source of life. How alarming then would be the turning to **blood** of the water on which they depended. Pharaoh, thinking it was a magical trick, was not impressed. Describe the unavoidable discomfort and revulsion caused by the infestation of **frogs**, as they got into food stores, beds, clothing, in fact, everywhere. Similarly the **gnats** would have been a great source of irritation - there was no escape from them. It would appear that these three plagues affected the Egyptians and the Israelites alike, so that all were made aware of God's control over the forces of nature. However, Pharaoh continued to be unmoved.

Before recounting the fourth plague (**flies**) read together in class chapter 8:22 to show that in order to demonstrate that he was in absolute control, God was now to protect his people from the sufferings to be inflicted upon Egypt. Pharaoh reacted by sending for Moses and Aaron and conceding that they could worship their God just outside the borders of the land, but as soon as the plague was removed he broke the agreement.

The fifth plague (affecting **farm animals**) introduced a new type of affliction, that of disease and destruction. Emphasize the seriousness of this plague. The people witnessed the dying of the animals that supplied them with food and clothing, as well as beasts of burden and means of transport - all suffered alike. Pharaoh, knowing that the Israelites had large flocks, sent messengers to find out the position in Goshen. On learning that they were completely unaffected, as Moses had predicted, he was angry and more obdurate than ever.

The incidence of disease became progressively worse, so that the next plague (**boils**) affected human beings, causing pain and great distress.

Summarize God's declaration, chapter 9:13-19. Up until now the plagues had been signs to demonstrate that the Lord was the one true and almighty God but, from that moment, the very lives of the people who served this rebellious king were to be at risk. The following verses show that some of the Egyptians had learned to respect the God of Moses, believed his words and, in taking note of the warning, were saved from the effects of the **hail**. Once again Pharaoh was sufficiently moved to summon Moses and Aaron. This time he agreed to release the people; but again when the plague ceased, he went back on his word as God had warned Moses he would do.

When threatened with **locusts**, Pharaoh's servants persuaded him to speak to Moses and Aaron again but, when Moses made it clear that a total exodus was required, he became furious and drove them out of the palace. (The plague of locusts is best depicted with the aid of pictures of the absolute devastation which they cause to all plant life). But despite Pharaoh's distress at the widespread destruction, he refused to relent.

The plague of **darkness** would have had an especially frightening effect on the Egyptian people, whose chief object of worship was Ra, the sun god. The total darkness, which could be felt and which lasted for three days, would create the impression that the sun had been extinguished and would strike terror into their hearts. Pharaoh tried bargaining with Moses and Aaron but, when the demands were repeated, he shouted at them in fury and threatened to have them killed if they dared to come to him again. Moses, realizing that the climax was about to be reached and that only one last punishing plague remained, calmly agreed that this was indeed their last meeting.

In telling the story, convey the increasing stubbornness of Pharaoh and emphasize the growing courage and confidence of Moses and his brother and the reputation they earned among the people. The Egyptians became afraid of them while the Israelites grew to respect and have confidence in them. The faith of the people in God developed as they witnessed his miraculous protection of them from the sufferings they saw inflicted upon their enemies. Their own health was unimpaired, their crops and cattle unscathed and, while darkness struck the enemy with fear, the Israelites enjoyed light from God, the source of all light. These people who had been the broken slaves of the mighty and cruel Egyptians were now strong and confident, while their taskmasters were ruined and brought low.

## RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES

Do you remember how reluctant Moses was about doing what God asked him to do? Why did he hesitate? However, unlike Pharaoh, Moses was not stubborn and he made up his mind to do his best. Do you think he continued to be afraid each time he approached Pharaoh? It seems that Moses grew braver and more confident each time; it was just the first time which was very hard. Can we learn a

lesson from Moses about how to face up to difficult tasks? (This can be applied to making a moral stand or, more generally, to facing up to unpleasant necessities, e.g., dental or hospital appointments, making new friends, changing schools, etc.)

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, Teach us not to be stubborn, but help us to be like Moses and Aaron and bravely do our best for you. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

“The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth my hand upon Egypt” (Exodus 7:5).

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## **MOSES - THE PASSOVER**

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**21**

### ***Exodus 11; 12:1-36***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show the way in which God brought his people out of slavery in Egypt, and how they were saved from death by obedience to God’s commands.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Deuteronomy 16:1-8; John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8; Hebrews 11:27-28; 1 Peter 1:18-19.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Remind the children of Pharaoh’s stubbornness and that, despite having suffered the effects of nine increasingly severe plagues and despite the pleas of his own servants, Pharaoh adamantly refused to change his mind. God, however, had decided that his people would be set free and he knew that only one more punishment would be necessary, though this would be far more ruthless than any that had gone before. It was to change the lives of both the Egyptians and the Israelites, and mark a turning point in the history of Israel.

Emphasize that it was God who gave Moses the detailed instructions about the preparations which the Israelites had to make for that night’s activities. They knew, unmistakably, that this was to be the night of their deliverance and that it was vital that they obeyed God’s word to the letter. They would be excited at the prospect of freedom and at the same time fearful of what was to take place before that freedom was gained. Describe the series of events, beginning with the pledging of gifts of jewellery, silver, gold and clothing by their Egyptian neighbours who would later be anxious to assist in this way.

Give details of the preparations for the meal, the death of the perfect lamb, the vital marking of the door posts and lintel, the manner in which the meal was to be eaten and the solemnity of the whole

proceedings. Stress that the people had to congregate in families, or groups of families, and that all the members of the household were to take part. The children were just as involved as their parents and would, no doubt, be wide-eyed with nervous fascination at these strange events and the lateness of the hour. Show how the meal was unusual in that it was to be eaten in haste, with everyone standing in their outdoor clothes ready to leave at a moment's notice, but with the door shut fast. Point out that even the bread was different because they were told to eat unleavened bread. (Unleavened bread and bunches of herbs may be used here as visual aids).

The uniqueness of this special meal would live long in their memories and was to be re-enacted annually to remind them of God's might and mercy, and of their indebtedness to him. Fathers were to teach their children the significance of the feast and they in turn were to teach their children so that the rite would be continued through future generations. (You may wish to point out that practising Jews consider this still to be the most important ceremony in their calendar). This was such an important event that it was to mark the beginning of a new calendar for the Israelites (Exodus 12:2) since it opened a new chapter in the history of the nation. Lay particular stress on the word "passover"; explain its meaning and relate this event to the New Testament references to the passover.

Sensitivity is required when describing the details of this, the last plague. Children will appreciate that this final disaster must of necessity have been the most severe, but to dwell too long on the facts may be distressing for some children. Nevertheless, the scene is a dramatic one and should be treated as such. Take care to ensure that throughout the children's sympathies are with God's people. Suffice it to say that Pharaoh was finally humbled before God through personal loss and that he had brought this ultimate suffering upon himself and upon his people by his pride and stubborn resistance.

Suddenly at midnight the Israelites' waiting was at an end. Now all was haste and bustle. Not only were they to be set free, but the Egyptians were urging them to leave speedily and they thrust great quantities of gifts into their hands. It is impossible to imagine the vast number of people who began this journey, but perhaps photographs of vast crowds will help to impress upon the children the enormity of the exodus. The Israelites went out in faith, with no provisions other than the unleavened dough they had prepared. Read together chapter 12 verses 40-42 by way of conclusion, stressing the people's dependence upon God and the close bond between God and his people.

Help the children to think about the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus was called "The Lamb of God". He, too, was and is perfect; he had to die and his blood was shed in order to save people from death, just as the Israelites were saved from death by the blood of the lamb when the angel of death passed over their homes. Children of this age group will be able to grasp only the simplest of parallels between the two, and you should resist the temptation to develop the theme beyond their comprehension at this stage.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

God laid down very definite rules regarding the first passover, in order that the people might be saved from the final plague. Did they obey all of these directions? What do you think would have happened to anyone who failed to do what was required, or who changed any of the details to suit themselves? It was God who saved them, but they had to do their part. This is the same God who loves us and wants to save us. Where can his instructions to us be found? What should we do about them?

## WORKSHEETS

The solutions to the double puzzle are:

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                P L A G U E
                P A S S
                H O U S E S
    E G Y P T I A N S
                F I R S T B O R N
                E V E R Y
                K I L L E D
                I S R A E L I T E S

```

and:

```

                M O S E S
    L A M B
                Y E A R
                O L D
                K I L L
    L I N T E L
                N I G H T
    Y E A S T

```

## PRAYER

Dear Lord God, we can see how important it is to obey. Please help us to obey you, our parents and our teachers. Thank you for giving us Jesus to be our perfect passover lamb. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

“The blood shall be a sign for you, upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Exodus 12:13).



***Exodus 12:37-42; 13:17-22; 14; 15:1-21***

### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show how God set his people free from slavery and by a miracle protected them from the Egyptian army.

### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Genesis 46:2-4,27; 50:24-25; Exodus 3:10-12; Psalm 105:37-38; Psalm 136:1-15; 1 Corinthians 10:1-5. Find a detailed map of the region showing the route taken across the Red Sea.

### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Refer to the details towards the end of the previous lesson concerning the vast number of people in the exodus. Humanly-speaking, the moving of this huge crowd of people through a desert to live in a land occupied by hostile people was impossible; but Moses, relieved that his ordeal of confronting Pharaoh was over, applied himself to the task of leading this complex horde of men, women, children and animals in the way God indicated. You might spend a little time discussing the problems of organization and the possible difficulties encountered, in order to convey the reality of the event.

The Israelites went out in hope of returning to the land from which their forefathers had come. Remind the children of the arrival of Jacob in Egypt and of God's promise that his family would grow into a great nation which would one day return to Canaan. Read together in class the words of Joseph, whose faith in this promise was so firm that he gave instructions for his body not to be buried in Egypt but to be taken back and buried in the land of his birth at the time of the nation's return. Now their hopes were beginning to be realized and the people followed Moses, carrying in their minds the vision of the land "flowing with milk and honey".

At this point you should introduce a large, clear map. It will be obvious that the shortest way from Goshen to Canaan lay through the country of the Philistines, a very cruel and fierce people. God knew that the Israelites had been slaves for many years and that if they met the warlike Philistines they would soon lose courage and be glad to return to Egypt. God knew, too, that it would take many years to train these slaves into a strong nation, to educate them in his ways and for them to learn to have a deep faith and trust in him. So the Lord commanded Moses to lead the Israelites through the wilderness towards the Red Sea.

Explain to the children that a flag, lamp or similar signal would have been of little use in directing so large a company and that God himself provided a clearly visible sign that moved ahead of the people and showed them the way. It took the form of a cloud during the daytime, distinctive in the otherwise cloudless sky, and of a fiery light by night (take care that the children understand the word "pillar", if used), so that the people were able to make progress for longer than the normal hours of daylight. In addition to God's presence being shown in this way, Moses also received detailed commands from God which he relayed to the tribal leaders and they to the heads of families. So they were guided to the Red Sea.

Now direct the children's attention back to Pharaoh in Egypt. There had been much mourning over the loss of the first-born children. But the Egyptians, who in their despair had been glad to be rid of these troublesome people, now realized that they had lost their useful slaves and regretted having allowed

them to go. Pharaoh, in particular, was filled with rage at having suffered at the hands of Israel's God and he determined to bring back the slaves or to destroy them. They were travelling on foot and he knew their progress would have been slow. With his swift chariots it would be easy to overtake them. How little did Pharaoh understand the might and the will of God for his people.

Stimulate the imagination of the children by describing the approach of the thundering chariots, and help them to appreciate something of the fear of the Israelites at being trapped by the barrier of water in front of them, and the fast approaching enemy behind. There was no escape. Ask the children whether the Israelites had any reason to be afraid. If the children think they had, then remind them of the miracles the people had so recently witnessed and of God's protection which was even then visible in the cloud and fire. In their fear, they forgot that God was all-powerful, but the faith and courage of Moses did not fail. He remembered the promise that God had made to him in Midian and he reassured the faithless of God's salvation. Read aloud his words (chapter 14:13-14).

The progress of the Egyptians was hindered by the apparently dense cloud which God placed between them and his people. Describe the tensions of that night; the strong easterly wind that blew fiercely across the sea, the sleeplessness of the anxious Israelites and the impatient confusion of the Egyptians. The morning was to reveal another of God's great wonders.

In describing the passage of the Israelites through the divided sea, try to convey the terror of the ordeal; the jostling of people to get through as swiftly as possible, the delays caused by heavy burdens and young children, the confusion of the animals, and the seemingly interminable queue of people anxiously fleeing from the threat of pursuit. Before they were all across, the Egyptians were hard on their heels and with the advantage - so they thought - of fast horses and chariots. Fearlessly the Egyptians had followed the fleeing slaves, but their confidence soon turned to dismay as their wheels began to sink in the mud of the sea bed. Then they were terror-struck as they realized that they were now the ones with no means of escape. They were imprisoned in the grip of the supreme power of the Almighty God. The Israelites, who had felt trapped and had feared the might of Pharaoh, found themselves on the other side of the sea, with their enemy totally destroyed. Their miraculous salvation restored their faith and evoked a response of joyful thanksgiving.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

It seems difficult to understand how the Israelites could so quickly forget the miracles that God had performed in Egypt, and be ready to doubt his care as soon as they faced problems. Yet, we tend to do something very similar. What great things has God done for us? Do we forget that everything we enjoy comes from God? Do we doubt him when things go wrong? What should we do? What did Moses do? (He trusted when faced with danger, and remembered to thank God when rescued from it).

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank you for your great power and thank you for keeping us safe until now. Help us to trust you through every danger. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

"Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today" (Exodus 14:13).

***Exodus 15:22-27; 16; 17:1-7***

### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show how God provided for his people in the wilderness, although they were faithless and complaining.

### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Genesis 2:1-3; Deuteronomy 8:2-3; Psalm 78:15-32; John 6:31-58.

Find a map showing Marah, Elim and Sinai, and photographs of the terrain. Consult a Bible Dictionary on quails and manna.

### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Begin the lesson with a general discussion about food, moving from what the children like to eat and the amount needed every day, to the planning and provision of food for a journey or holiday. Go on to point out that food and water are vital for survival.

After the Israelites' celebration, which followed the crossing of the Red Sea, the people moved on into the vast wilderness. Show the children a map of the route taken and compare the distances with journeys within the children's own experience. Show also pictures of the type of land through which the children of Israel were travelling, and describe the heat, the dust and the rough ground. How hot and weary they would become, and how thirsty. How eagerly they would approach the first sign of water which they had seen for three days. What a blow it must have been to find that the water was undrinkable. Paraphrase the account to convey their disappointment and anger. God, recognizing their need, heard Moses' prayer and provided a solution. God used this miracle as an object lesson to demonstrate his healing power, and he promised that he would keep them free from disease if they would follow his instructions. At Elim they were fully refreshed.

Remind the children that when God's people left Egypt they had complied with his instructions and had taken only unleavened bread with them. They had had no bread after this had run out. After six weeks of travelling they became anxious about the shortage of food and turned on Moses and Aaron with their complaints. It was at this point that they began looking back and imagining they had been better off in Egypt. Again God heard them and promised to supply their need. Moses explained that, in spite of their grumbling about God's seeming neglect, he was about to provide them with meat and bread, to convince them of his omnipotence. What a pleasure it must have been for them that evening to feast on meat, without the effort of having to hunt for it.

God's mercy extended not only to making natural food available, but to creating a special food which had never been known before. Everything about the manna was miraculous. It appeared only when God said it would, and kept fresh only as long as God ordained. Whatever quantity was gathered proved sufficient, and any that was left was melted away by the sun. Although the manna would not normally keep overnight, it lasted an extra day for the sabbath and it kept perpetually in the ark as a reminder of God's provision. The collection of the manna was a lesson in obedience, moderation and trust. The instructions were clear and were to be obeyed. Disobedience and greed resulted in suffering and disgrace.

An important instruction concerned the sabbath. This was the first time that the nation was shown the importance of setting aside the seventh day as a day of rest. Remind the children that this was not a new idea but had been established by God at the time of creation.

So began a forty-year period, through which God kept the whole nation alive by providing daily food and all the other physical necessities.

But in spite of all the miracles they had witnessed, the people complained again as soon as things became difficult. Ask the children to try and imagine how Moses felt at having to put up with their ceaseless complaints. As always, Moses cried to the Lord and immediately complied with God's instructions. The impact of the miracle of water from the rock should have made a lasting impression upon the elders of the tribes who witnessed it, and Moses renamed the place to commemorate the occasion.

All the incidents of the wilderness journey should be described as vividly as possible to help the children picture the scenes and to appreciate God's miraculous power at work.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Whenever the Israelites were faced with a problem they grumbled and complained. When things go wrong for us, or present us with difficulties, do we moan or grumble? Does it help if we do? What should we do instead?

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank you for our daily food. Teach us not to be ungrateful grumblers, but help us always to be cheerful and thankful. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, until they came to the border of the land of Canaan" (Exodus 16:35).

***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).

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## **MOSES - GOD'S HOUSE IN THE WILDERNESS**

**25**

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*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 the 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).

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## **TWELVE SPIES AND FORTY YEARS OF WANDERING**

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**26**

### ***Numbers 13 and 14***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show how God brought his people to a richly fertile land, as he had promised, and how lack of faith led to divine punishment.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Exodus 3:7-8; Deuteronomy 1:19-40; Hebrews 3:15-19.

Find a map showing the southern borders of Canaan (Sinai to Kadesh Barnea).

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

There is an opportunity at the beginning of this lesson to remind the children that Israel was divided into twelve tribes, descended from the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel). The children will probably enjoy searching out and writing down these twelve names (Numbers 13:4-15).

Remind the children that God had been guiding his people out of Egypt towards a land that he had promised them. Now, at last, their goal was in sight - a land “flowing with milk and honey”. Moses, following God’s instructions, chose a representative from each tribe and gave them orders for a secret mission. Each man was outstanding for his leadership qualities, and had been selected to spy out the land before them, and report back. Information was required about the nature of the terrain, the strength and number of the inhabitants, whether the cities were fortified and whether the land was fertile and wooded. What a stirring of feeling there would have been amongst the people as they became aware of the plans being made. It seemed that their arduous travels were almost over. Picture the excitement of the people as the twelve men set off, and the eagerness with which they would have awaited their return. They had six weeks to wait. On their return, the twelve men gave similar reports. The land was rich and fertile, just as God had promised them - it “flowed with milk and honey”. Ask the children what this phrase might mean. For milk to be in plentiful supply there must be lush pasture; for honey to be available the bees must collect the nectar from very many flowers and blossoms. The spies had brought ample evidence of the quality of the fruit harvest. Encourage the children to imagine how their mouths must have watered at the sight. They had not eaten fresh fruit for a long time.



However, there then followed a report of the strength of the inhabitants, and their large walled cities. Ten of the spies were apparently afraid and, as they described the giants, the impregnable fortresses, and the large numbers of foreign peoples to be overcome, they instilled fear in the hearts of their listeners. Read together Numbers 13:30-33 and 14:1. Caleb tried to prevent the people from panicking, but the ten men, forgetting about God, convinced the people of the hopelessness of their cause. Once more, Moses and Aaron were faced with a rebellious mob shouting their complaints, succumbing to their fears and demonstrating their lack of faith in God and in his chosen leader. Joshua's declaration of faith and his appeal to the people to trust in God, since he was ever with them, fell on deaf ears.

The hysterical crowd would have stoned the faithful men, but God, who was extremely angry at their wickedness, intervened. The light of his glory shone before them and he spoke. His patience had been repeatedly tried by these stubborn people. Only the impassioned plea of Moses deterred him from destroying them all. But they were not to go unpunished, and the punishment was severe: no one over the age of twenty was to enter the promised land. Instead of completing their journey, they were made to turn back into the desert, there to stay until all that faithless generation, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, had died. They had all witnessed the signs of God's power and glory and his abiding love for them in bringing them safely to the land in fulfilment of his promise. Nevertheless they had failed to trust him and had rebelled. Their children, whom they had feared would be killed by the inhabitants of the land, would be the only ones to enter and possess it; but not until forty years had passed (one year for each day the spies had spent reconnoitring) would it be theirs.

**RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

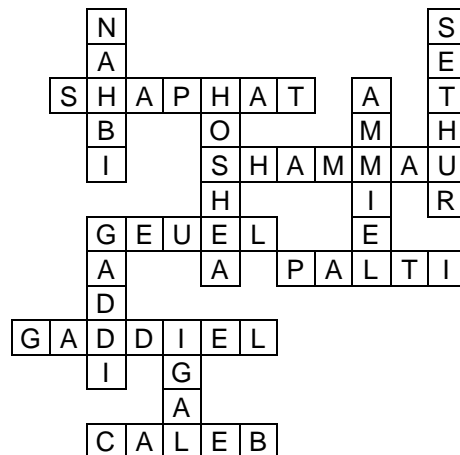
Can you remember some of the wonderful things that God did for Moses and his people on their journey from Egypt to Canaan? What should they have learned from these experiences? Which of them should have prevented the people from being cowards?

Can you think of some of the wonderful things God has done for you? Does this help you to have confidence for the future?

**WORKSHEETS**

The sentence reads 'They cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes. Two of them carried it on a pole between them.'

The names of the spies are:



Note that the AV and RSV have Shammua where the NIV has Shammau; the AV has Oshea where the RSV and NIV have Hoshea.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we are like the children of Israel, for we sometimes do things that make you angry. Please forgive us, and help us to put our trust in you. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

“If the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land which flows with milk and honey” (Numbers 14:8).

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## **THE BRONZE SERPENT**

**27**

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### ***Numbers 21:1-9***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show that God is like a father to his people, blessing those who do as he instructs and punishing the disobedient and rebellious, but that he never compels anyone to come to him. Everyone is free to obey or disobey him.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Numbers 20:14-21; 2 Kings 18:4; John 3:14-16.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Maps, photographs and pictures will help to remind the children of the journey of the Israelites so far, and show the kind of terrain through which they were passing when the incident of the bronze serpent took place. Help the children to imagine the situation by reminding them of the rocky landscape, the dust, heat and lack of shade - which made the people tired, hot, thirsty and dispirited. In such a situation it takes only one or two people to start grumbling and rebelling for discontent to grow and spread rapidly. This is what happened in Edom.

Not long before, God had shown his power by subduing the Canaanites and giving his people victory in response to their pleading. At that time they were not far from the land of promise. However, since the king of Edom had refused to allow them passage through his territory, the people were forced to take a prolonged circuitous route, which gave rise to impatience and frustration. They spoke bitterly against Moses and against God. Unjustly they blamed God's appointed leader for all their privations, for he had given himself wholly to guiding them and mediating for them. Rebelliously they complained about the miraculous God-given manna, railing against the Almighty who in his wisdom and mercy had rescued them from slavery, constantly provided for them and who had promised them great blessings and favours if they trusted and obeyed him. They had received ample evidence of God's providence in the past and should, therefore, have been confident of his future provision, but they were preoccupied with their immediate discomfort and frustration. You might paraphrase the grumbles and complaints

with which the people bombarded Moses, by using modern idiom and mimicking their tone of voice and persistence. God was deeply displeased with Israel's ingratitude and lack of faith; they had still not learned obedience.

God's punishment was swift and deadly. The children may have seen poisonous snakes in captivity and will be ready to talk about their sudden strike and fatal bite. Such snakes are not uncommon in hot countries where they are a source of terror. Once bitten the victims were doomed to die - nothing could save them. The people immediately recognized God's reproach and regretted their sin in speaking against him. Realizing that they were powerless to effect a cure, and that they were wholly dependent on God's mercy, they approached Moses, confessed their guilt and asked Moses to pray to God for them.

In answer to his prayer, God first required Moses to carry out his instructions and cast a visual symbol of the cause of death and erect it for everyone to see. This was something new, and different from the provisions under the law for the forgiveness of sins, but Moses obeyed without question. Then he explained to the people what they must do to be saved. God had wisely put the responsibility for their cure on to the people themselves. Those who listened, who accepted the assurance that it would work and who did as they were told, were made well. Any who ignored Moses and who persisted in despising God's provision, died. Convey the reality of the scene and the experiences of the people, as the suffering ones, some probably needing assistance, hurried to view the serpent. It was a simple act but it required faith and conviction. The relief felt by those who were healed, and witnessed by everyone, would once more bring the Israelites to the realization that God was their saviour, that they needed him and that they owed him gratitude and praise.

It will be sufficient, with children of this age, merely to introduce them to the way in which Jesus took up this incident and related it to himself. He was lifted up on the cross in order to save people from death and from the sin that causes it, and only those who come to him believing in him will be given everlasting life.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

God loves us and gives us everything we need. Do you agree? Why, then, do we all tend to grumble? What do we find to grumble about? Do we really have cause to complain? How can we overcome the human tendency to take the things God has given us for granted?

## **WORKSHEETS**

The jumbled words read (top to bottom, left to right): food, water, desert, bit, bitten, killed, Moses, live, poisonous, bread, bronze, Egypt, pole, sorry, snakes, prayed.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we know that you give us all things. We thank you for all your gifts. Teach us how to be grateful and not to grumble. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).

***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).

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## RAHAB AND THE SPIES

29

### *Joshua 2*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To highlight the faith of Rahab.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

Deuteronomy 2:25; 11:25; Matthew 1:5-6; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:24-25. Look up information about ancient Jericho - the dimensions of its walls and the style of its houses. Illustrations will be helpful.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Joshua, having been assured of God's favour and of the people's confidence in him, immediately prepared to invade Canaan. Explain to the children that although God had promised them this land, it was already inhabited, and the inhabitants, who were wicked and idolatrous, had to be conquered. The Israelites would require courage and determination, and Joshua set them the example.

They had encamped at a place called Shittim, just east of the Jordan. The river had to be crossed, and Joshua realized that the fortress of Jericho would need to be taken before the land could be penetrated further. He needed to investigate the city and its people, so he sent two spies to reconnoitre. This was a dangerous mission, for their discovery would probably have meant death.

Jericho was enclosed by a very high and very thick wall. The only way into the city was through guarded gates. During the day the gates remained open. Shepherds took out their flocks to graze, and merchants brought in goods from other countries. People passed in and out all day. In the evening the gates were shut, and no one was allowed in or out during the hours of darkness.

Joshua had heard about the huge wall and the strong gates of Jericho, but he wanted to know more about the people. Were they preparing an army to meet him, and were they afraid? The spies seem to have entered the city without difficulty, although they had been seen and recognized. The people of Jericho were apprehensive and suspicious of strangers. News had reached them of the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, forty years before, and of the Israelites' more recent campaigns against their enemies. They knew that these people were now camped across the valley and that an attack was imminent. The spies soon discovered that the people of Jericho were afraid.

As night fell the presence of the two men on the streets would have been regarded with suspicion, so they looked for somewhere to hide. Tell the children that Rahab kept a lodging-house and they chose to seek refuge there. The woman accepted them kindly and encouraged them to hide from the authorities. The spies had been observed entering her house and, when the news reached the king, he despatched soldiers to look for them. Recreate the tense atmosphere as the spies hurried to hide

and Rahab covered them with the dried stalks of flax. Suddenly there was a loud banging on the door. The spies lay rigid, holding their breath, as Rahab bravely confronted the soldiers and convinced them that the two men had already left the city. When the danger was past - danger for her as much as for the spies - she talked earnestly with the two men of Israel. She had taken their part against her own people, believing that the God of Israel was the true and living God.

Rahab is one of the most outstanding examples of faith recorded in the Bible. Although an idol-worshipper, an immoral woman, and an enemy of Israel, she had been so moved by the reports she had heard that she was prepared to embrace the Israelites' faith and way of life, and trust in their God.

Because Rahab had saved their lives, the spies promised to rescue her and her family during the forthcoming invasion, provided she displayed the cord in her window and gathered all her family into the house with her. The situation was too dangerous for the spies to remain in the city any longer. Wisely they followed Rahab's advice to leave immediately, with her assistance, and to lie low in the hills for three days until the search was called off.

Contrast the report of these two spies with the earlier report of Joshua and Caleb's faithless companions at Kadesh. Morale in the Israelite camp was now high, and they were ready for the campaign to begin.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Rahab believed what she had heard about the miracles God had done, although she had not seen them for herself. We read about miracles in the Bible. Do we believe them with the same kind of faith and trust that Rahab had?

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we know and believe that you led your people with great power. Help us to put our trust in you and bravely do what is right in your sight. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

Rahab said: "The Lord your God is he who is God in heaven above and on earth beneath" (Joshua 2:11).

***Joshua 3; 4; 5:10-12*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how the powerful God of Israel was with his people as they prepared to conquer Canaan.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Exodus 14:15-31; 19:10-11; Numbers 4:5-6; Deuteronomy 18:21-22.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Remind the children that the Israelites had come to the end of their long journey and they had only to cross the River Jordan in order to set foot in the promised land. But they could not wade or swim across because the river was in flood from melting snow; neither were there any of the usual means for crossing a river. (Discuss with the class what these might be, e.g. bridge, tunnel, boats). What were they to do? The class may remember that God's people had faced a similar problem shortly after leaving Egypt. Of those now waiting to cross the Jordan, some would remember the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, and everyone had certainly heard about it.

While the Israelites were encamped on the east bank, Joshua gave instructions that they should prepare themselves both physically and mentally; for they were to witness the power of God working for them. This would involve washing their clothes and joining in prayers, to remind them that they were holy and special people. As he had done on many other occasions, God gave precise commands which were to be followed in detail. He also assured Joshua that not only was he with him, but that the forthcoming events would firmly establish him as leader in the eyes of the people.

From early morning there would have been an atmosphere of excitement and expectancy in the camp. Every family had packed their belongings and were ready to move as soon as the signal was given. Eagerly they watched and waited for the procession of priests carrying the beautifully-covered ark of the covenant. This sight would also serve to underline their awareness of being a people ruled and guided by God. The distance of several hundred metres which was to be maintained between the procession and those following it would further remind them of the sacredness of the ark, and heighten their feelings of reverence and awe.

When Joshua explained to the people what was about to happen, he used the occasion to stress the certainty of God's promises. When they saw this miracle come to pass, as promised, they would be reassured that God's other promises concerning their occupation of the land would also be fulfilled.

In describing the remarkable stopping of the flowing river, point out the absolute faith of the priests in setting foot on the edge of the water and their endurance at having to stand holding the ark while the many thousands of people, with their goods, flocks and herds, passed safely across the dried-up bed.

There remained two things to do before the priests also passed over to the west bank. Twelve strong men were chosen (one from each tribe) and given the honour and duty of collecting one large boulder each from the river bed where the priests were standing. These stones were then carried to the place where they were to camp that night, and were to be set up as a permanent memorial, which would be a witness to future generations to the truth of the miracle. In addition to this, Joshua also raised up a memorial on the river bed itself - a mound of twelve stones.



Discuss with the children the feelings of the people who participated in this awe-inspiring event and now found themselves in the rich land for which they had longed. Their desert wanderings were at an end. The passover was celebrated, after which they fed on the produce of the land. The manna which had sustained them daily for forty years was no longer required and did not appear again. This people, who had been saddened by the death of their wise leader, Moses, now turned in confidence and great respect to Joshua, recognizing that the authority of God rested with him.

The lesson could be concluded by reading together the last four verses of Joshua 4, which constitute an appeal for the people never to forget the power which they had witnessed, and their responsibility towards their God.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

God promised Joshua that the river would dry up, so that the Israelites could cross. The people saw that God kept his promise. How do you think this made them feel about other promises which God made? We learn in Sunday School about God's promises which have already come true. Many others have not yet come true. How sure can we be that everything God has said will take place, will actually happen?

### **WORKSHEETS**

The dot-to-dot reads 'Follow God's instructions'. The stone puzzle reads 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground because God dried up the river. He did this so that everyone might know that the Lord is powerful.'

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, Joshua, the priests and the people in today's story believed in you and you helped them. Help us to trust in you as they did. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"On that day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they stood in awe of him, as they had stood in awe of Moses, all the days of his life" (Joshua 4:14).

***Joshua 5:13-15; 6*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show that God was at the head of the army which captured Jericho – a fact recognised not only by the Israelites but by their enemies; and to show how the two spies kept their word.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Exodus 3:4-5; Leviticus 25:6-13; Joshua 2:18-21; Hebrews 11:30-31.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Joshua stood before Jericho and looked at the city. How could these vast walls be penetrated? He had never seen any like them before. The walls were thick enough to incorporate houses and there was only one entrance, the great gates of which were locked. As he pondered the problem, a man appeared in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him to ask whose side he was on, only to discover that he was “the commander of the army of the Lord”. Up to that moment, had Joshua thought of himself as the commander of God’s army? Instantly he recognized the soldier as God’s angel, and he humbled himself and requested directions from God. As Moses had done before him, Joshua took off his shoes in reverence, acknowledging that he was in the presence of God.

The divine commands for the attack, and assurance of the outcome, were given. Joshua saw to it that these were conveyed to the people, and followed meticulously. Note the significance of the number seven - seven priests, seven trumpets, seven days, seven circuits of the wall on the seventh day. The trumpets or rams’ horns were jubilee trumpets and had a religious significance, thus emphasizing that this was a holy, and not simply a military, undertaking.

Faith played a vital part in this dramatic sequence. Faith was first shown by Joshua, fresh from his encounter with the angel. Then there was the faith of the priests accompanying the ark, the faith of Israel’s armed men and that of the silent people. To all of them that great fortress city must have been a daunting sight, but they obeyed the directions of the Lord, never wavering, as day after day the procession marched around Jericho.

Meanwhile, within the walls of the city, the people of Jericho were far from confident, in spite of their fortifications. They had heard of the extraordinary events that had marked their enemy’s travels towards Canaan, and of the rumours that a supernatural power was at work. The silent march of the enemy unnerved them further, increasing the tension. By the end of a week they would have been speculating as to what would happen. Their apprehension grew when the pattern changed on the seventh day. In one household only was there knowledge that an attack was certain.

Rahab had kept the agreement made with the two spies, and had gathered all her family under her roof. A scarlet cord was hanging in her window, and now Rahab and her relations waited for deliverance. The rest of the citizens were not at all prepared for the sudden, ear-splitting eruption of noise, and the panic, confusion and destruction that followed. The only part of that immense wall which remained standing was the part on which Rahab’s house was built. God had seen to it that her faithfulness was rewarded, and Joshua sent the two spies whom she had befriended, to rescue her and all her family.

It is important to stress that Israel had to understand that the total destruction of this wicked city was God’s will. Severe punishment was to come upon anyone who took anything for himself. The precious

treasures of the city were to be sacred to the Lord, but everything else was to be burned. In addition, a curse was pronounced on anyone who should afterwards rebuild the city of Jericho.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Rahab relied on the two spies not to let her down. Did they? When we agree to do something for our parents, teachers or friends, can they rely on us not to let them down?

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we know that you will never let us down. Help us to be trustworthy and reliable with our families and friends. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people raised a great shout, and the wall fell down flat" (Joshua 6:20).

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## **THE CAPTURE OF AI**

**32**

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### ***Joshua 7 and 8***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show that God sees everything and cannot be deceived.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Exodus 20:23; 34:10-17; Numbers 15:30-36; Joshua 6:18-19; Colossians 3:5; 1 John 2:15-17.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

The children will be happy to recall the magnificent and dramatic conquest of Jericho. Joshua and all Israel were full of confidence after that great victory. There would be no holding them now; all their enemies would tremble; victory would be easy; Canaan was theirs. Such was probably their thinking as they contemplated the taking of Ai. Spies were sent out who returned with an encouraging report. They said it would not even be necessary to send out the whole army; only two or three thousand would be required.

With the aid of a good map (preferably a relief map) show the hilly regions of Canaan. Ai was about ten miles to the west of Jericho on steeply rising ground, in a strategic position on the eastern edge of the central ridge, commanding the main route from Gilgal into the interior of Canaan. Out went three thousand soldiers to battle, while the rest of Israel remained in their camp eagerly anticipating news of another victory. Time passed, and instead of the exultant cries of triumph came the sight of a depleted

army of disillusioned, wounded and defeated men, now in retreat and bearing the bodies of thirty-six of their companions who were slain on the rocky slopes around Ai.

The hearts of the people of Israel sank at the humiliation of this defeat. Had God forsaken them already? Had he withdrawn his power from them now that they had entered Canaan? Joshua was shocked and mystified. He feared that God's name would be dishonoured when the news of this defeat spread to the Canaanites. He prostrated himself before God and pleaded for understanding.

God showed Joshua the reason for their failure. Israel had sinned. Note how everyone was implicated in the sin of the one man; he had lied and committed sacrilege by stealing what belonged to God and concealing it. The people had been expressly forbidden to keep any of the treasures of the conquered city, and Achan had brought shame on Israel. It was Joshua's duty to cleanse Israel of this sin; the sinner had to be found and punished according to God's commands.

Imagine the feelings of the Israelites as, early in the morning, they were gathered together. With God's guidance, first the tribe of Judah was singled out and by a process of elimination Achan was found to be responsible for the sin. There is no indication as to the way in which this was revealed to Joshua but God guided him in finding the culprit. When Achan realised that his crime had been exposed in the presence of all, he could not sustain the deception. Human greed had caused him to ignore the vitally important divine ban on the pagan treasures. He had condemned himself, and he must die. All Israel witnessed the admission of sin, saw the goods restored to the Lord's treasury, and fulfilled the task of administering the punishment decreed. Harsh though the punishment was, we must remember that, if Israel were to survive as God's chosen people, obedience was essential. There could be no rebellion or half commitment to the Lord God of Israel.

God's anger was turned away; the sin had been removed. God reassured Joshua of his presence and guidance, and the people of Israel were able to advance with confidence. All the fighting men were assembled for the capture of Ai. This was not because such a large number was needed for a victory but possibly to restore the morale of the army and of the whole nation. This time God told Joshua exactly how to achieve victory. Describe the strategy employed, and illustrate the positions of the armies by means of a simple sketch or model. Convey the strong leadership of Joshua and his complete adherence to God's instructions. His wielding of the javelin not only gave the signal for invasion but also seemed to represent the authority vested in Joshua over the enemy. Note the interesting difference in the commands of God regarding the contents of Jericho and Ai. The people were to learn that whatever God's instructions, they must be obeyed. There followed a ceremony of rededication and gratitude to God. Joshua was as concerned, as Moses had been, that the people should have the Law always before them and that God should be glorified.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Achan thought that no one knew that he had stolen the treasure. He had deceived everyone. But God, who sees everything, knew all about it. When we are tempted to take what doesn't belong to us, do we sometimes forget that, although we can deceive other people, we cannot hide our actions from God? If we always remembered this, would we behave differently?

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, you know all that we think and say and do. May we always remember that you are angry when we steal or tell lies. Please help us always to do right and speak the truth. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

"Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight" (Proverbs 12:22).

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## THE CALL OF GIDEON

33

### *Judges 6*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To show that God provided Israel with a suitable leader to deliver them from the Midianites and to turn them back to himself; and that God responded to Gideon's plea for a sign.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

Exodus 33:20; Deuteronomy 12:1-7, 29-32; Judges 2:7-23; Hebrews 11:32-34. Look into the worship of Baals and Ashtaroth.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

In order to explain how the people of Israel had settled in Canaan, and had become contaminated by the evil beliefs and practices of the local people, talk about the way in which the rotteness of one apple soon spreads to the good ones touching it. To keep apples from going bad, one has to be meticulous in removing the imperfect ones. In the same way, God instructed his people to be strict in eliminating from the land the idol-worshipping heathens, for fear that they themselves would be influenced by them. Remind the children about Jericho and Ai, where clear instructions were given to destroy them utterly. As the Israelites advanced through Canaan, they conquered many cities, but sometimes they made agreements with the people instead of keeping themselves separate.

Tell the children that Joshua had completed the conquest of the land, so that the people had been able to settle, by tribes, in the areas allotted to them by God. The years of wandering and living in tents were now over, and they had built houses and settled down to cultivate the rich land. Soon they were prosperous enough to trade with their neighbours and this contact led them into idolatry.

God had warned his people, through Moses, not to worship idols, and that if they did he would allow them to fall prey to their enemies; as a result they suffered at the hands of the Canaanites, the Midianites, the Philistines, etc. Whenever the people realised that their defeats were a punishment from God for their wickedness, they pleaded with God for forgiveness. Then God heard their prayers and provided them with a leader (judge) to deliver them.

A map, showing the division of the land among the twelve tribes, will reinforce the information given and can be used to show where Gideon lived (Manasseh), between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. The Midianites invaded from the east and attacked the people of Israel so cruelly that not only were they bereft of cattle and crops, they had to flee and hide in the hills. In their desperation they cried out to God.

In describing the call of Gideon by the angel, convey his despair; his feelings of inadequacy were reminiscent of Moses' reaction on Mount Horeb. As on that occasion, fire was the sign of God's power. Before his eyes, the meal that he had prepared was suddenly consumed with fire, which seemed to come out of the rock. This miraculous incident, which will excite the children with its visual impact, shocked Gideon and made him fear the consequences of so close a contact with God. God's reassurance moved him to worship and made him receptive to God's demands upon him. His first task not only required courage but also tested his loyalties. Gideon's mission to rid the land of wickedness had to begin with the destruction of the objects of idolatrous worship set up by his own father. It will be necessary to explain the practices of erecting idolatrous altars to Baal and worshipping wooden symbols (Asherah).

It appears that this one challenging act was enough to make Joash realise his error, and to inspire the Israelites to rise up against their enemies. They recognised that, in Gideon, they had a God-given leader.

Gideon was still overwhelmed by this sudden rise to prominence. Again he sought reassurance from God and asked for yet another sign that he had interpreted God's will correctly. A real sheepskin would be a powerful visual aid to introduce at this point. Children will appreciate how absorbent a fleece is, so that there could be no doubt, in each case, that God had answered his prayer.

In asking for a sign, Gideon was not lacking in faith in God, but was seeking confirmation that God really had chosen him to lead his people. He was aware that he was just an ordinary man but, with God's help, he was able to achieve great things.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Although Gideon was just an ordinary farmer, God called him to work for him. Gideon believed God, and proved this by destroying the altar of Baal, as God had instructed him to do. When he felt uncertain, he prayed to God to make him sure about what he was to do, and God readily answered his prayer. When we are uncertain what we should do, how can we be helped towards making the right decision?

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, when we are unsure, help us to remember that all we need to do is to turn to you and to ask you to show us the way. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies" (Judges 2:18).

***Judges 7:1-24*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how Israel learned to put their trust in God, and not to rely on their own strength.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Deuteronomy 20:1-8; Judges 8:4-10; 1 Samuel 17:47.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Remind the children that because of the signs God gave to Gideon, he was sure that God had called him to lead an army against their enemy, the Midianites. Make a statement to the effect that: "Today we shall learn how the small army of Israel defeated the great and powerful Midianites, without using a single weapon". When faced with the tremendous task of mustering an army, Gideon drew support from the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali. He was eager to assemble as large a company of fighting men as possible. When they set up camp early in the morning, Gideon took stock of his troops and considered whether there were sufficient to challenge the enemy. There were 32,000 men, to the enemy's 135,000 - a ratio of less than one to four.

Try to help the children imagine the scene by describing the camp of the Midianites filling the wide valley. The enemy could be seen by the Israelite soldiers who were positioned on higher ground several miles to the south. The enemy soldiers seemed to swarm over the whole area, and were equipped with vast numbers of camels on which they were able to make swift charges. Use a visual aid (map, diagrammatic representation or model) to demonstrate the situation. Ask the children how they might have felt to have been soldiers in the Israelite army. Draw out the natural fear against such odds. Some children may, on the other hand, feel they would have been confident because of Gideon's faith, God's assurance, and the memory of previous victories. Point out that more than two thirds of the men felt afraid, because they were so heavily outnumbered.

How surprising, then, were God's instructions to Gideon to send home everyone who was fearful, and in so doing to reduce their number to 10,000 men. It had been a principle established by Moses that there was no place in God's army for those who failed to trust in the power of God to give victory, whether by many or by few. God also explained to Gideon that it was vital to restrict the numbers to such an extent that the task would become humanly impossible, so that when the enemy was defeated, the Israelites would not be able to say that it was their army alone that had gained the victory.

But even the remaining 10,000 brave men were too many and God outlined a simple test for reducing the numbers more drastically. Let the children participate in the story by getting them to suggest how the soldiers might have managed to drink the water without the use of drinking vessels. Group their answers into the two main methods adopted, and point out that a mere 300 of the men actually scooped up the water with their hands. These were made to stand on one side, while the other 9,700 fighting men were sent home.

Having carried out these instructions, which were a test of Gideon's faith and obedience, Gideon was again assured by God that they would defeat the enemy. Gideon and his servant set out on a dangerous mission - to eavesdrop on the enemy at dead of night - which required stealth and courage. This was not a spying mission, but the response to a command given by God for the specific purpose

of inspiring Gideon with confidence. The words of the enemy soldier to his comrade suggest that, in spite of their numerical strength, there was fear in the Midianite camp because of the reputation of the God of Israel. When Gideon heard this, he worshipped God.

Eagerly Gideon hurried back to camp and rallied the 300 men to immediate action. He issued no weapons. Instead, each man was to carry a burning torch inside a clay pot, and a trumpet. Point out that with a torch in their left hand and a trumpet in the right, there was no hand free to hold a sword. What faith and courage it would require to go forward unarmed. Describe dramatically the way the Israelites quickly and silently encircled the valley and took positions around the perimeter. The Midianites were in the process of changing the guards on watch and would have been less inclined to notice any sound or movement nearby. Convey the impact of the sudden appearance of lights on all sides and the noise of hundreds of trumpets, the shattering of the jars and shouts of "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon". A shock wave spread through the Midianite camp, and panic ensued. Possibly they assumed that each trumpeter was leading a troop of men, and so thought they were being attacked by a vast army.

The Midianite soldiers, sword in hand, retreated in terror. Thinking they were completely surrounded, they could only retreat further into their own camp. In the darkness and confusion no one could recognise friend or foe, so the Midianites fought amongst themselves and destroyed each other. When, eventually, they broke through Gideon's ambush and fled, Gideon called on his reserve forces to attack the demoralised enemy and capture their lands as far as the river Jordan. There fell in that night 120,000 of the enemy, and of Gideon's band of 300 not one was lost.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

The Midianites were bad people, who had to be removed from the land. The Israelites could not do this by themselves and they trusted in God to help them. There is a lot of wrong done in the world today and we, who are on God's side, must try to overcome it. God has promised to help everyone who tries to do this. What can we do about the wrong things done by other people? What can we do about the wrong things we do ourselves?

## **WORKSHEETS**

The crossword reads:

Across: TREMBLED, CAMPED, KNEES, DOG, THE LORD, OWN, MIDIAN, ISRAEL, TENTS;  
Down: THREE, LAPPED, TONGUES, HIS SERVANT, SAVE, GIDEON, TRUMPETS, WATER, BOAST, TEN.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, thank you for the story of Gideon, and for showing us how you helped him. Help us not to follow the bad ways of the world. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

"The Lord your God is he that goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory" (Deuteronomy 20:4).



***Judges 13 and 14*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show Samson's faith and zeal for the Lord, and also his wilfulness.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Numbers 6:1-8. Map of Israel in the time of the Judges, or a physical map of the area.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Ask the children to name the biggest and strongest man they know. This is the story of Samson, to whom God gave great strength. The Lord was with him, and had given him this strength in order that he could overcome God's enemies. It is important to make clear that Samson was strong because God gave him strength, not - or at least, not only - because he was very muscular. It was when 'the Spirit of the Lord' came upon him that he was enabled to do such mighty deeds.

Show the position of Zorah on the map, and also the tribe of Dan close to the border of the Philistines, who had been the Israelites' enemies for forty years. Whenever the Israelites forgot God, he punished them by delivering them into the hands of their enemies. At this time the tribe of Dan was ruled by the Philistines.

However, there were still some people who trusted in God, from among whom he chose Manoah and his wife for a special part in his purpose. Describe the startling visits of the angel and the impact these had upon the couple. Describe the promise made to them of a son; how he was to be a Nazirite from birth, and what this entailed, i.e., not to drink wine, not to cut his hair, and not to touch a dead body. Point out that the reason for Samson's long hair had nothing to do with fashion. Also explain that his mother was to be very careful about what she ate and drank whilst pregnant.

Emphasize how the parents would bring up Samson, carrying out the rules of the Nazirite vow. But although Samson was set apart for a special purpose, he did not always remember to obey God's commandments. Refer to the wrong choice of a woman of Timnath for a wife, and the grief it caused Samson's parents, who knew the importance of God's law against marrying unbelievers. Furthermore, although he had strength to kill a lion without any weapons, on his way to Timnath, Samson's contact with its dead body on two occasions was against the Nazirite vow. Note also (chapter 14:6) that he did not tell his parents what he had done.

When describing the wedding feast, explain the customs of that time when parents "arranged" marriages for their children. In Samson's case, however, his parents were forced to comply with his desires to marry the woman from Timnath.

Refer to the seven days of feasting, the bridegroom celebrating with his companions, at the end of which would come the wedding. Thirty young men of the Philistines were present at Samson's feast, and when he met them Samson challenged them to answer his riddle. Explain this clearly. Can the children answer it? Indicate the reward offered by Samson for getting it right. Describe how Samson's new wife betrayed him by giving away the answer and how Samson retaliated and, in anger, killed thirty Philistines in order to settle the wager. This Samson did unaided by any man, but helped by the strength given to him by the Lord.

In concluding the story, sum up the character of Samson. Show on the one hand that his behaviour was far from exemplary, and yet how God used his strengths to overcome the enemies of Israel.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

No matter how good our parents are or how much they try to help us to be godly people, there comes a time when each of us has to make a decision to serve the Lord of our own free will, or to turn away from him. Samson was sometimes disobedient and wilful, as we all are.

What strengths do we have? (Health, energy, senses, brain, etc.) In what way can we use these strengths to serve God? How can prayer, and thinking about what God would want us to do, help us to obey him?

### **WORKSHEETS**

Samson's riddle reads 'Out of the eater something to eat, out of the strong something sweet'.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we want to use all our energy and strength and enthusiasm to serve you. Forgive us when we do what we want, instead of what you would have us do. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts; so I am helped" (Psalm 28:7).

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## **SAMSON'S DEATH**

**36**

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### ***Judges 16***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show that in his time of weakness Samson saw his great need for God.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Numbers 6:9-21; Hebrews 11:32-34.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Find out whether the children remember the rules of the Nazirite vow. As a result of keeping this vow, God had at times given Samson extraordinary physical strength. Ask the children to recall examples of this.

Using a map, indicate the area of Samson's home in the territory of Dan next to the Philistines, who were the enemies of Israel in the days of Samson. He had been responsible for the deaths of at least one thousand and thirty Philistines, and the lords of the Philistines wanted to make Samson their prisoner. Remind the children that God had given Samson his great strength so that he could use it to free the Israelites from their enemies. Unfortunately he was unwise in his choice of companions.

Discuss with the children the importance of making good friends. Emphasize his foolishness in being attracted to Delilah, a Philistine unbeliever, who was offered an enormous bribe of eleven hundred pieces of silver by each of the lords of the Philistines to find out the secret of his great strength. Explain the meaning of a bribe.

Tell the children about Samson's visits to Delilah and her three attempts to trick him, first binding him with new cords, then new ropes, and then by weaving his hair into the cloth she was making. Describe the way she used her feminine charm to beguile him. Illustrate the dialogue by changes in voice and expression. Hand puppets could be used to dramatize the scene. Finally, show Delilah's frustration at having been teased by Samson, and being made to look foolish in the eyes of the Philistines, from whom she hoped to get a large reward.

Point out that Samson appeared to be unaware of any personal danger, in spite of Delilah's previous attempts to hand him over to the Philistines. She persisted in her cajoling and, totally captivated by her, he finally gave in to her pleading and foolishly divulged his secret.

Convey the Philistines' triumph over their now helpless enemy, and the sudden reversal of the situation; how they put out Samson's eyes, bound him with fetters of brass, and took him to Gaza where he was made to grind corn in the prison house. Ask the children if they have seen animals doing a similar task. Draw out the children's ideas of how Samson must have felt at this time – frustrated at not being able to see, remorse and self-disgust for having given away his secret, and the utter weakness of his own body. Looking back on his life, Samson saw how reckless and self-reliant he had been, and realized his absolute dependence upon God. Nevertheless, he had to endure the cruel consequences of his careless disregard of God's laws. Eventually, however, Samson's hair started to grow again, perhaps reminding him that according to the rules for the Nazirites, once the vows were broken the hair had to be shaved off and grown afresh. No doubt he realized that his strength was being returned to him.

Describe vividly the scene of the Philistines gathering to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon, and their rejoicing over the capture of Samson. Highlight the curiosity of those on the roof, who wanted to see this man who had been brought from the prison and set between the centre pillars of the building. Explain what a pillar is, and its place in the construction of the temple.

In spite of his foolishness, and his broken vows, God heard Samson's final prayer and granted him the strength with which to avenge the Philistines for the loss of his eyes. He was prepared to die with his enemies as he grasped the centre pillars and drew them down upon himself. Ironically, Samson killed more Philistines at the time of his death (three thousand) than he did during his lifetime.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

It is so easy to think we know better than our parents, and to ignore what they say. Samson had been brought up to obey God's commandments but, when he grew up, he was foolish in his choice of companions. In the end, Delilah caused his downfall. When, and why, should we be very careful about our choice of friends?

## **WORKSHEETS**

Samson's prayer reads 'O Lord God, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more'.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, forgive us when we are too proud to listen to wise advice. Help us to turn to you, and to do what you ask. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1)

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## RUTH AND NAOMI

37

### *Ruth 1*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To look at the loyalty and love of Ruth for Naomi, and for God.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

Look for information about the effects of famine in Canaan.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

There are many points of interest arising out of this lesson, but do not be led away from the main theme of Ruth's love for Naomi, and for the God of Israel. This story is about a woman who was as kind to her husband's mother as daughters usually are to their own mothers.

Ask the children how they show their love for the members of their family. Do they simply say: “I love you”? What do they *do* to show their love?

Sketch the background of the departure of Naomi and Elimelech from Bethlehem in Judah, and their journey of some sixty miles across the Jordan and around the Dead Sea to Moab. Make sure the meaning of famine, with its far-reaching effects on a farming community, is clearly understood. It could have been going on for several years and very real hardship and suffering may have driven this family away from their homeland. Shortly after their arrival in Moab, Elimelech died, perhaps having suffered from prolonged malnutrition and the arduous journey. The meanings of the names of Naomi's sons, Mahlon (sickly) and Chilion (pining or wasting) suggests some hereditary weakness. Both men died young.

While in Moab, Naomi's two sons married girls from that land. Write down the names of Naomi, Orpah and Ruth in order to help the children to remember them as the story continues. Their stay in Moab lasted ten years, by the end of which time the women had been left on their own.

Ask the children to try and imagine what it would be like to be living away from their home country with no relatives nearby? Perhaps some of them have experienced this, and will know why Naomi wanted to return home to Bethlehem, especially having heard, perhaps from travelling merchants, that the famine was over. Describe the planning of the journey and the packing up of her home. Show Naomi's concern that her daughters-in-law should not leave their country, their families and friends. Stress the love and care which Ruth and Orpah had both shown to Naomi, and their desire to accompany her in spite of her attempts to persuade them to stay in Moab. Both girls wept at the thought of parting from Naomi. However, Orpah did decide to return to her home, but Ruth clung to Naomi and refused to let her go on alone. Repeat the lovely words which Ruth spoke (v16). If you are using the Authorised

Version it will be necessary to explain the word “entreat” and a modern Bible translation, or paraphrase of the words, will be helpful.

During her time of living with the family of Naomi, Ruth had come to learn about and believe in the great God of Israel. No longer could she worship the Moabite gods of wood and stone, and it was the love Ruth had for the true God which was one of the important factors in her decision to stay with Naomi, no matter what the outcome might be. Her faith would, no doubt, be a source of strength and an inspiration to the older woman.

Describe the remainder of the journey to Bethlehem. Naomi now had the company of this brave daughter-in-law as she walked (or rode a donkey) round the northern part of the Dead Sea, crossed the River Jordan and then climbed the hills of Judah. They finally reached Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest in April, a time of joy and celebration.

Ask the children whether they have any ideas about the greeting Naomi might have received after ten years’ absence? Would any people in the town recognize her and remember the day she had left with her husband and two sons? In spite of past sorrows, Naomi could see the hand of God in all that had happened to her in Moab and recognized that he had now brought her safely home. Naomi still trusted the God of Israel and believed that he would help her and Ruth in their life together in Bethlehem.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN’S LIVES**

Do you know what it means to be loyal? Ruth was loyal, both to God and to Naomi. She believed in God and was determined to put her trust in him. She loved Naomi and was determined not to leave her. How can we show loyalty to our families, our friends and to God?

### **WORKSHEETS**

Then footprints read ‘Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God’.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we want to be like Ruth and put our love and loyalty for you above everything. Please help us also to be loyal to our families and friends. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

“Where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16).

***Ruth 2-4*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how God directs the lives of godly people.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Leviticus 19:9 and 33-34; Deuteronomy 24:19; 25:5-10. Find out details about the harvest season in the Jewish agricultural year, the practices of threshing and winnowing, and the associated feasts.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Remind the children of Ruth and Naomi's arrival at Bethlehem. Imagine this were happening today, and suggest how two immigrants would go about providing for themselves and how they would find food, work and somewhere to live. Then, by contrast, describe the simple agricultural way of life in Bethlehem in those days and how the two women would find food, water and shelter. Explain the custom of gleaning, and God's instructions to the Israelites to provide for the needs of the poor and of strangers.

You may like to consider using hand puppets to represent Ruth, Naomi and Boaz when recounting the dialogues of chapter two. Clearly God was with Ruth in her choice of the part of the field which belonged to Boaz, a close relative of Naomi's husband. Point out that in Israel there were no hedges, and large areas of good land were divided into strips marked by boundary stones; Boaz owned one such strip. Spend a little time introducing Boaz, a wealthy, honourable and godly man who was highly respected. His greeting to the reapers and their reply to him indicate the good relationship which he had created with his own people, and show the way in which the Lord God was acknowledged in everyday greetings.

As a foreigner Ruth could not assume that she had a right to glean so she asked the foreman for permission to do so, and then applied herself to the task. Seeing a new woman amongst the gleaners, Boaz asked his foreman who she was. Notice the good report of her hard work. Boaz was impressed by her industry and conscientiousness and touched by her devotion to his kinswoman, Naomi. He showed his concern and kindness not only by allowing her to glean in his field, as the Law required, but by providing extra grain for her to gather. In addition he gave her access to the precious water which, contrary to the usual custom, the young men drew from the well, and invited her to share the mid-day meal.

Stress Ruth's gratitude for the Boaz' generosity, and her bewilderment at his concern, since she was but a foreigner in the land. It is interesting to note that Boaz had already heard about Ruth's background. This shows us two things, namely that Ruth's lovely character and unselfish behaviour had been noticed by the people of Bethlehem, and that Boaz was a man who cared about the welfare of others. His words to her were welcoming and kindly.

Show again Ruth's concern for Naomi when, having been provided with a good portion of food at the mealtime, she had saved some to take home to the older woman. Highlight Naomi's amazement at the amount of barley her daughter-in-law had gleaned, an ephah (50 lbs.), and her joy in knowing that God had guided Ruth to the field of Boaz. Ruth continued to glean, to provide for herself and Naomi, under the protection of Boaz until the barley and wheat harvests had ended.

In continuing this story, explain that in the days in which Ruth lived marriages were arranged by parents. Therefore it was fitting that Naomi should take the initiative in providing a home and security for Ruth. Harvest being over, the winnowing of the barley had to be undertaken by Boaz and his men, and Boaz remained on the site overnight until the job was completed. Ruth obeyed her mother-in-law's instructions carefully. She washed, put on some perfume and dressed in her best clothes. She hid until Boaz was asleep, drowsy with wine. His first concern when he awoke to find a woman lying at his feet was to identify her. When Ruth pointed out his responsibilities of kinship and asked him to marry her, Boaz said she was right to have approached him and he promised to fulfil her request if possible. However, there was an even closer relative who might wish to marry her and he must be consulted first.

Boaz went to the city gate, the place where business was transacted in those days. Here he met his kinsman and wasted no time in calling him and the elders of the city together to witness what he had to say. As it did not suit the other man to take Ruth for his wife, he agreed to pass this responsibility to Boaz, and the transaction was completed with the ceremony of the sandal, a confirmation of the agreement. The happy occasion was witnessed by a crowd of people who joined the elders in warm congratulations and good wishes for the couple's future happiness. In such a close community it was natural for everyone to share occasions of great happiness or of sorrow. All the villagers had consoled Naomi when she arrived back in Bethlehem bereft of her husband and sons; now they rejoiced with her in the celebration of her much loved daughter-in-law's marriage. When, later, a son was born to Ruth and Boaz the villagers again united to express their pleasure at the restoration of the family line. The child was named Obed, which means "restoring". They were not to know that he was to become the grandfather of the great king David.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

We can learn a great deal about kindness from the lives of Ruth and Boaz. They thought so much about the feelings and needs of others, that it must have been a great pleasure to know them. Let us ask ourselves some searching questions. When was the last time we did something kind for someone? What are the needs of the people whom we meet, such as our parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters, teachers, friends, old people, etc? How can we show that we understand their needs and feelings?

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we have enjoyed hearing about Naomi, Ruth and Boaz. Please help us to be kind and considerate, always careful about the needs and feelings of others. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"The Lord recompense you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" (Ruth 2:12).

**1 Samuel 1; 2:18-21****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how God answered a woman's fervent prayer, and how he rewarded her faithfulness.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Numbers 6:1-8; Joshua 18:1; 1 Samuel 2:1-11; 1 Chronicles 6:33-38.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Begin this lesson by talking to the children about prayer. Do they pray? To whom? How often? What for? Have they experienced answers to their prayers? Consider now the prayer of a very sad woman.

Describe the family background, the two wives of Elkanah, and the concern Elkanah felt for Hannah. Explain the disgrace felt by Hebrew women who were childless, and Hannah's great longing for a baby of her own. Although Elkanah lived in Ephraim, he was a descendent of the priestly tribe of Levi.

Talk about the annual journey made by Elkanah and his family from their home in Ramah, to Shiloh where they went to worship and sacrifice at the tabernacle. On one such occasion Hannah felt particularly unhappy. She saw other women with their children and, in particular, her husband's other wife with her sons and daughters, and she felt so miserable that she cried bitterly and even refused to eat. Elkanah tried to understand and to comfort her, but she was inconsolable.

Hannah decided (no doubt not for the first time) to take her troubles to the Lord. Recite Hannah's prayer and her solemn promise to give back to God the gift of the son for which she earnestly prayed. It will be necessary to explain some of the words or to put the whole prayer into everyday language, and reference should be made to the meaning of total dedication to the Lord, under the Nazirite vow. Eli, the old priest, had been watching Hannah as she prayed. Seeing her lips moving, but hearing no words, the priest thought that Hannah was drunk. Show how Eli's attitude changed as he listened to her, and how he blessed her. Emphasize that Hannah left the tabernacle feeling utterly relieved, having unburdened herself and left the problem with God. She trusted that God would answer her prayer, whatever the answer might be.

Hannah was overjoyed when God granted her request and she called her son Samuel, which means "asked of God". Imagine the happiness she must have felt on first holding her new-born son. Hannah remembered the promise that she had made to God about the baby, and began preparing him for his priestly life. Ask the children if they have had a baby in their house and discuss teaching it to walk, to talk, to feed itself, to wash and dress itself. These would have been Hannah's tasks during the first two or three years of Samuel's life and she would have done them with loving care. Then came the time for Hannah to keep her promise.

All the family went to Shiloh. Convey the excitement of Samuel, and the preparations Hannah would have made to provide suitable clothing for him for the next twelve months. It was more than half a day's journey from home and many thoughts must have gone through Hannah's mind as they travelled. Upon arriving at the tabernacle, they first offered their sacrifice and then took Samuel to Eli, the High Priest. Hannah made herself known and reminded the priest of the day, a few years earlier, when she had spoken to him of her prayer for a child. She explained her vow and her intention of leaving the child with him. Convey how those involved might have felt: Hannah's mixed feelings of sadness and



devotion to God, Samuel's homesickness, Elkanah's respect for, and support of, his wife, and Eli's joy and thankfulness to God for this great blessing. Samuel was welcomed gladly by the old man, who was to care for him as his own son and to teach him the ways of the Lord.

Point out that, having received a child in answer to her prayer, Hannah did not forget to say thank you to God. Her prayer of thanksgiving in chapter two shows clearly that her life was dedicated to the Lord's service. God blessed her with five more children.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

There are at least two lessons we can learn from the story of Hannah and Samuel. The first is that whatever our problem (or reason for celebration) we should talk to God about it. Secondly, we must believe that God will answer our prayer in the way that is best for us. What problems or joys can we pray about, concerning ourselves or others? How should we feel when we have prayed?

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank you for letting us know about Hannah, who is such a good example to us. Please help us to remember to talk to you whenever we have a problem, and to thank you whenever you have made us happy. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth. He fulfils the desire of all who fear him" (Psalm 145:18-19).

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## **GOD SPEAKS TO SAMUEL**

**40**

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### ***1 Samuel 3***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show how Samuel readily responded to God's call, and how God punished those who chose to do wickedly.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Revise the details of the tabernacle in Exodus 36-40. Read and select material from 1 Samuel 2.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Commence the lesson with a quiz on the previous story, emphasizing Hannah's faith and the way in which God answered her prayer. Ask the children whether they remember the meaning of Samuel's name, the promise Hannah made and the purpose in bringing Samuel to stay with Eli?

Using models or pictures of the tabernacle, remind the children of its design, purpose and contents, and of the clothing and work of the priests. It was their responsibility to uphold the Law and to guide the people in the right way. Only men of the tribe of Levi were priests, and the work was handed down from father to son. Eli was the High Priest and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas were also expected to become faithful priests. But they turned out to be self-willed and godless men who behaved wickedly and encouraged other people to do wrong. Eli was very displeased and ashamed about the things they did but he had given up trying to correct them; they wouldn't listen to him.

Explain the love Eli would have had for this young boy who took the place of his reprobate sons; this lad was conscientious, pious, obedient and willing to learn. Suggest some of the jobs which the young Levite may have been able to do to help Eli in caring for God's house - though he would have to wait until he was grown up to be able to carry out any of the formal duties of a Kohathite. There is a useful lesson here - children are always important, and it is always possible for children to please God, but there is also a need to respect their elders and to realise that not everything is permitted to them.

Describe Hannah's annual visit to Shiloh when she and Elkanah and all the family came to worship at the appointed meeting place. Each year she took Samuel a new and bigger coat to wear over his tunic. No doubt Samuel would be glad to see them and to hear the latest news of the family, especially the birth of a new brother or sister. He would show his mother and father where he slept and worked, and told them about the things he had to do. Year by year he took on more duties and, through Eli's careful teaching, he came to understand and to recite the Law and to appreciate the covenant which God had made with his ancestors. It had been many years since God had spoken directly to anyone. Samuel would have learned about God's communications with Abraham, Joseph, Moses and with Joshua. Samuel grew to love God and wanted to serve him well.

Describe the quietness and darkness of the night as Eli and Samuel lay asleep. When Samuel was awakened by a voice calling his name, he naturally assumed that Eli wanted him and immediately ran to his side. Using the exact words spoken, convey the persistence of Samuel and the patience and subsequent realization of Eli. Having been told by Eli how to reply if the voice called him again, Samuel would feel excited and nervously expectant as he lay down, and no doubt he rehearsed the words he was to say. With what breathless wonder, and perhaps fear, he listened to the dreadful words which God spoke to him that night. Afterwards he could not sleep again but lay wondering how he would give the message to Eli in the morning. No doubt he was relieved when it became light and he got up to open the doors of God's house.

Perhaps Eli was restless, too, and when he heard Samuel moving about he called to him and insisted on being told everything that God had said. Sadly Samuel told him all. Eli knew only too well that his sons were very wicked and that he had failed to stop their evil practices. He recognized that God's judgement was just and accepted it meekly. For his part, Samuel became a faithful and obedient judge who led the people in the right way and taught them wisely. What is more, God spoke to him many times after that first message, so that he became also a great prophet in Israel.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Do we hear the voice of God speaking to us aloud today? How does God tell us what he wants us to do? God is pleased when we listen carefully to his word and then try to do what he asks. We are never too young to begin to work for God. What sort of things could we do at Sunday School, at home, at school, and how should we do them?

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, thank you for choosing Samuel to be a great leader in Israel. Help us to listen to your words and to start now to serve you in the best way we can. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

“And the Lord came and stood forth, calling as at other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’. And Samuel said ‘Speak, for thy servant hears.’” (1 Samuel 3:10).

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## **THE ARK OF GOD TAKEN**

**41**

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### ***1 Samuel 4:1-18; 5 and 6***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show what happened to the ark in the time of Samuel, and to demonstrate that it is vital to have the right attitude when worshipping God.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Exodus 25:10-22; 1 Samuel 7.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

With the aid of a good picture, remind the children what the ark of God was, its size, what it contained, and that it was kept in the most holy place in the tabernacle into which only the high Priest entered once a year. Recall also the way in which the glory of God appeared between the cherubim, which were above the ark, and how the ark was considered the most sacred object in Israel.

Many of the people of Israel had at this time neglected the worship of God and were worshipping idols again. The priests failed to lead the people as they should have done, and God was very displeased. Ask the children if they remember the means God used to punish the Israelite’s wickedness and to bring them back to him. The Philistines had conquered much of Israel’s territory and now engaged in a further attack. Use a map to show the site of the battle, and describe Israel’s crushing defeat.

The people knew that God had not been with them and they sought to rectify this by sending for the ark to be brought from Shiloh. Perhaps they thought about the fall of Jericho, when the ark had been carried in procession, and considered that it was what was lacking on this occasion. Their reasoning, however, was faulty and their plan was not in accordance with God’s will. The priests should have known this and forbidden the taking of the ark from the tabernacle. They should have exhorted the people to repent of their wickedness and plead for God’s forgiveness and guidance, but they were weak and immoral themselves and they colluded in this folly of taking the ark into battle as if it were a mascot which might bring them good luck. It seems that they had a misguided and superstitious idea that God dwelt in the ark alone, and that the actual structure had some magical properties. Reference may be made to the practice, common even today, of keeping lucky charms in the superstitious belief that they will protect the owner. Make clear the futility of this idea.

Convey the misguided excitement of the army of Israel on seeing the ark arrive at the battlefield, and the mighty shout of greeting. Describe the effect of this noise on the Philistines who knew of Israel's past exploits and were spurred on to a greater determination to win. In describing the battle, stress the totality of the defeat: thirty thousand men had died, the ark of God had been captured and Hophni and Phinehas had both been killed. When the terrible news reached the aged Eli, the shock caused his death.

The Philistines rejoiced in their capture of the ark and bore it in triumph to the temple of Dagon whom they believed had granted their victory. However, their triumph soon turned to horror and dread. For seven months the ark was with them, and they turned out to be seven months they would never forget. Graphic descriptions are given of what happened to the people of Ashdod, Gath and Ekron. It seems likely that the ark was also taken to Gaza and Ashkelon (chapter 6:17-18) and it left behind a trail of disease, panic and death. At last the counsellors of the Philistines advised that the ark should be returned in such a way as to demonstrate whether or not Israel's God had caused the plague and, if so, to placate him. Normally the cows separated from their calves would have returned to their young, but an unseen hand led them straight to Israel.

Describe the harvest scene at Beth Shemesh and convey the emotion of the people as they saw the precious ark returning to them. It was the Levites, in accordance with the Law, who lifted it down from the cart and who led the people in an act of worship and thanksgiving. All this was observed by the Philistine lords who carried back a report to their own city. What they did not witness was the striking down of seventy Israelites who wilfully flouted the Law and dared to approach the ark and look into it. The lesson was clear, that neither the Israelites nor the Philistines could trifle with the things of God, nor disregard his Law. In fear the people of Beth Shemesh sent messengers to Kiriath Jearim to ask them to take the ark. This they did, lawfully and reverently, and the ark stayed there safely for the next twenty years.

If time allows, present the sequel to the story, of repentance and victory (chapter 7) inspired by the strong leadership of Samuel.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Do you know people who say that some things bring good luck and that some things bring bad luck? What does today's lesson teach us about this? Do people who truly believe in God need to rely on such things, considering that God works in a very real way in the lives of those who love and obey him?

## **WORKSHEETS**

The numbers in the arrows are, from the top: 6,5,1,9,4,2,10,3,7,8.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we are glad that you have power over all. Please help us to rely on your help and guidance. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

"My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:2).

**1 Samuel 8:4-22****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how God's people wanted to be like other nations, and to show Samuel's faithful obedience to God.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Deuteronomy 17:14-20, 1 Chronicles 6:31-34.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

This story could be introduced by discussing the ways in which different countries are ruled: some by a king or queen, some by a government, some by a president, etc. Explain that the people of Israel were ruled by God alone. It was he who had given them their land and their identity as a nation. It was he who had given them their laws and rules for living, which were explained to them by priests and judges. How sad it was that the first king of Israel came to power as a result of the people's desire to copy the godless nations around them. They realized that Samuel was getting old and that his sons were not following in his good ways. They could also see that their nation was disorganized and under constant threat from the surrounding nations. The Philistines, especially, had been a trouble to them for many years, as we know from the problems that the judges of Israel, such as Samson, encountered. Now they demanded a king of their own. They did not realize that they had no need of a human king; God was their king - the all-wise, all-knowing, holy, loving creator and sustainer - and they should have been thankful for this, and content.

Explain how hurt and disappointed Samuel must have felt when his sons had failed to obey God's laws and judged the people falsely. Now he was much more distressed and displeased that the people rejected the system of judges and repudiated God's kingship. Samuel gave the elders no immediate answer; he knew he must first talk to God. God's reply, no doubt, surprised him; it was probably far from what he expected. However, he did not hesitate to obey God and he faithfully carried his message to the elders.

At this point, it would be interesting to enter into discussion, by means of questions, about the reasons why Israel wanted a king, and then ask the children to consider what, if any, would be the advantages of having a king who had absolute power. On the other hand, might there be disadvantages in having a king? What would he need? Where would he live? What other people would he need to have at his command? Who would pay for all this? What if he were a bad or cruel king? When the children have considered such issues as these, go on to tell them how God instructed Samuel to warn the people of the consequences of their request being granted. The people however, having made up their minds, were stubborn and unmoved by such warnings. They imagined only the military pomp and the glamour of a monarchy, whereas Samuel, in his wisdom, foresaw the many problems that would arise. Once again he turned to God in prayer and awaited instructions. God said he would choose a king and Samuel had the task of making the arrangements. In spite of his own feelings, he was obedient to God's commands.

As a postscript, you could point out that Samuel's grandson Heman was responsible for music in the house of God in the time of David, so whatever the wrong-doings of Samuel's firstborn, they were not

carried on in the next generation. Our perspective on life is always limited - we cannot see what the years will bring, as God can.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

The people of Israel saw that other nations had a king - something they had not, and they felt this was unfair. They wanted a king, too. Have you ever looked at something somebody else has had and wished you could have the same? What sorts of things make you feel like this - clothes, toys, hairstyles, holidays, etc? What would be the best way to overcome this feeling?

### **WORKSHEETS**

The code reads 'Listen to the voice of the people: for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them'.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, help us not to want everything we see, but instead to be thankful for what we have, knowing that you care for us and give us everything we need. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"And the Lord said to Samuel, they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them." (1 Samuel 8:7).

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## **SAUL THE CHOSEN KING**

**43**

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***1 Samuel 9:1-10 and 15-22; 10:1 and 15-22; 11:15***

### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show how the purpose of God is worked out in the everyday lives of his people.

### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Find a relief map of the area that Saul covered in search of the donkeys. Refer to information on the casting of lots.

### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

In order to make the children more curious and attentive throughout the narrative, begin with a positive statement such as: "Today the story is about a man who was going about his daily work, little realizing that he was being guided by God as part of his plan ...". Describe Saul, emphasizing his physical attributes and attractive character. Paint a picture of a very tall, powerfully-built, agreeable young man. During the search for his father's asses, Saul showed himself to be hardworking, conscientious, obedient and considerate. There is no evidence that this fine young man was either vain or arrogant, despite his impressive appearance and wealthy family - we are told that Kish was a mighty man of power and it is likely that he was a breeder of donkeys. These animals were very valuable and were

used for both farming and riding. In addition Kish had several servants and the one who accompanied Saul was obviously a very responsible member of the household, whom Saul respected and consulted. It was he who pointed out the proximity of the prophet and who suggested what gift they could give him.

Meanwhile, unbeknown to Saul and the servant, Samuel the prophet was already expecting their arrival and had in fact known of it for twenty-four hours. He had made preparations for welcoming the new arrivals and he was ready to meet the future king of Israel. Perhaps he could already imagine what this man would be like, since God had told him that he would be the people's champion, to lead them against the Philistines.

As Saul approached, God spoke to Samuel and identified the man for whom he had been waiting. Saul was completely unaware that his future was in God's hands. Describe how that, stage by stage, it gradually dawned on Saul that events were being controlled and that he had been selected for a special purpose. First there was the prophet's knowledge of, and assurance about, the safety of the asses; then the announcement of the honour to be bestowed on his family; he was welcomed as chief guest at a reception and served a special meal already prepared for him. Finally there was his audience with the great prophet, culminating in his anointing.

Point out Saul's humility throughout these events. His words were few and he seemed to submit to Samuel's authority and to the developing situation, without grasping the demands that would be made upon him. Upon his return home, when questioned about his meeting with Samuel, he said nothing of his remarkable experiences. Although he had some time to consider the implications of Samuel's declaration (10:1) before the matter became public, he was still unprepared to shoulder the responsibility when his name was announced.

The method of selection - casting lots - was probably used many times by the Israelites. Explain to the children how this was done and why. They believed that this method ruled out human prejudice and allowed God to decide the outcome (Proverbs 16:33). Saul knew from the outset what the result would be, and the fact that he was selected was confirmation of God's word and of Samuel's God-given authority. The people were favourably impressed with the tall, strong, young man, and content with God's choice. They cheered him and shouted: "Long live the King".

Samuel made a list of kingly duties, which he announced to the people, and then wrote a book, which he laid before the Lord. Saul was not left to cope with his new position alone. Samuel spelled out his responsibilities and advised him how to rule wisely. In writing this book, was Samuel perhaps following the guidance of Moses in Deuteronomy 17:18-19?

A time was arranged for the coronation, which was to take place in Gilgal. Describe the pomp and ceremony, the music and the colour of the occasion. This was Israel's first crowning and thousands came to Gilgal to witness the event. It was both a happy and a solemn day - a day of rejoicing at achieving their longed for kingdom status, and a day of worship and rededication to God. The future blessing of both king and people depended on their continuing to obey God's laws.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

From this story, can you recall the things God knew about Saul before Saul knew them? Saul's God is the same God who cares about people living today. He knows everything about us, and we can be confident that he is in control of our lives. How should we feel about this?

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we are glad that it is you who are in control of our lives and that you know and understand us. We praise you today for your greatness and goodness. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

“Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise” (Daniel 2:20-21).

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## **THE BRAVERY OF JONATHAN**

**44**

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### ***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).

**1 Samuel 15:35; 16****AIM OF LESSON**

To show that God knows our hearts and does not judge by outward appearance.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Genesis 49:8-10; 1 Samuel 13:8-14; 15:1-28. Look into the method and significance of anointing.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Ask the children what would happen in their school if the school captain, a team captain or a class representative were found not to be doing the job properly - perhaps they were unreliable or disobedient. How would the school or class choose a new leader? When teams are being picked for games, what qualities are looked for? Then discuss why Saul had failed as king of Israel. Although he had looked so tall and impressive, he had proved to be an inadequate leader because he had relied on his own strength and reasoning and not obeyed God. He had let the people down, angered Samuel, and had aroused God's displeasure. Because of his faithlessness and disobedience, God decided not to allow Saul's son to inherit the throne.

Instead, he sent Samuel to Bethlehem, with his anointing oil, to choose a king from among the eight sons of a man named Jesse. Talk to the class about the significance of Bethlehem in Judah; perhaps they will be able to call to mind other times when Bethlehem is mentioned in the Bible. God told Samuel that he would indicate to him which of these young men was to be the next king of Israel.

The children might like to consider whether Saul was likely to hear of Samuel's journey and its purpose, and why Samuel took a young calf with him for sacrifice. The chief men of Bethlehem were also fearful, wondering why the prophet was visiting their small town.

Try to imagine how surprised Jesse would be when asked to parade his sons before Samuel, and to accompany the great man to the sacrifice. When Eliab, the eldest, came before Samuel he looked such a tall, good-looking, intelligent man that Samuel thought he must be the one, but he knew that he must listen for God's guidance. Quote from chapter 16, verse 7. If you have enough children in the class, let them line up to re-enact this part of the story. We can then imagine how puzzled Samuel must have been when none of these men was God's choice. What should he do now? Jesse had clearly discounted the possibility of his youngest son being considered. Having been asked if there were more sons, Jesse sent for David. While Samuel waited for David, everyone stood around expectantly, anxious to see what Samuel would do. The young shepherd arrived, strikingly handsome and tanned, and Samuel was left in no doubt that this was the chosen one.

At this point it will be necessary to concentrate the children's attention on David's reaction to the situation. Without warning, he had been brought home from the hillside, and had to make hasty preparation to meet the aged and revered prophet. He then found himself the centre of attention in the family circle, with all eyes focused upon him. Ask the children to imagine how overwhelmed David would have felt upon realizing that he had been chosen by God to be the future king of Israel. Samuel confirmed this by anointing him with the oil, and we read that from that time God's spirit was with David. Make it clear that this did not mean that he was immediately crowned king. There was to follow a long period of preparation before this could happen.

This preparation began by means of David's musical talent. He was so skilled on the lyre that his ability was reported at the palace. When the king was bad-tempered or depressed, it was suggested that he might be soothed by David's music. The king agreed and sent for David. Thus David had his first experience of the royal court.

It is well to be aware of a seeming contradiction between these events and those that follow. At the end of chapter 16 Saul loves David greatly, takes him into his service, and David has become his armour-bearer. In chapter 17 Saul does not know who David is, and describes him as a stripling (v56, RSV). The explanation, no doubt, is that chapter 16 is looking ahead to events which were to happen after chapter 17.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

How would you wish to choose a new leader or captain (at school or C.Y.C.)? Would you choose the tallest, best-looking, jolliest person, or the one who would be most helpful to everyone. Do you think it would be right to ask God in prayer for help in choosing? Does what people look like really matter? What is most important?

### **WORKSHEETS**

The message of the faces is 'For man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart'.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, please teach us to ask for your help when we need to choose a new leader, so that we may find the best person. Help us to realize that goodness is more important than good looks. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"The Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

**1 Samuel 17****AIM OF LESSON**

To show David's absolute faith in God's power to destroy Goliath.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Numbers 13:28 and 32-33; Joshua 11:21-22; Psalms 18 and 124; Ephesians 6:10-17. A cubit was at least 18 inches and a span 9 inches. Find information and pictures of the Philistine army, its weapons and armour.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

This story will undoubtedly have been heard before by most children of this age group, unless they are new to Sunday School. It is recommended that thought be given to presenting the story with a fresh approach. It may be effective to tell the story in the first person, from David's point of view. By this means his absolute confidence in God can be most powerfully conveyed. His was the clear-sighted faith of a young man who had committed himself totally to God from an early age.

Remind the children of his position in the family and his duties as a shepherd, of the dangers he had faced when alone on the hillside and of his close personal relationship with God, who had chosen him as future ruler of his people. At the time of this story David was probably under twenty and not old enough to be in Saul's army. Tell the children to imagine that David is telling them the story himself. Lead into this role play by using such phrases as: "I was looking after the sheep as usual for my father, when he asked me to pay a visit to my three eldest brothers who were at the battle-front in a war against the Philistines .... There they were, ranked on opposite sides of a valley ... A powerful voice could be heard echoing round the hills ...".

Stress the extraordinary size of Goliath, which filled everyone with awe, and the arrogant and scornful words of this enemy who considered himself invulnerable. How confident and complacent the Philistines felt to have Goliath as their challenger. How demoralized were the Israelites at having no comparable champion. As David arrived he sensed the fear which prevailed and was at a loss to understand it. He saw not an insuperable adversary, but a man who defied God. The matter was simple. He questioned the Israelite soldiers' reluctance and cowardice. Was not God on their side?

Point out the typical older brother's reaction - of superiority and disdain - compared with David's sincerity and his surprise at finding himself summoned to the king. He was not looking for glory, but was quietly confident that he could overcome the enemy through trusting in God's strength. Once more he met with a disdainful response, this time from the mighty Saul, who could see only the stark contrast between the warlike giant and the fresh-faced shepherd boy. David saw things in a different light. It was God who would fight the giant, not himself alone.

Saul's reaction to David's approach was first one of incredulity, then amusement, and finally admiration. He must have caught something of David's confidence. Because of the nature of the challenge, the lives of every one of them depended on David's success. Saul accepted the courageous offer, but was still thinking in purely human terms. The incident of the trying on of the armour is at once amusing and poignant. At this point the children will be ahead of you and should be allowed to participate in the narrative. The tension and suspense of the duel must be built up before

the climax is reached. Make much of the contemptuous taunting of David by Goliath, his powerful stance and proud disdain, the sight of his armour and weapons contrasting with the simple tunic and primitive sling. David's physique, unencumbered, youthful and lithe, contrasted with that of the muscular armoured warrior. Goliath's threats and pagan curses offended David and roused a response in him. Loudly he proclaimed his confidence in the power of the God of Israel to deliver his people. With swift accuracy, and with but one stone, the foe was vanquished. And now the suspense and tension gave way to confusion and panic on the part of the Philistines and a triumphant charge by the Israelite army, leaving David standing over the beheaded enemy.

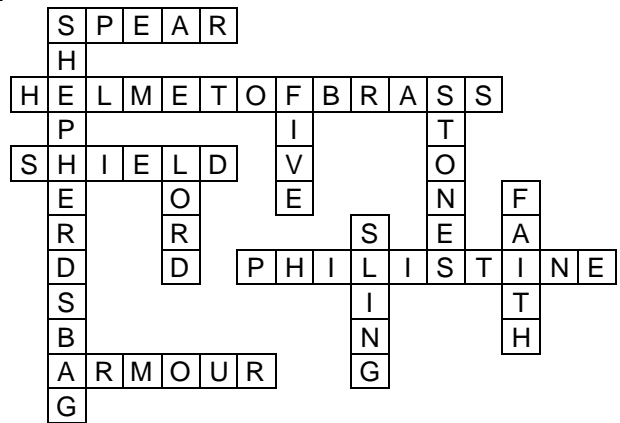
For those with suitable facilities, this story lends itself to dramatization. Children will readily paraphrase the dialogue in their own words and, in so doing, will reveal and reinforce their understanding of the faith of David.

**RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

David faced up to a giant, and won. How was he able to win when the giant was stronger than he was? We may be young and small like David, and we sometimes face problems that seem like giants. How can we learn from David's example not to be afraid?

**WORKSHEETS**

The words in the grid are:



**PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, please help us to be as brave as David and to remember that we can win when we have to face problems, as long as we put our trust in you. Amen.

**MEMORY VERSE**

"You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied" (1 Samuel 17:45).

**1 Samuel 16:21-23; 18:1-16; 19:1-7; 20:12-17****AIM OF LESSON**

To show the value of true friendship, which can survive even in the face of severe difficulties.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Read 1 Samuel 18 to 26 in order to get an overall picture of events, and the developing relationships of the characters.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Ask the children to recall David's triumph over Goliath and lead on to show how that event was to mark the beginning of a changed way of life for David. He was about to leave behind him his family, his friends and his life as a shepherd in Bethlehem. When the battle was over David was summoned to the presence of the king, who honoured him for his bravery and skill. Standing with king Saul was his son, Jonathan the prince, who was filled with admiration. David's great courage and, above all, his unshakeable faith in God, appealed strongly to Jonathan. Here was a kindred spirit. As they talked, David responded to Jonathan's clear signs of friendship, and the two recognized immediately their mutual affinity. Jonathan felt impelled to demonstrate his feelings of admiration and affection by bestowing gifts. In doing so, he not only honoured the young shepherd as an equal, but also, by implication, acknowledged David's right to the position of military leader. The princely robe would have contrasted strongly with the simple tunic, and the precious iron weapons (rare in Israel) were very different from his familiar sling and pebbles.

From that day David entered the service of the king. He soon earned a reputation as a military hero, and everywhere the people cheered him. As the number of his successes grew and his popularity increased, Saul's admiration of David turned to jealousy. Let the children read 1 Samuel 18:6-9, and help them to appreciate the understandable reaction of the once proud king whose superiority was now undermined. From that time on Saul became violent and unpredictable in his moods, as a result of his bitter hatred of the man who had captured the hearts of the people.

Ironically, it was David's task, as a skilled musician, to soothe the troubled king. The children will probably appreciate that music can affect people's moods and, when played softly and expressively, can induce calm and even sleep. Convey the shock that David experienced on the day following his triumphal homecoming, when suddenly Saul hurled his javelin at him, so that he had to leap for his life. From that day, the king was openly hostile, and David was continually on his guard.

Jonathan was saddened and alarmed by his father's menacing attitude towards David. Consider what it must have been like for Jonathan to live in an atmosphere of jealousy and hatred and to be torn between loyalty to his father and love for his friend. No one had more reason to resent David than he. But, despite David's success and his increasing favour with the people, and despite his challenge to his own secure position, Jonathan's friendship for David grew even stronger.

Jonathan did his utmost to bring about a reconciliation and to avert his father's murderous hatred. Read together in class the words of Jonathan (19:4-5) and stress the wisdom and godliness of the young man. He was so persuasive and diplomatic that Saul had to recognize the truth of his words and, for a while, peace was restored. This state of affairs was short-lived, however, and very soon

David fled for his life. Then Jonathan became the go-between in a very stressful situation. Because he was a man of honour he stood by his father and king; because of his enduring love for David he continued to seek his good and protect him from his father's unreasonable, and angry outbursts.

Before David finally went into exile, describe the poignant scene, as the close friends sadly took leave of each other. It would seem that Jonathan understood that David had been chosen to replace him as the next king of Israel. Because of his faith in God and his love for David, he accepted the situation humbly, without the jealousy and resentment that had destroyed the character of his father.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

The friendship of Jonathan and David was very precious to both of them. What do you look for in your friends? How do you show that you are someone's friend? What can you do to make your friendships grow?

### **WORKSHEETS**

The solution to the riddle: FRIENDS.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, please help us to be kind and loyal to our friends, as David and Jonathan were to each other. Help us to remember that in Jesus we have the perfect friend. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Samuel 18:1).

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## **SAUL SEEKS TO KILL DAVID**

**48**

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### ***1 Samuel 19:8-18; 20***

### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show how jealousy can lead to hatred and wickedness, and how love results in kindness and good deeds.

### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

A map showing the area into which David fled. 1 Corinthians 13:4-6.

### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Begin by questioning the children about the previous lesson in order to discover whether or not they are quite clear as to why the friendship between David and Jonathan was unusual and how difficult the situation was for them. Show how Jonathan became a go-between, torn by loyalty to his father, who was also his king, and by concern for his greatest friend. With wise words he was able to stave off

Saul's wicked intentions for a time and even elicited sworn promises that David would not be harmed, so that David was able to return to the palace.

However, this state of affairs was short-lived. Saul's behaviour was unpredictable and his moods became more and more extreme. The news of David's military successes roused again Saul's jealousy and hatred, which made him want to hurt David. No doubt the children will know how it feels to be so angry that one is driven to say and do bad things which are later regretted and fill one with shame. In his uncontrollable anger Saul again threw a javelin at David, who fled from the palace to his own home and to his loving and anxious wife. It was she who convinced him of the danger he was in and urged him to run away. It is obvious from the account that her love for David was stronger than her loyalty to her father, the king. Describe David's exciting and dramatic escape, emphasizing the great risk Michal took in trying to deceive the king, knowing that his violent temper could cause her life to be threatened, too.

David was now on the run. He was an outlaw, and in constant danger. There was only one person left to whom he could turn, and that was Samuel, the aged prophet, though even with him David was not safe for long. Wherever he went Saul's men pursued him, and he had to keep on running.

Point out that David had been living in the royal house at Gibeah and would be expected to join in the "new moon" festivities. He had a special place allotted at the king's table and so, of course, his absence would be most noticeable. David did return to the city and sought out Jonathan. It seems that David had finally learned that he could no longer trust Saul. Jonathan, however, clung to the vain hope that his father's intentions might not be as bad as David supposed, and agreed to speak to his father again. The conversation between Saul and Jonathan so angered the king that now he turned against his own son to the extent of threatening *him* with his spear. Saul's bitterness towards David was aggravated by the knowledge that both his son and his daughter sided with his enemy. He must have felt betrayed. For fear of Saul's violence, Jonathan and David could not meet openly, but made detailed plans for the prince to signal his findings to his friend.

Through all these frightening and unhappy events David and Jonathan's loyalty and love for each other grew even stronger. They must have anticipated that, once David had severed his connections with the court, they might never meet again. Sadly, and hurriedly, they made a vow that henceforward their two families would be bound together in enduring friendship.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Saul was jealous of David because the people loved him for his bravery and success in battle. How did this jealousy affect his attitude towards David? Who suffered most from Saul's hatred? Think how easy it is for people to make themselves unhappy by feeling jealous of others who may have more friends, or who are cleverer or better at sport, or prettier, and how, instead of being pleased and admiring, their jealousy makes them unpleasant and spiteful. Talk about this problem; try to find out why people feel like this and how such feelings can be overcome.

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank you for the loyalty and love of David and Jonathan. Please help us to so love our friends that, when they do well, we are happy for them. Amen.



## MEMORY VERSE

“Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful” (1 Corinthians 13:4).

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## DAVID SPARES SAUL’S LIFE

49

### *1 Samuel 24 and 26*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To show David's respect for Saul as God's chosen king, and how he returned good for evil.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

1 Samuel 21-23. Map as used in previous lesson. Try to find photographs of caves similar to those of En Gedi.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Remind the children that David was an outlaw, fleeing from Saul's murderous intent. He had fled alone from Gibeah, but as he moved around the country he gathered support, so that now he had six hundred men at his command. David's loyalty to his people was such that he continued to fight against their enemies, the Philistines. Saul, too, was actively engaged in battle with the Philistines, while relentlessly pursuing David whenever he learned of his whereabouts. Saul commanded a force of three thousand trained soldiers.

It was while Saul was in hot pursuit of David that he happened to enter the very cave in which David and his men were hiding, in the innermost part where they were safe from detection. Emphasize the way in which David was egged on to make use of the apparently God-given opportunity to be rid of his persecutor, and the tension David must have felt as he crept stealthily through the dark cave. Could he really manage to cut off a piece of Saul's robe without his knowledge, or would Saul sense his presence and raise the alarm?

His objective accomplished, David was immediately overcome by remorse for having presumed to raise a hand against his king. However, he could not resist demonstrating to Saul that he had actually spared his life. The reaction of Saul to this fact was dramatic. Were his feelings those of relief after having come so close to death, or remorse at having misjudged David, or of shame at his own bitter hatred which contrasted so keenly with David's kindness? Whatever his feelings were, they moved him to tears. He confessed that he had been in the wrong, acknowledged David's position as heir to the throne and elicited a promise from David (verses 21 and 22) which was, in effect, what David had already promised Jonathan.

The pattern of events was soon to be repeated. The details of the incident in chapter 26 are different and interesting; but the sequence is similar - Saul's evil intent, Abishai's incitement to revenge, David's mercy and Saul's remorse.

In this account, consider the risks David and Abishai took in venturing right into the enemy camp. Describe the scene as the two daring men, under cover of darkness, crept past the armed guards, and

approached the centre of the camp where the king lay, with Abner, his commander-in-chief close by. Imagine the whispered conversation as Abishai tried to persuade David to let him kill Saul at a stroke. Did they gradually become aware that the men were more deeply asleep than usual, and that God was actively assisting them? Although David knew he was to be king, he never for a moment considered taking the law into his own hands. He was content for God to work out his promises in his own good time. Use David's actual words in reply to Abishai's evil suggestion, from 1 Samuel 26:10-11, in the course of the narrative. (Note that David chose to take the very things upon which Saul's life depended - his weapon and vital water supply. In allowing these items to be returned later, David demonstrated that he had not only refrained from attacking Saul, but also wished to preserve his life.)

Consider the possibility of dramatizing this story by getting the children to act the parts. By so doing they will more readily appreciate the contrasts between the characters. Throughout this time David was faithful to God, loyal to his king and consistent in his behaviour; Saul, however, was unstable, swinging from extreme jealousy and aggression to pitiful remorse. David's men, in the first incident, and Abishai, in the second, were completely loyal to David, while failing to understand their master's goodness.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

When Saul was violent and angry, David reacted in a remarkable way. How do most people react when they are attacked or shouted at? Usually people respond by becoming angry themselves. What often happens then? The Bible teaches that it is better to keep calm and show kindness to everyone, even when people are being cruel to you. This sounds impossible, but we see from this story that it really does work. When David remained calm and showed kindness, Saul was immediately sorry and, as a result, no one was hurt. Doesn't this show that kindness is more powerful than anger?

### **WORKSHEETS**

Saul said, "Come back, David my son. I will not try to harm you again."

David said "The Lord gave you into my hands today but I would not lay a hand on the Lord's anointed".

The remaining letters in the grid are 'love your enemies'.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, help us to see the power of kindness, and to be brave enough to use it when others are being unkind to us. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

**1 Samuel 31:1-6; 2 Samuel 1****AIM OF LESSON**

To show that Saul's death came as a direct result of his disobedience to God, and to show David's grief at the death of Saul and Jonathan.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

1 Chronicles 10; 1 Samuel 13:13-14; 15:23. Find a map of the kingdom that shows Mount Gilboa, Beth-shan and Jabesh-Gilead. A modern photograph of the ruins of Beth-shan may help to show that these were real events at real places.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Remind the children of the young king Saul, and of his handsome appearance and fine character. Contrast this with the man he had become - older but not wiser, consumed with hatred, unstable and afraid. Samuel the prophet was now dead; and Saul, recalling Samuel's words of reproach and rejection, knew in his heart that God was no longer with him. He had also lost the confidence of the people and he had driven away David, the champion of his army, together with those who chose to follow David. Increasing attacks from the Philistine army, with their superior weapons and horses, was a challenge the demoralized Israelites could not hope to meet.

The battle was doomed from the start. The Israelite resistance could not be sustained, so that they fled and were relentlessly pursued. In telling the story, convey the confusion of the Israelites and their desperate attempts to escape death at the hands of the cruel Philistines. You should be sensitive to the feelings of the children in the class towards a war story of this nature and temper the narrative accordingly. It was for fear that the enemy might take him alive that Saul appealed to his armour bearer to kill him and, on being refused, killed himself. It is noteworthy that, in spite of the extenuating circumstances, the armour bearer could not bring himself to accept the responsibility of ending the king's life. Moreover, his loyalty to Saul was such that he preferred to die with him rather than fight on without his leader.

Among the many who died that day was Jonathan, the prince. It is tragic that this fine young man also died because of his father's faithlessness and wilful disobedience.

David, meanwhile, was fully occupied in successfully resisting an attack from the Amalekites in another part of the country and was, therefore, unaware of the turn of events. Any satisfaction at his own victory was short-lived as he received news of the crushing defeat of his fellow-countrymen and the tragic loss of both his king, and his closest friend.

Think how the Amalekite, who brought the news, must have rehearsed what he would say to David, convinced that David would honour him for bringing the "good" news of the death of his "enemy", Saul. So anxious was he to curry favour with the successor to the throne that he went so far as to elaborate on the truth and make false claims regarding his own involvement. Imagine his surprise and horror at David's reaction. His lie cost him his life. If he had been a man of Israel, he would have known of David's constant loyalty to the king.

Far from rejoicing that Saul was dead, David was deeply grieved. In his youth, he had expressed his inner feelings in psalms. Now he was moved to write a song of lament in order to express his sorrow.

His generosity of spirit is also seen here, in his equal tribute to the man who had hated him and the man who had loved him. Children will appreciate something of the beauty of the poetry and the depth of David's feelings, although not necessarily understanding all the words.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Jesus says: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). David lived a long time before Jesus, but he showed this kind of love to Saul, who had for many years tried to harm him. By living the way God wanted him to do and relying on God to guide him, and by returning good for evil throughout this life, David grew to be wise, and a great king.

The way we treat other people has an effect on the kind of people we become. Isn't it true that when we have been angry we feel bad for the rest of the day, but when we are kind or loving, forgiving or unselfish, we feel happy? That is the way God wants us to be. Every time we do something kind for somebody else our own character improves.

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we want to grow to be like David, who was forgiving and kind and obedient to you. Please help us to become kinder, and more thoughtful day by day. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

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## **DAVID MADE KING; THE ARK BROUGHT TO JERUSALEM**

**51**

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### **2 Samuel 5:1-12; 6**

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show how king David was taught the lesson of obedience.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Revise the details concerning the ark of the covenant, find suitable illustrations, and a map showing Hebron and Jerusalem. Read 2 Samuel 2-4; Exodus 25:10-22; Numbers 4:1-15; 1 Chronicles 15:1-4 and 11-15.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Remind the children that David had been anointed to be king when he was still a lad, living at home in Bethlehem. Many years had now passed, during which he had been through some exciting, frightening, and some very sad experiences. He had lived in Saul's royal household and had known what it felt like

to be hated and hunted by that jealous king. There had been several opportunities to take his revenge on Saul but he had always repaid evil with good, and had never tried to take by force the kingship he knew would be his. Saul was now dead, and so were three of his sons. But because David was not the natural heir he could not immediately assume the kingship. What was he to do? As always, he turned to the Lord for help and guidance, and waited for God to direct him. Contrast David's humble and godly attitude with the faithless pride of Saul.

David, and his household, moved to Hebron because God told him to. And there he waited. At last it was time for God's plan for David to be fulfilled. It is interesting to note that, when the elders of the tribes of Israel assembled at Hebron to invite David to be their king, the reason they gave was that he had been a great military leader. They recalled the days, prior to his persecution by Saul, when David had been their champion and the commander of the army. They remembered, too, that God had chosen him (2 Samuel 5:2). Recall the incident of David's anointing by Samuel, which was a private declaration of God's choosing of David, and describe how the anointing at Hebron was a public ceremony to be compared with that of a coronation. The children will be interested to know that anointing - the exact procedure needs to be explained - still forms a part of the present-day coronation service in England.

At first David stayed in Hebron, but after seven years he led his people against the Jebusites and captured their city, Jerusalem, and made his own capital in the place which God had chosen. He was no doubt also a wise young king and knew that it was important for the nation to have a centrally-placed capital city, in order to maintain its unity. He undertook a building programme to strengthen and enlarge the city. (The supporting terraces or Millo (2 Samuel 5:9) were the reinforced foundations for the stronghold of the city which was also David's palace.)

Stress the fact that God was blessing David, and that David acknowledged that he was ruling on God's behalf (quote chapter 5:10-12). Having captured Jerusalem, and made it the City of David, David was now anxious to bring to the city the ark of God, which was a special box symbolizing God's presence amongst them, and containing reminders of God's laws, his love, and his power. David also knew that the action would unite the tribes of Israel, so he made the task a matter of priority. The city was to become the religious, as well as the political, centre of Israel.

But David, in his haste to do what he considered to be pleasing to God, on this occasion neglected to seek God's guidance on the matter of transporting the ark. The people were fired by David's enthusiasm, and the procession took on a festive air. In relating this incident emphasize the sharp change in emotions, for this first attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem ended in tragedy. The people's excitement turned to fear and bewilderment as Uzzah was struck down. David was angered by this act of God, for he had thought that what he was doing would please God. In fear and dismay he abandoned the project. The ark was left in the house of Obed-Edom and this man was so greatly blessed by the Lord that David's courage and enthusiasm returned and he made plans for the second stage of the ark's journey to Jerusalem.

David realized that he had disobeyed God's instructions regarding the carrying of the ark (Exodus 25:14), and that he was responsible for Uzzah's death. Had the ark been carried in the proper way there would have been no necessity for Uzzah to touch it - something not even the Levites were allowed to do.

Describe the care which David exercised when planning again for the ark to be carried to Jerusalem, and try to capture something of the praise and rejoicing that rang throughout the city when the ark arrived.

On that occasion their joy was even greater because they were assured of God's approval and blessing. It seemed as if the whole nation was at last united in praising their God. David returned

home brimming with happiness. How hurt he must have been by his wife's reproach. Cold and unmoved by the presence of God, Michal did not share David's enthusiasm, but censured him for abandoning his royal dignity. David, however, was proud to have praised God with his whole being.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Do you know what obedience means? We can see from this lesson that God expects obedience from his people. If he asks us to do something, he wants us to obey him in every detail, not in a half-hearted way as if it doesn't really matter. Think of some of the things God has asked us to do, and talk about the reasons for rules and laws.

### **WORKSHEETS**

The numbered letters read 'They anointed David king over Israel'.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, thank you for giving us rules to live by. We know you have done this because you love us and want us to be happy. Please help us to obey the instructions you have given us in the Bible. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart" (Psalm 119:2).

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## **GOD'S PROMISE TO DAVID; PREPARING THE TEMPLE**

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**52**

### ***1 Chronicles 17***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show that God loved David so much that he promised to establish his family and his throne for ever, and to show the way in which David prepared for the building of the temple.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

1 Chronicles 21 and 28:19. Recall God's promises to the Patriarchs: to Abraham (Genesis 18 and 22), renewed to Isaac (Genesis 26:3-5) and to Jacob (Genesis 28:13-15). God's promise to David fulfilled: in Solomon building God's House (1 Kings 5:5) and in Christ (Luke 1:32-33). Psalm 72, dedicated to Solomon, is prophetic of Christ's reign on earth.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

David wanted to please God more than anything else. He was now well established as king, and he lived in a grand new cedar palace. This royal house had been built for him with the help of his ally, king Hiram of Tyre, who had sent him the necessary cedar trees and also skilful masons and carpenters to construct it. When David looked around at his splendid home, he was disturbed by the contrast he saw

between the tent that housed the ark of God and his own magnificent palace. He thought that now was the time to build a permanent temple to replace the tabernacle.

Full of enthusiasm, David told Nathan, the prophet, of his plan. Nathan, too, thought it was a good idea. In his imagination David could already visualize the impressive new temple standing in the centre of Jerusalem, filled with people worshipping God. Imagine, then, David's disappointment when Nathan brought him a message from the Lord to say that he was not to proceed with his plan.

Although David's hopes were not to be realized, God's message to him, however, was such that he felt honoured and content. God reassured him of his continued presence and favour, and promised his eternal blessing. In promising to build David a house, God was not referring to a building. Show how the word "house" can be used to mean a royal family line, e.g. the House of Windsor, or a group of people bound by a common loyalty, e.g. a house within a school. Quote Luke 2:4 to show that the word "house" referred to David's family. As for the temple, God promised that one of David's sons, who was to be king after David, would build it, and that the kingdom would flourish for ever. Remind the children of the earlier promises that God had made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. David's family was descended from these men, so all the promises can be linked together, and will come to pass in the future, when God will bless all his faithful people. Note, from David's reply, his gratitude to the Lord for honouring his family with such wonderful promises, his reverent recognition of God's great power, and his humble acceptance of God's ruling that he should not build the temple.

David was conscious, however, that Solomon, chosen as his heir, was young and inexperienced for the task. He therefore took it upon himself to advise and assist in the preparation for the work. Because the design for this great temple was given to David by God himself (28:19) he knew the vast quantities of rich materials which would be required, and the expert craftsmen needed to execute the intricate work. Try to help the children understand the huge scale of the operation.

David's instructions to Solomon reveal his fervour and joyful dedication, which surely must have fired Solomon with similar enthusiasm. David pointed out that he had wanted to build the temple himself but, because he was a warfaring man, God had denied him the privilege and allotted the task to Solomon his man of peace. David gave to Solomon all the instructions he had received, together with the necessary materials. He also gave Solomon his blessing, urged him to begin, and to be ever conscious that it was God's work in which he was engaged.

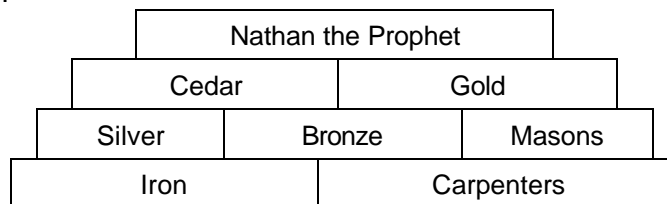
## RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES

In this lesson we have seen how lovingly and carefully David prepared for the building of the temple of God. He was satisfied only with the best of everything - beautiful wood, precious metals, skilled craftsmen, etc. Think of ways in which we can show the same conscientious spirit in the things we do, at home and at school.

## WORKSHEETS

God's message reads 'He is the one who will build a house for my name and I will establish his throne for ever'.

The jumbled words are:



## PRAYER

Read together the prayer of David in 1 Chronicles 29:11-13.

## MEMORY VERSE

"I declare to you that the Lord will build you a house" (1 Chronicles 17:10).

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## DAVID KEEPS A PROMISE

53

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### *2 Samuel 4:4; 9*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To show how David kept his promise to his greatest friend, and brought happiness to a lame man.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

1 Samuel 18:1-4; 20:12-17; 20:42.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Introduce the lesson with a statement to the effect that "Today's story is about a man who had made a promise to his friend and, even though the friend died, he still kept the promise. Do you remember that when David was young, long before he became king, he had a very special friend?" Continue by questioning the children about the friendship between David and Jonathan, and the sadness of their parting when David had to flee into exile. Explain clearly the solemn promise (vow) which each made to the other, that they would never cease to love and care for the other's family. Although Jonathan was the heir to the throne, he knew and accepted that he would not become king, and that David had been chosen by God to take his place. He, therefore, asked David to safeguard his family name. Because of his love for Jonathan, David readily agreed. At that time, neither could have foreseen the terrible strife that was to mark Israel's history for many years to come.

During the civil war, which followed the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, Saul's family and his army fought against David. David, however, gradually gained power and support, and the members of the royal household began to fear. Describe the panic in the palace that drove the nurse to flee with the young prince, Mephibosheth, and the haste and confusion that caused the accident. But in spite of this, she had saved the boy's life and, though he was to be lame for the rest of his days, he grew up in safety, unharmed by his father's enemies. Many years went by, and Mephibosheth married and had a son called Mica. They lived humbly with no thoughts of claiming their inheritance, nor of resisting the kingship of David.

David had fought for many years to unite the nation of Israel and to banish God's enemies from the land. Having established peace and order, he was anxious that his rule should be just and in accordance with his dedication to God, by whom he had been so blessed. It was at this time that David remembered the promise he had made to his friend so long before. Immediately, he set about discovering whether any of Jonathan's family had survived. His servants were given the task of making enquiries. When David learned that Jonathan had a son still living, he was eager to meet him.



How would Mephibosheth have reacted when the king's messengers came to fetch him? It was natural that he should feel apprehensive, and doubtful about the king's intentions. But when they met, David immediately reassured him. For his part, he would have felt warmth and affection for the son of his old friend, coupled with compassion when he saw how lame the younger man was. Suggest how David may have been interested to note the family likeness and to share with Mephibosheth his memories of Jonathan's gentleness, loyalty and bravery. David may have recounted the happiness which he and Jonathan had shared in their youth, the honour Jonathan had won, the sadness of their parting, and the deep grief he had felt at Jonathan's untimely death. David did all that was within his power to do, in memory of his friend and in fulfilment of his vow. Not only did he restore to Mephibosheth all the land and property that had belonged to his grandfather Saul, and reappoint Ziba to serve him, but he also welcomed him as a son into his household for the rest of his life.

**RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

How do you think Mephibosheth felt at the end of this story? How do you think David felt at having kept his promise to Jonathan? Do you ever make promises? What does it mean when someone says: "I promise?" What are the results of a broken promise? How do people feel when a promise to them has been kept?

**WORKSHEETS**

Jonathan said to David: "Do not ever cut off your kindness from my family".

In God's kingdom:

L	A	M	E	M	A	N
L	A	L	E	M	A	E
W	A	L	L	M	A	E
W	I	L	L	M	B	E
W	I	L	L	B	E	
W	A	L	L	I	B	E
W	A	L	K	I	N	G

**PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we know that you always keep your promises. Help us to mean what we say when we make promises, so that people can trust us, just as we can trust your word. Amen.

**MEMORY VERSE**

"You shall be careful to perform what has passed your lips, for you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth" (Deuteronomy 23:23).

***1 Chronicles 28:1-10 and 20; 29; 2 Chronicles 1:1-12; 1 Kings 3:16-28***

### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show David's concern that Solomon should find favour in the sight of God, and to show how he encouraged him. To show how God rewarded Solomon for having chosen wisdom.

### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Joshua 1:6-9; 1 Kings 3; Proverbs 2:1-11; 3:1-7; 8:11-21.

### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

The essence of this lesson is contained in the exhortations and prayers of David and the words of God to Solomon, and it is important to build these profound abstractions into a pictorial narration which will enliven the lesson and help the children to assimilate the teaching. Give a vivid description of the assemblies, and contrast the aged king with the upright young prince. Compare the solemnity of the handing over of the temple plans, and the coronation, with the spontaneous expressions of thanksgiving. Describe the spectacular presentation of the vast quantities of treasure, and the impact of God's communication with Solomon in the stillness of the night. Begin by drawing on the children's knowledge of the previous lessons about David, questioning them about his life and leading on to whether or not they think David was a good king. Discuss the attributes that had proved him to be so - faithfulness, courage and obedience to God. Point out that he was now an old man, whose chief concern, as he came towards the end of his life, was that the son who was to succeed him should continue to lead God's people in the right way, and complete the project so dear to his heart. Explain that of all David's nineteen sons God had already chosen Solomon, one of the youngest, to be the heir. Bring out the close relationship between father and son, and the natural inclination of any loving father to advise his son about his future.

It was time for David to declare publicly that God had chosen Solomon to be the next king and to build the temple. He therefore assembled all the influential men in the land, including all his sons, so that there would be no doubt or controversy about his wishes and the will of God. The crowd fell silent as the king rose slowly to his feet and addressed them. He told them all that was in his heart, and exhorted them to remain faithful to God and loyal to the chosen king. Then he charged Solomon to serve God wholeheartedly and courageously (his words are reminiscent of Moses' counsel to Joshua). He handed over the plans and instructions for the temple, the building of which was to be Solomon's first task. David stressed that it was God himself who had drawn up the plans, and he assured his son that God would continue to guide the work.

The old king reminded the people that he had contributed a great deal of his own treasure for the house of the Lord, and he encouraged the people to do the same. Their response was both enthusiastic and generous. The people then expressed their feelings in songs of rejoicing and David led the assembly in prayers of gratitude and worship. Throughout his life David had been constantly in touch with God, in bad times and good, and as a result he was able to speak to Solomon and the people with the conviction and confidence born of his experience of God's providence. In his psalms David referred constantly to his total trust in God and his dependence upon him.

It is interesting that the coronation of Solomon took place in the presence of David and not after his death, when Solomon was probably about twenty years old.

After the death of his father, Solomon was very aware of his own youth and inexperience and of the enormity of the responsibility that was now his. He knew that if he were to be as great a king as his father he must dedicate his life to God as his father had done. He began well by holding a service of thanksgiving to God and called together a large assembly of his people, not at Jerusalem where the coronation had taken place but at Gibeon where the tabernacle had remained. There Solomon offered sacrifices and performed a public act of worship. This was pleasing to God, who longs for men to seek him and serve him.

That night God spoke to Solomon in a vision and asked Solomon what he desired from him. Solomon was very conscious of his father's greatness, the daunting task that had been placed upon his young shoulders, and the special theocratic nature of this kingdom, and he knew that his greatest need was for a wise and understanding heart. Solomon's request pleased God. There were so many things he might have asked for. Ask the children for some suggestions and consider the possible results. God mentioned several alternatives - riches, wealth, honour, victory over his enemies and long life for himself - and because Solomon had humbled himself and sought God's help for the sake of the nation, he promised the other blessings also, the last of which was conditional upon his continuing to live aright. Solomon was greatly encouraged by this experience, and returned to Jerusalem and worshipped again, this time before the ark of God.

Explain how necessary it was for a king of Israel to be wise, since he had very real responsibility for making decisions for God's people, ensuring that laws were carried out and acting as a judge in difficult situations. In relating the emotive story of the two women, show how Solomon's wisdom was soon put to the test. The case was presented in such a way that it would have been impossible, on the evidence given, to decide to whom the baby belonged. The problem had been brought to Solomon because the other counsellors had been unable to make a judgement. Make use of the scholars' reaction to Solomon's order to explain the reaction of the real mother; the expression on her face and movement of her hands betrayed her concern and horror. Do make it clear to the class that it was never Solomon's intention to harm the child, but that the threat was deliberately harsh in order that the effect could be seen upon the two women. The king's counsellors were overawed by Solomon's immediate perception of what was needed to reveal the women's true feelings. They recognized that this was no human judgement, but God-given wisdom. Thus Solomon was blessed by God, highly esteemed by the people and became a very great king.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

In a prayer to God, Solomon asked for something special. When we pray, what things do we ask God for? (Toys, fine weather, ability to pass exams, new clothes, etc.) Are there things that we could ask God for which would please him more, and that would be of more value to us? What might those things be?

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, the God of David, the God of Solomon, and our God, please forgive us when we ask you for the wrong things, and guide us to know what we should ask for. We can see that only you know what is best for us. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously ... and it will be given him" (James 1:5).

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## BUILDING THE TEMPLE

55

***2 Chronicles 2; 3:1-2; 5; 6:40-42; 7***

### AIM OF LESSON

To show Solomon's dedication to the Lord in the building of the temple.

### BACKGROUND STUDY

1 Kings chapters 5-8. Remaining verses from 2 Chronicles chapters 2-7. Seek information and diagrams regarding the temple plan and materials used.

### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Ask the children if they remember how pleased God was with Solomon's choice of wisdom, and what it was that God promised to give him in addition to wisdom. Endeavour to convey the vast amount of wealth that was at Solomon's disposal. Conjure up a picture of treasure, e.g. gold, silver, fabrics, perfumes, precious stones, and explain that the supply of these was almost limitless. What was Solomon to do with all this? His mind was clear. He would use it all to build the magnificent temple to glorify God. He remembered how his father had hoped to accomplish this great work, but that God had directed David to prepare Solomon for the task. Solomon had received the detailed plans and instructions that God had given to David. Now he was eager to follow his father's zealous and generous example, and give all to his God. He felt deeply, as had David, that he owed everything to God, and was now greatly honoured and excited at the prospect of the work before him.

In addition to the materials that David and Solomon had amassed, and those willingly donated by the people, timber was also needed which was not available in Israel. Describe the trading agreement between Solomon and Hiram, king of Tyre, who had been David's ally. The Israelites had no experience in constructing a building of this magnitude, but Solomon was determined to acquire skilled craftsmen - carpenters, wood-carvers, engravers, stonemasons, embroiderers, etc. - and these, too, came from Tyre. Solomon himself undertook the negotiations with Hiram, and also organized the work force.

Impress upon the children the vast numbers employed. It is also important to point out that in those days there was no mass-production, nor could items be purchased ready-made. Everything was made by hand with great skill, care and attention to detail. Solomon inspired all who contributed to the work to give of their best. The children will understand the pleasure and satisfaction experienced by each workman as he completed his work, knowing that it was a job well done.

The blocks of stone were cut in the quarries and made ready before being brought to the temple site, so that no sound of metal tools on stone could be heard during the construction. Nor would there be

the noise of machinery, for they had no power-driven equipment such as drills, earth-movers, concrete-mixers or cranes.

It will be necessary to read and re-read the two accounts (Chronicles and Kings) in order to gain an overall picture which can then be described in your own words. Also draw a simple diagram in front of the children (this could be prepared lightly in pencil beforehand and gone over with a felt pen in class) showing the ground plan, or, better still, produce a model upon which to focus their attention. Describe the magnificence and outstanding beauty of the interior, with its lining of gold and intricate detail. Describe how the light from the ten lampstands would make the precious stones and burnished gold gleam and sparkle.

After seven-and-a-half years the temple was finished, and Solomon proclaimed a general holiday (holy day). Many people gathered at Jerusalem to witness the dedication of this majestic building to the glory of God. Outside, the whole congregation watched as the ark was carried into the temple. The people's work was finished; now it was time for the priests' work to begin, for henceforth only the priests would be privileged to enter the beautiful holy place which had been so lovingly prepared. As the priests emerged, a great fanfare of trumpets, accompanied by other musical instruments and the sound of many voices, rang out through Jerusalem - "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever". This sudden burst of music and praise uplifted the congregation. As the notes died away, Solomon stood before the altar, on which a great sacrifice had been prepared. As he was about to dedicate the temple to God, he was aware, none the less, that God was far too great to be contained in any house.

At this point it is important to build the story towards a climax. Solomon was ecstatic and spread his arms wide to heaven. At the same time he felt deep humility, as he knelt before God and the assembled people and expressed the overwhelming feelings of them all in a prayer of praise and dedication. At the culmination of this heart-felt prayer, God demonstrated his acceptance, and manifested his presence amongst them in a visually spectacular way. Their hearts were so full of devotion to God that they drew close to him and felt his power and glory with them that day. Now they humbled themselves and gave voice to their praise. The solemn dedication of the temple was the focal point of prolonged devotions and a feast that lasted fourteen days (8th to 22nd of the 7th month, which included the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles).

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Solomon built a beautiful temple, the place where God should be worshipped, and God was pleased with it. But Solomon knew that God was everywhere. We worship God in our Sunday School. Can we worship God anywhere else? Where do we find it easiest to talk to God?

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we worship you. All that we have has come from you. Help us to use the gifts you have given us, in order to do things which will please you. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

"They ... gave thanks to the Lord, saying, 'For he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever'" (2 Chronicles 7:3).

**1 Kings 10:1-24****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how God's gifts of wisdom and riches made Solomon a great king, and demonstrated God's power to the surrounding nations.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

1 Kings 4:21-34. Find a map to illustrate the extent of the journey of the queen.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

This lesson begins on a note of expectancy and excitement as the people of Jerusalem prepared to receive a visiting queen. Lavish provision would have been made for entertaining so distinguished a guest and her entourage. Children will understand the thrill of anticipating such an occasion, if they can draw on events within their own experiences, such as a visit of a member of the royal family, a local festival or carnival, or any similar event involving extensive preparations. Recreate in their minds the atmosphere that would prevail. Numerous people would be busy for weeks beforehand. Protocol would be of prime importance. There would be much to organize, rooms to be cleaned and polished, meals planned, transport arranged, and special decorations provided in readiness for the great day.

The arrival of the Queen of Sheba was an impressive spectacle, more exotic than any twentieth century counterpart. The approach of a train of camels richly bedecked and loaded with treasure cannot be compared with a cavalcade of black limousines. With the help of a map and pictures of the terrain, show the distance she had travelled and the probable route. Suggest how arduous the journey would have been through the hot and dusty desert, with the sun blazing down. The length of the journey would have necessitated camping at night, and carrying a great deal of food and equipment. They would have had to be on the lookout for marauding bands of robbers, because of the valuable treasure they were carrying. Here was an important person who had heard so much about King Solomon's fabulous wealth and extraordinary wisdom that she felt compelled to undertake this long and difficult journey in person to find out for herself whether the tales she had heard were true. She was not prepared to believe the reports until she had seen everything with her own eyes.

Ask the children what sort of questions the Queen of Sheba might have asked Solomon. What was the secret of his great wealth? How had he come to be so wise? How had he come to make the laws by which his people were governed? What things were important to him? Was there one God, or many? Whatever she asked, it is clear that she was impressed by the extent of his knowledge and understanding. Perhaps she had heard some of his poetry, and his wise sayings. Show the children the parts of the Bible that are attributed to Solomon. Refer also to 1 Kings 4:29-34, to show that his interests included music, poetry and nature.

Besides being convinced of Solomon's wisdom, the Queen of Sheba saw the evidence of his great wealth all around her. Even though she herself was wealthy, she was overwhelmed by the sight of the magnificent temple, the beautiful palace, the vast number of horses and chariots, and the sheer abundance of priceless possessions. All her doubts were now dispelled. What she had been told was no exaggeration; rather, the reports had underestimated Solomon's status.

As was the custom for visitors in those days, the Queen presented her host with gifts which were representative of the wealth of her own country. He, in turn, generously showered her with presents, to the extent of giving her all that she desired. The fact that she asked for things may seem discourteous to us, but it was evidently regarded as a normal part of accepting hospitality. The general impression is that this had been a happy and successful encounter. There must have been mutual respect and a sharing of interests for them to have talked at such length, and so openly to each other.

Above all, the Queen of Sheba had been convinced that the Almighty God ruled in this land through a divinely appointed king.

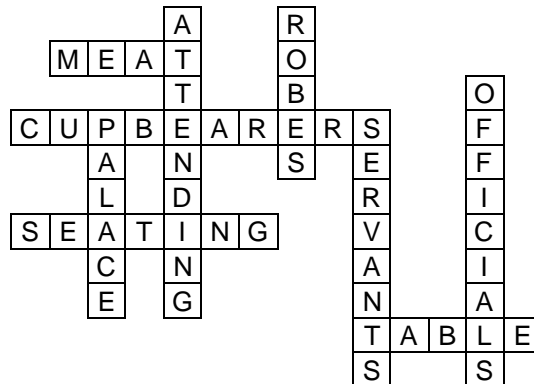
**RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN’S LIVES**

Solomon was the kind of person whom people wanted to meet. He was known for his wise words and good deeds. Everyone is known for something, (some for their kindness, politeness, helpfulness and good behaviour, others for their rudeness, selfishness, lying and naughtiness). What kind of things are some children known for? How can we make sure that we are known for good things, so that God will be pleased with us, and people will be glad to know us?

**WORKSHEETS**

The message contained in the coins reads: “Blessed be the Lord your God which delighted in you to set you on the throne of Israel”.

The words in the grid are:



**PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, help us to show others, by our good behaviour, politeness and helpfulness, that we are trying to live in a way that will please you. Amen.

**MEMORY VERSE**

“A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favour is better than silver or gold” (Proverbs 22:1).

***1 Kings 11:1-13, 26-43; 12:1-24*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how Solomon's disobedience and unfaithfulness to God resulted in the division of Israel, the rebellion of the people and the appointment of two wicked kings.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Exodus 34:14-17; Deuteronomy 17:17; 18:9-14; 1 Samuel 8:10-18; 12:14-15; 1 Kings 5:1-6:38; 9:15-19. Find maps of Palestine and surrounding countries.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

With the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon still fresh in the children's minds, emphasize how sad it was that Solomon, this wise, rich and powerful king, should, in the last years of his life, turn away from God. Having made alliances and trade agreements with foreign nations, Solomon saw fit to strengthen these bonds by marrying foreign princesses - Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, Hittites and the daughter of the Pharaoh of Egypt. This was strictly against God's commands, and did not end there. Like all wrong actions, one error led to another. Solomon permitted his wives to continue their pagan practices and even had altars and temples built for their foreign gods. It was not long before he, too, was tempted to involve himself with their worship, while continuing, so he thought, to worship the true God. In fact, it is impossible to be obedient to the true God and, at the same time, worship false gods. Quote "You shall have no other gods before me", the very first commandment.

God was angry with Solomon and disappointed that, despite all the help and blessings he had given him, he had gone his own way and turned his back on God's laws. He had ignored what he knew to be right and become involved with wrongdoers. Solomon's behaviour had caused him to fail in his duty as God's king to guide his people correctly and, from that time on, the people of Israel tended towards idolatry. God spoke to Solomon in a very different way from that first communication when the young man had asked for wisdom and God had blessed him. Now God's anger was such that he told Solomon that his kingdom would be torn apart. God explained that this disaster would not take place until after Solomon's death. So Solomon's reign, which had begun so gloriously, ended in shame, and Israel's brief "golden era" was ended.

Besides angering God, Solomon had also lost the confidence and loyalty of the people. His vast building programme of palaces and temples, houses and stables, cities and ships had been achieved only by forcing the people to work extremely hard for him. Introduce Jeroboam, a hard-working and efficient man, whom Solomon promoted to be an overseer of a labour force. He saw the over-ambitious and self-indulgent projects of Solomon and the cruel effect the slave-like work had upon the people, and he resented Solomon's rule. Describe his encounter with the prophet Ahijah, and, using a paper coat, reproduce his action of tearing it into twelve pieces to illustrate the prophecy. Stress the words of warning in verse 38, which made the continuing reign of Jeroboam's family conditional, as always, upon obedience to the laws of God. When Solomon learned of Jeroboam's aspirations, he threatened his life. Jeroboam was forced to flee to Egypt, there to await God's time for the promise to be fulfilled.

Explain to the children that at the death of Solomon, his own son, the prince Rehoboam, was naturally due to become the next king. So, after king Solomon had died, Rehoboam assembled the people in



order to declare himself king. But he was not popular, and the people were unwilling to accept him as their king without some reassurance that he would discontinue the harsh regime imposed by his father. They needed a spokesman to put their case. Jeroboam, who had returned home as soon as he had learned of the death of Solomon, was ready and willing to champion the people.

Describe the scene in the palace where the wise, old advisers, who had seen the mistakes of Solomon, tried to guide Rehoboam into attempting to win back the respect of the people. Unfortunately the proud prince listened to his contemporaries, who were as hot-headed as himself. Ask the children which advice he should have taken, and why. Explain that he made up his own mind about taking the wrong advice, and that his decision helped to bring about what God had planned, because God knew beforehand what sort of man he was and what he would decide to do. His clumsy and cruel response to the people's appeal served to swing the loyalty of nearly all the tribes from Solomon's son to Jeroboam, whom they appointed as their king. These ten tribes formed the northern kingdom of Israel, whilst Rehoboam retained only Judah, Benjamin and the priests. Rehoboam wanted to fight to regain the whole kingdom, but God sent a prophet to him with a message explaining that this division of the kingdom was God's doing and he was not to fight against it.

Even in the days of Saul, Israel and Judah had been regarded as separate parts of the kingdom (see 1 Samuel 11:8), but Saul, David and Solomon had united the people. Use a map to show that during the reign of Solomon the kingdom of Israel had reached its greatest extent. From this time on, the nation was divided, and so began a period of bitter hatred and trouble for God's people. Even though Jeroboam had known the reasons for Solomon's downfall, he too chose to lead the people astray by doing the same wrong things and encouraging the people to turn away from God. He accepted the God-given responsibility, but rejected the counsel of God that had accompanied the prophecy. His name became a byword: "Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin" (1 Kings 22:52). It is ironic that, in choosing Jeroboam, whom they thought would be a better leader than Rehoboam, the people acquired one of the most wicked of their leaders.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Solomon became so disobedient that God was very angry with him. Can you say where he first began to go wrong? He thought there was no harm in marrying a princess who did not believe in God, because he was sure this would not affect him. He thought he knew better than God, who had told his people never to do this.

Do you think, sometimes, that there is no harm in doing what you have been told not to do? (e.g. not to walk on the grass in the park, not to kick a ball in the house, not to leave your toys on the floor, etc.) If you love your parents you will do as they say, because you trust them to know what is good for you and for the family, and because there is usually a very good reason for the instructions.

### **WORKSHEETS**

When placed in the correct order, the words read 'Solomon turned his heart away from the Lord, who became angry and said "I will give your kingdom to one of your servants, but for the sake of David and Jerusalem I will do this after you die, and will leave your son one tribe"'.  
"

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we praise you for your wisdom and love. We ask you to help us to obey the rules we are given, and not to argue about them or ignore them. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

“If both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well” (1 Samuel 12:14).

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## ELIJAH FED BY GOD

58

### *1 Kings 17*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To show that God will provide for people who trust, love and obey him.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

Deuteronomy 11:11-17; 13:1-5; Jeremiah 35:15; Matthew 10:41; James 5:17. Find a map showing Cherith Brook, flowing past Tishbe, Elijah’s home town, and Zarephath.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

In order to start at a point which the children will understand, it will be necessary to discuss with them the influence of leaders. Their knowledge will be limited to those people in authority over them, such as teachers, parents, etc. Try to get them to see that the integrity of those in authority is all-important. No doubt they take it for granted that teachers are good people on whom they can rely. Get them to consider how different it would be if people in authority were wicked, selfish and cruel, and if there was no one to teach them what was right. Then introduce the characters of Ahab and Jezebel, who, as leaders of God’s people, were setting the wrong example. They cared nothing for God’s laws or for the needs of their subjects. They even worshipped strange gods, idols that were man-made.

With the aid of a map, show the extent of the kingdom of Israel and remind the children of the division of God’s people into two kingdoms. Briefly summarize the succession of wicked kings, the decline of godliness and the growth of idolatry in Israel, culminating in the evil reign of Ahab under the strong, pagan influence of Jezebel. Deeply grieved at this state of affairs, God chose someone to teach the people the truth about him and to try to lead them in the right way of life. This man was Elijah. Explain to the children that he was not a king, but a prophet; and at some point in the lesson it will be necessary to explain that a prophet was not only a good teacher but also a man given special power by God - that of foretelling the future. He also had authority to speak God’s words to his people, and so he was held in awe as God’s messenger.

It is important to note that, whereas most of the people were afraid of the autocratic King Ahab, Elijah showed no fear in approaching him in spite of the dire prediction he was to make. Elijah spoke with God’s authority and needed to fear no man. Describe the scene of this encounter, contrasting the rugged plainness of Elijah’s appearance - his simple clothes, strong features, compelling glance and confident bearing - with the guilty expression and apprehension of the spineless king and his heathen queen. Discuss their reaction to Elijah’s words and their growing fear as, over the ensuing months, his prophecy was confirmed.

But, unlike the people, Elijah had no need to be over-anxious because he trusted in the true God. He knew that God had promised, through Moses, that those who obeyed and served God truly would be provided for. Describe how God cared for him, first at the brook (indicate the places on the map) and then by directing him to the woman of Zarephath (ironically over the border near Sidon whence Jezebel had come). In focusing on the plight of this poor widow, try to help the children imagine themselves as the woman, and to think how they would react to a stranger asking for food when all that was left was barely sufficient for one last meal. Her answer to Elijah's plea indicates that she recognized him as a man of God and because of this she was ready to believe his words and follow his instructions. Her faith, which she demonstrated by her actions, was rewarded. Note that the flour and oil were provided on a daily basis, for their immediate needs only. Each day they would be reminded of God's care and their dependence upon him.

Tell the children how pleasant it would have been if the story ended there, but the widow's troubles were not over. Describe the tragedy of her son's death - he would have been the focus of her life - and her despairing outburst. She turned to the only one she could trust and he in turn appealed to God on her behalf. Convey the wonder of the miracle of restored life and the overwhelming joy of the mother. Her faith and trust in the living God were now absolute.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

It must have been hard for the widow of Zarephath to be generous. She could have claimed that she had a good reason for not sharing. How much do we need to have in order to be able to share it with others? What sort of person, then, is a generous person?

### **WORKSHEETS**

The message of the ravens is 'At the Cherith Brook God fed Elijah with bread and meat'; the code reads 'After a while the brook dried up because there had been no rain'.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, thank you for your daily care. All that we have comes from you. Help us to be generous and share with others what you have given us. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"And the woman said to Elijah, 'Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth ...'" (1 Kings 17:24).

**1 Kings 18****AIM OF LESSON**

To show that there is only one God.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Find details about and pictures of the results of prolonged drought, and a map of the territory. Deuteronomy 11:17.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Question the children, by way of revision, about Elijah's forecast. By means of descriptive language and well chosen illustrations, get the children to imagine the state of the land, the severe shortage of food for humans and animals, and the desperate search for water. The wealth of the king was no protection against such a catastrophe. Ahab himself was now in such a desperate plight that he was driven to join the search. He had had cause to ponder on Elijah's words for three years and had sought him persistently, realizing that only he had the authority to countermand the initial decree. As king of Israel, Ahab should have recognized that God had brought the drought upon the land as a sign of his displeasure and a means of correcting the wicked people, but his pride and sinfulness resisted this knowledge and instead he blamed Elijah for the disaster.

The faithful stand of Obadiah in the face of an evil society and the danger of persecution must have been an encouragement to the stalwart prophet, as he approached his confrontation with the king. As is often the case with people who know in their heart of hearts that they are wrong, Ahab vehemently attacked Elijah and levelled accusations at him. Elijah, however, would have none of it and, consistent with his strength of purpose, came straight to the point; with an air of authority, he issued instructions. Ahab, unable to defend his position, could only comply. Point out what a weak man Ahab proved himself to be in the presence of the great Elijah.

The prophet's power and impact were never more clearly demonstrated than in the events that followed on Carmel. Describe the scene as the people gathered on the mountain side. Elijah stood above them and reproached them for their ambivalence, reminding them that the worship of God was not compatible with homage to idols. The force of his challenge stunned them into silence. Make much of the tension and drama of the situation as it built towards its climax, step by step: the authoritative instructions followed by the detailed preparations for the Baal sacrifice, the vain cries of the Baal worshippers, Elijah's mocking words goading them to louder chanting and then their frustrated frenzy in which they cut themselves and screamed their pleas until half the day was gone. They exhausted themselves and the outcome was an empty silence. In obvious contrast Elijah, as all eyes turned on him, spoke with calm assurance and made his preparations with firm confidence. The attention of the people was drawn to the broken altar of the Lord. As Elijah took the 12 great stones and built them up again, the people would have been reminded of their history, in particular God's covenant with Jacob (Israel), the inheritance of the 12 tribes, the giving of the Law through Moses and the leadership of Joshua. The implication was clear, that just as Elijah was rebuilding the altar which had been neglected through lack of use, so the people should renew their weakened faith in the one true God, the God of their fathers, and worship him again. The children will readily appreciate how impossible it

is for anything saturated with water to be kindled into flame. They should therefore, be particularly impressed with the magnitude of the miracle and be able to share in the excitement of the spectators.

Elijah's earnest prayer should be dwelt upon. It is an exquisite expression of Elijah's own faith and his heartfelt plea for the redemption of God's people. God's response was immediate and phenomenal, and brought the people to their knees. Elijah's plea for the people's change of heart was answered: they instantly and spontaneously declared "The Lord - he is God". The people were given the chance to turn back to God, but the false prophets who had wilfully misled them were condemned and slain.

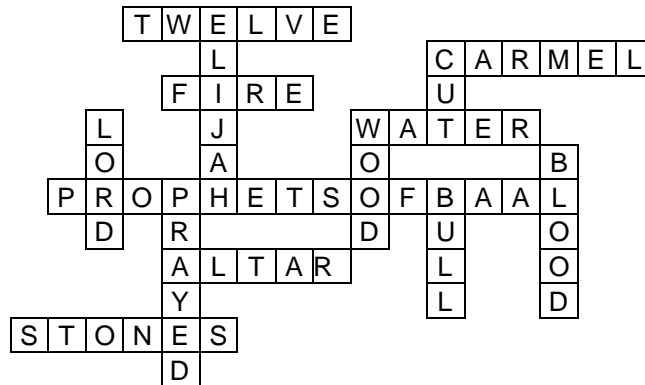
The king did not intervene in any part of these stupendous events. Instead, he complied with Elijah's further instructions to take nourishment and prepare for a journey, while the prophet drew away from the crowds to pray alone at the top of the mountain. Tell of Elijah's prolonged prayers, the repeated scanning of the horizon by his servant, the slow build-up of the storm clouds and wind, the hurried descent from the mountain, the race to Jezreel and the longed for blessing from God of life-giving rain. The "hand of the Lord" was certainly upon Elijah.

**RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Elijah told the people that they had to make up their minds to trust and worship only God. God wants all of us to be very sure that he is the one true, living, all-powerful God. What sort of things and what kind of people could lead us away from obeying God?

**WORKSHEETS**

The crossword reads:



**PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, help us to trust and worship you as the one true God. Amen.

**MEMORY VERSE**

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

**1 Kings 19****AIM OF LESSON**

To show that God revealed himself to Elijah, and reassured him when he most needed it.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Find a map showing the physical features of the land from Syria to Sinai. Look for illustrations of clothing and agricultural implements.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Question the children about the thrilling events on Mount Carmel. Ask them which significant person was missing (Jezebel), giving them clues if necessary. Describe her violent reaction when Ahab related what had happened, and the murderous threat that she sent by messenger.

Even Elijah, the great prophet who was so sure of the authority of God, felt afraid. Children will readily understand fear of the threat of violence, and the desire to run away and hide to avoid being hurt. Having fled for his life to a lonely place deep in the bare and rocky countryside, Elijah felt depressed and very much alone. He felt that all his work was in vain as long as such a godless and wicked queen held power over the king and God's people. He could not face up to returning to the cities. Where could he go? What could he do? He just wanted to die. However, although he *felt* so alone, he was soon shown that he was not alone. First an angel was sent to provide for his physical needs, and then to guide him where God wanted him to go. Discuss with the children the miraculous quality of the food that enabled Elijah to undertake a long and strenuous journey, presumably on foot, without having anything else to eat. Using a map as a visual aid, show the distance he covered and the location of Mount Horeb. Perhaps the children will remember that this was the mountain, also called Sinai, where God spoke to Moses and gave him the laws. Here Elijah was to experience the presence and power of God, as Moses had done before him. Elijah heard God's questioning voice and freely admitted how downhearted he was. Quote in full verses 11 and 12, which are so clear and dramatic. Elaborate on the awe-inspiring evidence of God's power, which Elijah so closely witnessed, and the effect on his emotions that these fearful events caused. Was God, perhaps, teaching Elijah that a man of God need fear no human power, which is as nothing compared with his own omnipotence? All these events were manifestations of God's might, which Elijah had known and recognized before. He had witnessed such a revelation on Mount Carmel. It was only after the storm, the quaking and the fire had ended that Elijah became aware of the nearness of God as he heard the quiet, meaningful voice. The same question was repeated and although Elijah gave the same reply, he was now ready to resume his work for God and to follow whatever instructions were given. We can learn from the fact that God sent Elijah back the way he had come. When we turn to God in need, it is likely that he will give us strength to cope with the situation, rather than taking it away from us. In setting Elijah his tasks God also reassured the prophet that his work would not be in vain and that, though many people would forsake God and be punished for it, there would always be the faithful - at this time seven thousand who would remain true to him.

How opportune it was, at this point, that God appointed Elisha to be a companion and successor for the lonely Elijah.

## RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES

Do you ever feel miserable and afraid when unkind people threaten to hurt you? Do you feel lonely and unable to tell anyone about it? Even Elijah needed help when he felt like that. You, too, should turn to someone you trust for help - a parent, an older brother or sister, or your teacher. You must not let people bully you. God also sees what is happening and will give you courage if you will talk to him about it.

## WORKSHEETS

The solution to the puzzle is:

E	A	R	T	H	Q	U	A	K	E
W	A		T	H	Q	U	A	R	E
W	A		D	H	Q	F	A	R	E
W	I		D	H	Q	F	I	R	E
W	I	N	D	H	Q	F	I	R	E
W	I	N	D			F	I	R	E
W	I	N	D		V	F	I	R	E
S	I	A	D		V	F	I	R	E
S	M	A	D		V	O	I	R	E
S	M	A	D	L	V	O	I	R	E
S	M	A	L	L	V	O	I	C	E

The good advice is 'God reassured Elijah because he thought he was the only good man left. We must remember that God will help us when we are lonely if we pray and ask him to'.

## PRAYER

Dear Lord God, please be with us when we are lonely and afraid, and give us courage to talk to someone about it. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

"The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1).

**1 Kings 21****AIM OF LESSON**

To show that it is wrong to desire the possessions of others and that such craving can lead to disaster.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Exodus 20:17; Leviticus 24:16; Numbers 36:7-9.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Start the story by painting a happy word-picture of Naboth living a quiet, industrious life tending his vineyard, as his forefathers had done. How honoured he must have felt to receive a visit from the king himself. But his pleasure turned to dismay on learning the purpose of Ahab's visit. Describe how Ahab assumed he had only to make a fair offer to Naboth, his subject, for this to be accepted. But it was not as straightforward as that. Naboth's ownership of the land was not merely a personal pleasure, but also a matter of inheritance, governed by law. Because of his faithfulness to the laws of God, he argued his case with conviction. Ahab had no right at all in the matter. His kingship in this case bore no weight. However, he was unused to being crossed or refused any favour, and was not prepared to be frustrated now. Even so, his reaction was so extreme that he sulked like a spoilt child. But he was a weak man and the matter would probably have ended there, but for the cunning of Jezebel.

Recount the devious and wicked means by which Jezebel had Naboth removed, showing that she was prepared, without a qualm, to resort to forgery, bribery, deceit and murder, twisting the law to her own ends. Ahab did not intervene to prevent her wicked schemes, nor apparently did he enquire about her plans. On hearing the news of Naboth's death, he did not question the circumstances but thought only of seizing the land the moment it was free. He was preoccupied with greed and self-gratification, and had turned a blind eye to the means that had enabled him to take possession of the vineyard.

God, on the other hand, saw very clearly the tragedy that had taken place and the evil that had caused it, and was angry. He sent Elijah with a message. What a shock Ahab received. When inspecting his new property he came suddenly face to face with the prophet. Elijah did not mince words, but challenged him with a direct accusation of his wrong-doing, and immediately passed sentence; God had judged him. Explain to the children that Ahab was held responsible for Naboth's death because, although he had not directly instigated it, his was the sin in coveting the vineyard in the first place, and in doing nothing in his position as king to restrain his wife's wickedness. For her part, Jezebel was also condemned to suffer a violent death.

Ahab had tried to ignore his own guilt but, when he was made to face it, he recognized the seriousness of the deeds and that he had been the cause of them, and felt remorse. As a result God modified the sentence.

**RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

What had really caused the tragedy in the story? Where did it begin? Ahab desperately wanted the vineyard belonging to Naboth. Which of the ten commandments tells us how wrong it is to desire things



that belong to other people? The word “covet” really means being envious. God tells us not to let ourselves feel like this, but to be thankful for what we have, and to be kind to - not envious of - others.

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, help us to be content with what we have, and to stop wanting things that other people have. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

“For I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content” (Philippians 4:11).

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## **ELIJAH AND ELISHA**

**62**

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### ***2 Kings 2:1-15***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show that God’s work is continued by a succession of faithful men.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

See Deuteronomy 21:16-17 regarding the double portion; also references to the “Sons of the Prophets” in existence in the time of Samuel and again in the days of Elijah and Elisha (1 Samuel 19:20; 2 Kings 5:22; 9:1. A Bible Dictionary will give further information.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Talk about growing old, from the point of view of coming to the end of one’s work and the need for a younger person to take one’s place. The children may know and understand a little of retirement, through grandparents or neighbours. Show how it is necessary for the younger person to be trained and prepared as a replacement, so that the wisdom, knowledge and experience of the older person are not lost. The children may be interested by the suggestion that they themselves may one day become Sunday School teachers, carrying on the work of teaching the next generation of children.

Remind the children that Elijah had worked long and hard in the Lord’s service, travelling many hundreds of miles on foot, visiting and instructing younger prophets, teaching the people about God and giving them help and advice on how they should live. When he grew old, it was important that he should train a younger man to carry on the work. Remind them that it was God who had chosen Elijah’s successor at just the right time. The two could get to know one another, so that Elijah would be encouraged to feel that he could hand over the work with confidence, and Elisha could learn much from Elijah by way of preparation for his task. Draw attention to the distinction between the two names, and endeavour to devise a means of differentiating (e.g. alphabetical order) between them.

When something sad is about to happen, people tend not to talk about it, and this seems to have been the case as the time approached for Elijah and Elisha to part. Elijah knew the time had come; Elisha was also aware of it, and the communities of prophets in the towns through which they travelled had also had the knowledge revealed to them. But the two men avoided discussing it. On the one hand Elijah sought to be alone, while Elisha was determined to be with Elijah to the last. Whenever the subject was raised by the prophets it was Elisha who, sensitive to Elijah's feelings, quickly silenced them. Clearly Elijah had received, and was following, directions from God. Steadfastly and without wavering, he finally approached the Jordan, watched from a distance by fifty of the prophets. Demonstrate the action of Elijah and describe the dramatic result. This day was a special one in the lives of both men. Only at the last minute did Elijah speak of the parting when he asked Elisha if he had a request. Elisha's response was unhesitating. He so valued the wisdom and holiness of his teacher that he could think of nothing greater than to be blessed with the same qualities. It needs to be understood that, in asking for a "double portion", he was not asking to be twice as wise, but was referring to the provision in the law whereby the eldest son received twice as much of the father's goods as did the other sons. Elisha felt that he was the "firstborn" amongst the sons of the prophets. He loved and respected Elijah as a father, and wished to be heir to his authority and duties.

Elijah knew that to grant such a petition was not within his power, and his answer left the decision to God. Convey the air of expectancy that pervaded the scene and then the dramatic manifestation of God's glory, which effected the parting. The old man was swept off his feet and into the air by a sudden fierce whirling wind, while the young man stood rooted to the spot, crying out in wonder and gazing upward until Elijah was lost to view and the vision of the chariots and horsemen disappeared. In Biblical times the tearing of clothes was often associated with bereavement and, on this occasion, probably expressed Elisha's sorrow. He was left to make the return journey alone. In taking up the cloak that had fallen from Elijah, Elisha was symbolically taking on Elijah's work. Refer back to the call of Elisha (1 Kings 19:19), when he had obviously understood the significance of the cloak that had been cast upon him.

Elisha was given immediate proof that he had indeed inherited the power of Elijah. The watching prophets witnessed the miracle and recognized that Elisha had taken Elijah's place.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Why did God arrange for Elisha to spend time with Elijah when his work was coming to an end? Elisha had to learn what he should do, before he could do it. *You* are learning now from *your* teacher. Do you think that one day, when you are grown up, you could teach others about the Bible?

## **WORKSHEETS**

The letters from the boxes that add up to 6 read: 'Elisha said "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit"'.  
E L I S H A S A I D " L E T M E I N H E R I T A D O U B L E P O R T I O N O F Y O U R S P I R I T "

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, help us to learn well, so that we may grow up to work for you. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

"Tell the next generation that this is God, our God for ever and ever" (Psalm 48:13-14).

***2 Kings 4:8-37*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how God blesses those who help his servants.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Look for information about domestic life in Old Testament times. Matthew 10:40-42.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Remind the class that Elijah had gone away and that it was Elisha who now had the task of preaching God's word to the people. He travelled round to meet the people in the towns and villages, visiting each community at regular intervals, concerned for their spiritual welfare. Remind the children too, that travel was usually on foot, along dusty tracks, often under a hot sun. At the end of each day Elisha and his servant would be glad to find comfortable accommodation and to rest their tired limbs. Perhaps they spent some nights out in the open. How welcome, then, would be an offer of hospitality in someone's home.

Convey the character of the woman, her thoughtfulness, her recognition of Elisha's godliness and her awareness of his needs. One gains the impression from the story that this was a quiet, welcoming home. The woman of Shunem was hospitable and contented. She and her husband were also exceedingly generous, for not only did they rearrange their accommodation to suit Elisha, but went to considerable trouble and expense in order to provide him with his own room. In describing the furnishing of the room, explain that the candlestick was not a holder for a wax candle but a stand on which to place an oil lamp (pictures would be useful). Elisha so appreciated all that the woman had done for him that he wanted to give her something to express his gratitude. He was poor and she was wealthy, so he was not able to buy her a gift. Yet his gift to her was greater than anything money could buy.

No doubt Elisha was glad to witness the happiness that the arrival of the baby brought to this family, and each time he visited during the next few years he would remark upon how much the boy had grown. His friendship with the family grew and he must have looked forward to his visits to their home. In describing the circumstances of the boy's collapse, suggest the possibility of sunstroke. It was because of the fierce heat of the sun's rays that the Israelites wore a cloth to cover the head and neck, as many Arabs still do today.

When tragedy struck, the Shunammite woman immediately thought of Elisha and wasted no time in turning to him for help. Happily she knew where Elisha could be found and rode hard to fetch him as quickly as possible. Elisha was very surprised to see her approaching, and was immediately concerned about the family's welfare. Clearly something was wrong for her to have made the journey, yet Elisha had received no message from God about it. She would allow nothing to deter her from securing Elisha's personal intervention, knowing that he was the one endowed with the power of God. This power was granted to him by God, in response to his prayer. It is interesting that, in this case, the miracle of restoring life was not immediate, in response to a word of command; only after Elisha's persistent efforts to revive the child was life restored. The relief and joy not only of the parents, but of Elisha and Gehazi too, can be imagined, and many prayers of thankfulness would have been offered to

God that day. Possibly, during further visits, Elisha and his servant were able to see the boy grow to manhood.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Do you sometimes have visitors at your house? What can you do to make them feel welcome? "Hospitality" means making people welcome, and this creates happiness for those who receive it and those who give it, and strengthens friendships.

### **WORKSHEETS**

The code reads: 'Elisha was a holy man of God who raised the son of the Shunammite woman because she had always been very kind to him and often given him a bed for the night'

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, thank you for everything you have given us. Help us to be kind and generous to others, and to share with them the things we have. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"You will be enriched in every way for great generosity" (2 Corinthians 9:11).

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## **NAAMAN THE LEPER**

**64**

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### ***2 Kings 5***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show the importance of obedience.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Leviticus 13:1-8. Consult reference books regarding leprosy, and attitudes towards it in Bible times. Find a map to show the route that Naaman took, and the rivers mentioned.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Introduce the story by describing the position of the little Jewish girl who had been taken captive by the Syrians during an attack on her country. She had been separated from her family and all that she held dear, deprived of her possessions and, although she was still very young, she had been made to work hard as a slave. It would appear, however, that she was treated well by the master and mistress of the house, probably because she accepted her lot and endeavoured to work conscientiously and to please. Despite the fact that she was having to adjust to living in a different country with strange ways, she remembered that she belonged to God's people, and still trusted in him. Not only did she do her duty in the household; she also felt genuine concern when she learned of her master's illness. Describe the symptoms of leprosy and the horror it produced in others, in an age when there was no

known cure. Point out the contrast between the girl's humble status and her master's high-ranking position. Yet her recommendation was heeded.

Describe the elaborate preparations for Naaman's journey - the large retinue, the costly gifts and the royal letters which led up to his arrival at the king of Israel's palace, and the king's irritation at being presented with this problem. The king suspected a plot. It was Elisha's job to remind the king that God had a prophet in Israel.

Elisha's humble life-style also contrasted strongly with Naaman's opulence. The latter considered it a personal affront that the prophet would not even grant him an audience, and he rejected Elisha's instructions - they offended his dignity. Furthermore, Naaman had no faith in the efficacy of bathing in the river. He had expected a spectacular miracle to be performed, which would be more in keeping with his high office. Dramatize the attitude of Naaman, paraphrasing his angry outburst, and conveying his resentment and disgust. Dramatize also the attitude of Naaman's servants who, in their loyalty and concern for their master, persuaded him to obey Elisha's instructions. Just as he had listened to advice from the little girl, he listened again to advice from those who served him. This great military leader now had to prepare, in front of all his soldiers, to wade into the water. Build up the suspense as he emerged from the river, watched expectantly by his men. Where was his dignity now? As you approach the climax of the incident, ask the children what they think happened next. Then, looking at your hands with pleasure and amazement, describe Naaman's relief and joy at discovering that he was cured.

Now his loss of dignity seemed unimportant. He felt humble and chastened; honoured that he had been so blessed. In gratitude, however, he felt constrained to shower Elisha with gifts. Here, too, he was to learn that in God's sight, his wealth and position were worthless. He had, in fact, already given what was required of him - obedience. He also confessed belief in the God of Israel, acknowledging him as the one true God. Ask the children to imagine what a happy welcome Naaman would have received from the little girl, not only because of his cure, but also because of his recognition of the power of the God of Israel.

Tell the children that this is not the end of the story. Unhappily, not all people are trustworthy and loyal. Elisha's own servant, Gehazi, let him down badly. Although he had accompanied Elisha on his journeys and witnessed the power of God, nevertheless his head was turned by the riches and costly gifts from Naaman, and he coveted them. Wrong thoughts lead to wrong actions, and Gehazi was prepared to go against his master's decision and to lie in order to satisfy his greed. He was blind to the fact that his actions were known to God, and that God's prophet had the authority to punish him.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Naaman learned a very important lesson. What does God require of people who want to be blessed by him? (Obedience). Whom should we obey (parents, teachers, Jesus, God). This discussion can lead to the topic of baptism, depending on the age and maturity of your scholars.

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, help us to realize that it is only doing what you want us to do that will bring us happiness. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

“The Lord our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey” (Joshua 24:24).

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## GOD PROTECTS ELISHA

65

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### *2 Kings 6:8-23*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To show that God's power surrounds those who trust in him, and to show how God's people should treat their enemies.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

1 Kings 20; 2 Kings 2:11-12; Matthew 26:53; Romans 12:20-21.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Ask the children what they know about angels - from the angels at creation to the angel that rolled away the stone from Christ's tomb. They may remember the angel that shut the lions' mouths for Daniel, or the angel who woke Peter and led him out of prison. This lesson shows how God's angels are always ready to help his servants, even though they may not be visible.

Begin the story by pointing out that Israel had a number of enemies who attacked their cities from time to time. One of the most powerful of these was the Syrian army, led by their king, Ben-Hadad. The Syrians had experienced a crushing defeat by Israel during the time of Elijah and now, with renewed forces, they moved in to attack again. This time they planned to capture the king of Israel in an ambush, but he was saved from capture because he was prepared to obey the words of God's prophet. As before, the Syrians failed to appreciate the power of Israel's God, and their plans were thwarted by Elisha. This happened so often that the king of Syria suspected that there must be an Israelite spy in his camp, who was forewarning the Israelites of his plans. Learning that Elisha was responsible for the undermining of his strategy, the king of Syria decided that further attacks on the king must take second place to the capture of Elisha.

Describe the means by which Ben-Hadad set about capturing Elisha, the search to discover his whereabouts, and the hasty but stealthy movement of troops as under the cover of darkness they closed in around the city of Dothan. An alarming situation revealed itself to the city's inhabitants when they awoke in the morning; they were completely surrounded by enemy forces, and there was no means of escape.

Elisha's new young servant reacted by running, panic-stricken, to his master. By contrast, Elisha was calm, confident and untroubled, inspired by his constant awareness of the presence and power of God. Quote the words of Elisha to his servant (verse 16) and the ensuing prayer, uttered aloud for the young man's sake (verse 17). The answer was immediate. The young man was shown something not normally visible to the human eye. It was a manifestation of the angelic forces at God's command. Try to help the children appreciate the wonder and magnitude of this revelation, which brought home to the servant the power and presence of God in a way which no words could have conveyed.

Once again Elisha took the initiative and called upon God to intervene and protect him, and once again his prayer was answered. Elisha was able to lead his would-be captors into captivity in the capital city. Now it was the turn of the Syrians to be afraid, when they found themselves at the mercy of the king of Israel. They would expect to receive harsh punishment. How surprised then, and puzzled, they must have been to be entertained on such a grand scale and afterwards set free, and with what confused thoughts they must have returned to their own camp. We are not told what reports they gave to their king, but the outcome was that the whole army abandoned their siege and returned to Syria, humiliated and demoralized.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Do you think that there are still angels? Can you see them? Why not? Are they still able to help us?

Do you think Elisha was right in not taking revenge on his enemies when they were in his power? If we try to get our own back on someone who has hurt or threatened us, what usually happens? If we forgive them and are kind to them instead, what is often the result?

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank you that we have learned about angels. Help us to believe that your power is still around us and that your angels are still able to protect and help us. When people try to hurt us, help us to overcome the desire to get our own back, and instead be brave enough to forgive and to be kind. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them" (Psalm 34:7).

***Jonah 1-4*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how Jonah learned that it is impossible to run away from God, and that God forgives and saves those who repent.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

2 Kings 14:23-25. Map showing Gath Hopher, Joppa, Tarshish and Nineveh. Seek information about Nineveh, early sailing ships, whales and large fish, methods of casting lots. Proverbs 16:33; Joshua 18:6; 1 Chronicles 24:31; Matthew 12:40; Luke 11:32; Acts 1:23-26.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Use the theme of punishment for wrong doing as an introduction to this lesson. Discuss with the children why punishment is necessary, who administers it and how important it is that it should be just. Explore their feelings about the punishment other people have to undergo when they have done wrong. Sometimes we take pleasure in seeing that people get what they deserve. Tell the children that God is different. He is not pleased when people need punishing, but is very glad when they can be persuaded to turn from their bad ways. He is always ready to forgive. He instructs his servants to preach about his requirement and his invitation to all men to turn to him and be forgiven. One such servant was the prophet Jonah.

God instructed Jonah to take a warning message to the people of Nineveh: So great was their wickedness that he intended destroying them. Jonah was furious for he knew that if the Ninevites changed their ways God, in his great mercy, would forgive them. But Jonah wanted this threatening enemy nation to be destroyed. Deliberately disobeying God's instructions he set off in the opposite direction and went to Joppa, hoping to escape from God and avoid having to carry out his unpleasant mission. If Jonah had stopped to think he would have seen the futility of his action, for he knew that God's presence was everywhere, and that God sees and hears everything that is happening in the world.

On board ship Jonah slept soundly, still under the delusion that he had succeeded in avoiding the trip to Nineveh. But his peace of mind was soon shattered when he was roughly awakened by the captain. He heard the din of a raging sea, the howling wind, and cries of anguish. A storm had broken over the ship, so fierce that even the seasoned sailors were terrified. In their panic they offered up prayers to their false gods. These mariners did not know about the true God. But, as the storm raged around him, Jonah knew that he was in the presence of God, and must have known that the casting of lots would show that he was the one who had done wrong. He had not escaped from God, and was still required to obey his command. In addition, he had to face the questions of the angry sailors. Try to help the children imagine what it would have been like to be in Jonah's shoes; alone among strangers, in a ship which was in imminent danger of capsizing, and knowing that he had failed to carry out God's command. With great courage he not only admitted that he was to blame, but also asked that they should throw him overboard, although he knew that in such conditions he would undoubtedly drown. In their reluctance to send Jonah to his death the sailors displayed more compassion towards Jonah than Jonah had done towards Nineveh. But the power of Jonah's confession and his sure knowledge that God would calm the sea again convinced them that to get rid of Jonah was their only chance of



survival. The sudden change from storm to calm confirmed that what Jonah had said was true, and the sailors knew that his God, the one true God, was in control of the elements.

As Jonah sank beneath the waves, he must have felt certain that he was to die for his disobedience. Then an unimaginable thing happened. Describe the terror that Jonah had to endure for three long and lonely days - the shock of finding himself surviving in such sinister circumstances, the darkness, the cold and the apprehension about what would happen next. The realisation of his utter helplessness finally made him acknowledge his need for God, and cry out for his help. It is possible that he died inside the fish - certainly he was close to death as he prayed. His prayer was heard and answered. Describe Jonah's relief and happiness at finding himself on dry land. He recognised that God had miraculously saved him.

God patiently repeated his original command to Jonah. How differently he responded this time. He had learned that he must obey, and he set off unhesitatingly on his mission to Nineveh. However, he still had another lesson to learn.

Describe to the children this vast, busy city, whose inhabitants behaved in a way which was so displeasing to God. As Jonah walked through the streets he, too, was horrified at the wickedness he saw and still felt that God should destroy the city. However, his fervent preaching had a profound effect on all those who heard him - you should explain their penitence. But Jonah did not share God's pleasure and acceptance of the people's repentance. He felt no compassion; he felt no joy in their change of heart. He wanted God's love and mercy to be confined to Israel.

God caused the plant to spring up (probably the shady castor oil plant) in order to make Jonah feel something of his own pity for men and women. God wanted the people of Nineveh to live in the same way as Jonah wanted the plant to live. Jonah needed to learn the extent of God's mercy. It is God's prerogative to forgive all those who are sorry for the wrong they have done. It is not right, therefore, for a man to judge others, but rather he should seek to save those who do wrong.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

What did Jonah have to point out to the people of Nineveh? Why did God decide not to punish these people? When a parent, teacher or neighbour points out that we are doing something wrong, how do we usually react? What would be the best thing to do? What would happen then?

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we know from the story of Jonah that you will forgive those who are truly sorry. Help us to own up when we have done wrong and ask to be forgiven. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

"For thou, Lord, art good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on thee" (Psalm 86:5).

***Isaiah 11:1-9; 35:5-6; 42:1-7; 53***

### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show that the coming of Jesus Christ and the work he would do was foretold by God hundreds of years previously.

### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Consult Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7; 49:6; 52:13-15; 61:1-2, and commentaries or expositions of Isaiah for historical background and study of Messianic prophecies.

### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Ask the children what a prophet is. Remind them about Elijah and Elisha, their role of preacher, and how by God's power they were able to reveal future events. Briefly introduce Isaiah and his place in history. Ask the children to turn to the book, and explain how and when he wrote it. Usually, when we want to learn about historical characters, we read books written about them during their lifetime by people who knew them, or written after their death by writers who have carried out a great deal of research about them. Isaiah, however, was able to write about the life of Jesus although he lived 700 years before Jesus was born. Explain that, although Jesus is never mentioned by name, Isaiah tells us so much about the king who would save people from their enemies and rule over the whole world that we can tell he was speaking about Jesus.

Ask the children to tell you what they know about Jesus, his birth, his character, his death and in what ways he was special. As they offer the items of information, list them on a chart in chronological order. The following points should be drawn out, and shown to be recorded in Isaiah:

1. The king would be born as a baby (9:6)
2. He would be a descendant of David, but greater than David, and would inherit his throne (9:7; 11:1)
3. His mother would be a young woman specially chosen (7:14). He would be sent by God himself (7:14; 61:1)
4. He would be kind to the poor and humble (11:4)
5. He would be able to see right into men's hearts and know just what they were like (11:3)
6. He would heal the sick (35:5-6)
7. He would teach people about God's laws and God's plans (61:1-2)
8. He would be wise and good, and would seek always to please God (11:2-3)
9. Although perfectly good, he would be hated by other men who would cause him great sorrow and eventually kill him. He would never complain or try to stop them ill-treating him (53:7)
10. He would die with wicked men and be buried by a rich man (53:9)
11. He would bear the punishment that other people deserved (53:4-6)
12. God would raise him from the dead and give him great power and authority (53:10-12). He would become king, and rule in righteousness and peace for ever (9:7)
13. He would rule all the world, not just the Jews but the Gentiles also (49:6)

Make full use of this opportunity to emphasize our confidence in the return of Christ. Because all the prophecies recorded by Isaiah regarding the life, death and resurrection of Jesus were fulfilled, we can be sure that Isaiah was a true prophet and so look forward with certainty to the fulfilment of the rest of the prophecy.

Tell the children that Isaiah knew the sacrifice of God's son would be for a purpose. Jesus would allow himself to be punished for the wrong that all other people do - including the wrong that we ourselves do. But Jesus would consider his suffering to be worthwhile when he saw many people believing and turning to him in gratitude as a result of what he had done (53:10-11). Isaiah also makes it clear that when Jesus comes again to be king, those who have believed in him will also live with him; they will be happy, free from pain, illness, sorrow and worry. There will be peace in all the earth, even among the animals, and all people will know and love God. Furthermore, this wonderful state will last for ever (11:6-9).

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

How can we be really sure that Jesus will come back to the earth? What is it that makes us certain? (You may find it helpful to utilize the list by putting a tick beside all the prophecies fulfilled in the past in order to demonstrate clearly that all that remains for the completion of the picture is his return).

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank and praise you for sending Jesus to save us, and pray that we can look forward to meeting him one day. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called 'Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace...'" (Isaiah 9:6).

***Ezra 7-10*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show that God is in control of the nations but still cares for individuals.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

1 Kings 12; 2 Kings 17; Psalm 137; Jeremiah 29. Find a map showing the divided kingdom and places of exile.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

By asking questions and reminding the children of the division of the kingdom (lesson 57) and the behaviour of King Ahab (lesson 61), build up a picture of God's people divided into two different nations with two different kings. Use a Bible Atlas to show the kingdom of Judah with Jerusalem still its capital, and Israel with Bethel and Dan where Jeroboam had built golden calves.

Explain that both kingdoms had good and bad kings but in the main Israel had a succession of kings that not only did not worship God but led astray the people that they were supposed to be ruling. Judah's kings were descended from King David and more often realised their responsibility; some tried to lead the people back to God.

Ask the children what God would have thought about the way his people were behaving. He would have been sad and angry when they went astray, and pleased when they remembered him. Remind them that it is the same with us. God wants us to worship him and is sad when we don't.

Ask about Elijah, Elisha and Jonah, and get the children to understand that God did all he could to warn the people that if they didn't remember him he would punish them.

The kingdom of Israel only lasted for about two hundred years and then God sent the Assyrians to besiege them and take them into captivity. Select some verses from 2 Kings 17:7-18 and read them with the children to illustrate what God felt about the people of Israel.

The kingdom of Judah lasted for about another two hundred years before they too had completely forsaken God and he sent the Babylonians to take them into captivity. 2 Kings 24:2-4 illustrates this.

Ask the children whether they think God would now forget his people and how they felt in a strange land. We do not know much about the people of the nation of Israel who went to Assyria but we do know that many of those of Judah who went to Babylon missed their homeland very much (Psalm 137), and that they lived together and tried to help each other to remember God. Daniel and his friends were amongst these. Most of the children will know some of the stories of Daniel and you can tell them that they will be learning more about him in the coming weeks.

God promised them that after seventy years they would be able to go back home and that he had a special person in mind who would allow them to do this. His name was King Cyrus.

It is amazing to think that this man, who did not worship God himself and had no reason to be kind to God's people, should suddenly decide to let them all go back to their homeland. But God is in charge and it was really he who wanted the people to go back home.

After seventy years (the little children who were taken into captivity would be grand parents) just as God had said, King Cyrus issued a proclamation saying that God had told him to build again the temple in Jerusalem. Any of his people who wanted to go back could do so and they could take with them gold and silver, and goods and animals, to help them to rebuild the temple.

If you read with the children Ezra 1:2-4 you may need to explain that Cyrus is described as king of Persia whereas the people of Judah were taken to Babylon. It will probably be sufficient to say that Cyrus was now king over the land that used to be called Babylon. When they learn the stories of Daniel they may appreciate the succession of kings better. As this lesson covers large periods of time it is probably best to keep it simple. Children of this age find long time spans difficult to understand.

The first group of people went back with a man called Zerubbabel, and despite many problems from the people living in the land the temple was built and there were great celebrations.

The next group to go home, some 80 years later, were to be in the charge of a man called Ezra. Describe the scene as it might have been beside the Ahava Canal where the people gathered and camped for three days before their journey. Explain how Ezra would have the very difficult job of sorting everyone out who was going and who was to look after the precious gifts Artaxerxes had sent; how he found there were no Levites in the company, so he had to find some and tell everyone what to do. Above all show how worried he was about the responsibility of taking all these people through dangerous desert areas where there would be bandits. The children will be able to identify with his touching little comments in Ezra 8:21-23, where he admits his fears but feels he cannot ask for protection because he must trust in God. They prayed and fasted, and Ezra's confidence in God's overall guidance was justified.

How happy Ezra would have been to see the rebuilt temple, and to tell everyone how God had guided them and brought them home the way he had planned.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

We often get so involved in our day to day cares that we forget that God has plans for the world and for us. What are God's plans for the world? What can we do to try to fit in with them?

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear God, we are glad that you know the future and will make all the nations do what you want. We are also glad that even though you are so powerful you will watch over us and keep us safe. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

'The gracious hand of God is on everyone who looks to him.' (Ezra 8:22).

***Nehemiah 1-5*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how prayer guided Nehemiah's life.

**BIBLE BACKGROUND**

The same as for the previous lesson.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Ask the children about last week's lesson or set the background to Nehemiah. The Israelites often now called Jews, had been in captivity for seventy years when it was decreed that they could go back to the land that God had promised them. There were three companies of people who went. The first group had rebuilt the temple and the second group, led by Ezra, brought many precious gifts with them for the service of the temple. Since the return of Ezra, thirteen years had passed.

Explain to the children that there were still many people left behind who were anxious to hear news of their fellow countrymen who had gone back home. Nehemiah was one of these. His job was cupbearer to king Artaxerxes. Explain that this was an important job. He probably had to taste the wine before he brought it to the king in case it was poisoned. It was also expected that he remain cheerful in front of the king at all times.

Nehemiah heard distressing news from Judah. The people were in great trouble, and the walls and gates of Jerusalem were broken down and burned. This made him very upset; he wept and mourned, but there was not much he could do to help his friends. Ask the children if there is anything they can do if their friends are in trouble. Something like an illness of someone who lives a long way away. Encourage them to realise that they can pray for the person even when there is nothing else they can do. This is what Nehemiah did.

For many days he prayed, but when he had to go back to work he was still feeling sad. When the king saw his miserable face he asked Nehemiah what the matter was. Get the children to imagine how Nehemiah must have felt. He would have been scared about whether the king would be cross about his sadness, but he recognised that God was answering his prayers and giving him an opportunity to ask the king for help. He told the king why he was sad and asked if he could go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls. He also felt bold enough to ask for letters to allow him a safe journey, and wood to do the building.

Talk to the children about whether this would have been a good time to say a prayer and help them to realise that there are different sorts of prayers and that they can pray at any time. Nehemiah had prayed quietly on his own many times and it was so much a habit to him that when faced with danger he was able to ask for God's help immediately with only a few words. Nehemiah's requests were granted and then he too went back to Judah with many more people.

Tell the story of how Nehemiah inspected the broken down walls of Jerusalem with his donkey at night and how everyone rallied to build them up again. Describe how when there was opposition half the people worked on building the walls and half had to be ready with weapons in case they were attacked. With everyone (not just the builders - see chapter 3) working together, the walls were built in fifty-two days. It would have been impossible if God had not been with them.

## RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES

All through the book of Nehemiah we can read how he prayed to God about the problem of the moment. How can we build prayer into our lives? When are some good times to pray? What sort of things might we want to say a quick prayer about?

## WORKSHEETS

These should be self-explanatory.

## PRAYER

Dear Lord God, help us to get into the habit of praying to you about everything in our lives and help us to know that you are always listening. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

'The king said to me, "What is it you want?" Then I prayed to the God of heaven.' (Nehemiah 2:4).

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## DANIEL AND HIS FRIENDS

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### *Daniel 1*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To show how, in captivity, the young Daniel steadfastly trusted and obeyed God, and resisted temptation.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

2 Kings 24 and 25; Psalm 137. Investigate the background of the downfall of Judah, and the might and wealth of Babylon in the days of Nebuchadnezzar. Look at the Mosaic food laws (Leviticus 11).

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Introduce the theme of the captivity by discussing with the children what it feels like to be lonely, sad and homesick. Some may have experienced these feelings in hospital, or in having to move to another town or country. Go on to explain the traumatic circumstances of the Babylonian invasion and captivity, when the Jews were taken by force from their homes and country and transported as prisoners to a strange environment in a distant land. Describe the contrast of the two cultures; the differences in religion, ethics, language, laws, customs, etc.

Among the unfortunate prisoners were Daniel and his three friends; four fine, strong, intelligent youths, far from home and all that was familiar, without rights or possessions, and made to serve in the king's palace. Because the king recognized their potential, they were singled out to be educated in the ways of the Babylonian court. They had no choice in the matter. What were they to do? Ask the children to suggest possible ways in which the young men might have responded. They might have given in to their unhappiness and become more and more miserable and depressed, so that they lost hope and

gave up trying; they might have become rebellious and angry, actually resisting the authority of their captors and making trouble for them whenever possible; worst of all, they might have been tempted to make the most of the opportunity given to them and adapt themselves to the Babylonian way of life. But not so these faithful young Jews. Not only were they handsome and clever, they were also firm in their conviction that obedience to God was what mattered most.

During the three years' training there must have been occasions when their faith was put to the test in such a pagan land. What was expected of them would often conflict with their conscience, forcing them to make a choice. The incident of the food, which should be fully developed, is an example of this sort of dilemma, and illustrates the way in which they dealt with it. When they heard the king's command they knew they could not obey. They had been brought up to observe the law that God had given to Moses, under which certain kinds of meat were forbidden. Daniel was not afraid to refuse the king's food and wine, and firmly explained the reason why. The steward, impressed by the young men's courteous behaviour, was willing to let them have their own diet. The outcome provided visual proof that their faith had been rewarded. Their adherence to God's laws and their dependence on his providence were such that God blessed them further with wisdom and understanding, so that the king came to rely on their knowledge and integrity.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Daniel refused to do what he knew was wrong, because he listened to his conscience. What is a conscience? How do we feel when we obey what our conscience is telling us? How do we feel when we have refused to listen to it?

### **WORKSHEETS**

YES: Beans, Lentils, Peas, Carrots; NO: Bacon, Chicken, Lamb, Beef.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, when we are sure of the right thing to do, help us to do it bravely, no matter how difficult. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"Turn away from evil and do right .... and keep your conscience clear" (1 Peter 3:11 and 16).



***Daniel 2*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show that God gives wisdom to men of faith in answer to their prayers, and that God knows the future.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Ensure that you are familiar with the image, and be prepared to answer likely questions on the names and duration of the kingdoms.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Introduce the story by describing the kind of king Nebuchadnezzar was, namely, the most powerful ruler in the world at that time. His servants were well aware that if they offended him or failed to respond to his wishes their very lives were in danger. Having established the relationship of the king with his subjects, try to convey to the children the feelings of fear, tension and anger the people would have experienced.

The action begins with Nebuchadnezzar's unreasonable demand to be told the dream, which he himself could not remember. Discuss with the children how sometimes we know we have been dreaming, even though we cannot recall what the dream was about. On this occasion the king was strongly aware that his dream held some significance, and so he was anxious to be reminded what it was about in order to learn the meaning of it. It is possible, of course, that he had not really forgotten the dream, but was testing his wise men to see if they really had the power to interpret it.

The wise men whom Nebuchadnezzar summoned approached him with flattering words, confidently preparing themselves to offer an interpretation of the dream, but their complacency soon turned to nervous uncertainty and then to desperation. The king was consumed with anger. These men were supposed to be the cleverest in the land, possessed of special gifts of understanding, yet his demand was too much for them. In his frustration he sentenced them all to death.

Although Daniel had not been present in the court, he was one of the "wise men" and thus included in the death sentence. But he did not share the hopelessness of the Babylonian scholars when hearing the news. He knew that what seemed impossible to men was not impossible with God. He had only to ask God, in faith, for true wisdom. The prayers of his friends were needed also. In response to God's answer to his prayer, Daniel praised the Lord. Verses 20-23 could be read aloud effectively in class. In these words of praise, Daniel revealed his awareness of God's supreme power over all human beings, including kings, and expressed his gratitude for the gift of wisdom.

It would appear that the revelation came just in time to enable Daniel to prevent the executions. He was rushed to the king who was still wholly preoccupied with the dream, and ready to honour the one who could solve the mystery. This was not what Daniel sought. His manner was calm and humble. He took no credit or acclaim for himself, but showed himself to be the servant of the living God, who alone could reveal secrets.

Discuss in general terms the fulfilment of the prophecy. It may be hard for them to imagine the long time periods involved. The important thing is to establish in their minds the overall lesson that the rule



and could no doubt be seen for miles, particularly when the sun shone upon it. The rulers of the provinces were assembled at an impressive dedication ceremony of the vast statue, amongst whom would have been Daniel's three friends.

Introduce the names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and ask the children to try and memorise them. Use these three names at intervals throughout the story, so that the children automatically come to repeat them. Similarly, repeat the list of musical instruments each time they appear, in the same order in which they are written, since children take pleasure in such repetition, and their attention is held.

Nebuchadnezzar was not content for the people simply to admire his statue. He ordered that they must also bow down and worship it. This the Babylonians were willing to do, because they were accustomed to worshipping idols. But to Daniel and his friends, and all the other devout Jews, the idea of worshipping an idol was abhorrent: God had expressly forbidden it. Ask the children to find and read the first three commandments for themselves. In the minds of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, there was no question of disobeying God's laws, despite the threats of punishment.

Clearly some of the Babylonians resented Daniel's three friends, because of their promotion to positions of authority, and would have been delighted to see them brought down. They aroused the king's anger by informing against Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. But the conviction of the three Jews was so strong that even in the face of the king's rage they remained calm and unafraid. They expressed their confidence that God could save them, yet they did not presume that he would do so, and were prepared to die if necessary rather than offend God. Nebuchadnezzar's previous declaration of God's greatness had been meaningless for he now defied the power of their God to save them.

Once more, however, Nebuchadnezzar was shown that his power was as nothing compared with that of the true God. He could not deny the evidence of his own eyes. Convey to the children the wonder of the miracle: not only were the three men unharmed, but they had also been protected from any after effects of the fire. The presence of the angel, whose appearance was that of a man, had ensured absolute immunity. Nebuchadnezzar was again impressed, and there followed a reversal of his former attitude. His people were forbidden, on pain of death, to speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and the three men were to be admired and respected. They were also given greater responsibilities in Babylon.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

The Babylonian empire was very splendid and much admired. Can we admire the king of Babylon? Why not? What was the king's worst fault? (pride). Can people who are "big-headed" be pleasing to God?

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, it is easy for us to think well of ourselves, and not so easy to be humble. We need you to teach us of your greatness. Help us to worship only you. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

"I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think" (Romans 12:3).

***Daniel 5*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show that God will not leave unpunished those who are proud and dishonour his name.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Daniel 4.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Approach this lesson by talking about parties and how enjoyable they can be. However, explain that some parties can become too wild, when grown-ups drink too much wine and begin behaving foolishly. In the time of Daniel this kind of party was often associated with idol worship. Explain that today's story begins with such a party, at the king's palace in Babylon. Introduce Belshazzar who was probably acting king, ruling in the absence of his father, Nabonidus, who was in Arabia. Describe the scene, the opulence of the palace, the vast number of guests, the excessive quantity and variety of food and wine. In no time Belshazzar was feeling merry, and he became even more arrogant and expansive than usual. To further impress his pleasure-seeking guests, he sent for the gold and silver goblets, part of the treasure that Nebuchadnezzar had plundered from the temple in Jerusalem. They were sacred vessels, which had been used only in the temple worship, and to put them to such a base use amounted to sacrilege. They further dishonoured God by drinking to their pagan gods.

Having painted a picture of noisy revelry, convey the sudden interruption of the proceedings by an eerie, frightening happening. Knowing they had been drinking, the Babylonians might have thought at first that they were imagining things, but they really did see the disembodied fingers of a man's hand, writing on the wall. The king was terrified and like Nebuchadnezzar before him, he consulted his 'wise' men. He did not understand the words but he knew, instinctively, that the message was ominous. He was frantic. When the initial shock had passed, everyone began talking at once, and the commotion reached the ears of the queen mother. She was able to remember when the 'wise' men had failed to solve a mystery and only Daniel, the prophet of God, had been able to reveal it.

Although it was the king who summoned Daniel, his servant, yet in the interview that followed it was Daniel who spoke with authority. Fearlessly, he reminded Belshazzar of Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation before the true God, in order that he might acknowledge God's supremacy. He denounced Belshazzar's blasphemy, wickedness and pride and pronounced the judgements of God against him and against his kingdom.

Having promised to reward any man who could interpret the writing, Belshazzar kept his word. The judgements of God against Babylon were carried out forthwith. That very night Belshazzar was killed at the hands of the invaders, and his kingdom passed into the hands of another world power, led by Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian.

Belshazzar had failed to learn what Nebuchadnezzar had finally realised - that God exerts his power over the affairs of men, and controls the tide of history. The era of the head of gold had now passed.

## RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES

Belshazzar thought that he could do as he liked and get away with it. Many people today have the same idea. They do just as they please, regardless of what they know to be right, even to the extent of offending God. Knowing that God wants us to belong to him, how should we behave? Is it wrong to enjoy ourselves?

## WORKSHEETS

The jigsaw reads: 'You did not honour the God who holds in his hands your life & all your ways'.

## PRAYER

Dear Lord God, we are glad that you are in control of the world. Please help us to see that, in pleasing you, we can find true happiness. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

"The Most High God rules the kingdom of men, and sets over it whom he will" (Daniel 5:21).

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## DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN

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### *Daniel 6*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To show how God continued to care for his faithful prophet.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

Study Psalms 95-97 as examples of a faithful man's praise of his Creator, and his acknowledgement of God's loving care.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

As can be seen from the chapter, the story appears to be greatly concerned with the feelings, thoughts and actions of king Darius. Because this is a short and very familiar story, it is suggested that you might put yourself in his place and relate the story in the first person, as if you were the king. First introduce the idea by telling the class that they must imagine you to be a king who has come all the way from Babylon to tell them from first hand experience about something very extraordinary that happened. The following is a suggestion of how to proceed: "My name is King Darius. With a mighty army I conquered the great empire of Babylon, took the throne from the corrupt Belshazzar, and at once set about establishing law and order. From the start, I kept hearing about a rather special man, whose name was Daniel. Perhaps you have heard of him? ..." Encourage the children to participate in this dialogue which, in itself is a form of revision. Having thus brought the story up to the current events, continue: "Now I should like to tell you about something else which happened in Daniel's life, with which I was personally concerned".

By using this ploy, Darius can be shown to be a sincere and honourable man, very different from his Babylonian predecessors. His various feelings can be demonstrated throughout the account - his initial admiration and appreciation of Daniel's worth and his pleasure at the flattering suggestion of the counsellors that he should be worshipped. Convey his self-disgust on realising that he had been manipulated by a conspiracy of jealous and envious men. He was distressed that he was unable to prevent Daniel's undeserved destruction. He spent a sleepless, anxious night, desperately hoping that Daniel's God would protect his servant yet again. As soon as it was light, the king went with great urgency to investigate the outcome. Repeat his anguished but expectant cry and describe his extreme relief and delight at finding Daniel unharmed.

The conclusion of the narrative might go something like this: "I considered it right that the men who had so cruelly plotted against a fine and innocent man should be punished. I, therefore, ordered that the ringleaders should receive the same punishment that they had devised for Daniel. It is certainly true that 'seeing is believing'. I had, of course, heard about Daniel's beliefs and that his God was all-powerful. Now, having seen it for myself, I know that this is true. Unlike the idols that I had worshipped, Daniel's God is the living God who really does control the whole world. I felt urged to write to all the people to tell them so, and it is the reason I am here today. I wanted you to know about this great prophet who, by his faith, showed that God alone is the one we should worship".

**RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN' LIVES**

When you hear a story like this, doesn't it make you want to worship God, too? We worship God when we meet together to praise him in our hymns and prayers. What should we be thinking about when we sing hymns? When somebody says a prayer for us in Sunday School, how can we make it our prayer?

**WORKSHEETS**

The solution to the grid is:

		<b>T</b>	W	E	N	T	Y
D	A	<b>R</b>	I	U	S		
J	E	<b>U</b>	S	A	L	E	M
P	E	<b>S</b>	I	A	N	S	
		<b>T</b>	H	I	R	T	Y
W		<b>I</b>	N	D	O	W	S
K		<b>N</b>	E	E	L	E	D
		<b>T</b>	H	R	E	E	
	T	<b>H</b>	R	O	W	N	
	D	<b>E</b>	C	R	E	E	
		<b>L</b>	I	O	N	S	
M		<b>O</b>	U	T	H	S	
H	U	<b>R</b>	T				
		<b>D</b>	E	N			

**PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, how great you are. How wonderful it is that you have always watched over your people, and now watch over us. We praise and worship you as our God. Amen.

**MEMORY VERSE**

"Fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring for ever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed" (Daniel 6:26).

***Esther 1 and 2*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how Esther, a humble Jewess, became Queen of Persia, and that those who seek the good of others are blessed.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Look into the historical background of the story, and the circumstances and privations of the captivity.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

During the course of this first lesson about Esther, it will be necessary to identify the characters in the account and provide a background. Some of the following points may be woven into the story.

Ahasuerus (486-465 BC) was ruler of a vast empire which extended from India to Ethiopia. He saw few of his subjects because, in the interests of security, the throne room was separated from the rest of the great hall by a curtain and only seven of his closest advisers were allowed to go beyond this curtain without invitation. All others, including his family, had to wait for a signal of approval. His rule was supreme, and he needed to consult no one in making decisions. He could honour whomsoever he chose and put to death any who offended him.

Mordecai, of the tribe of Benjamin, was one of many Jews in the city – a descendant of those who had been carried away to Babylon, and when given the chance by Cyrus to return to their homeland, had elected to stay. (The Persians treated conquered peoples with exceptional leniency and therefore the Jews were able to maintain their identity). Mordecai was employed at the palace, which explains why he was able to communicate with Esther, and knew what was going on at court.

Shushan was a bustling, cosmopolitan centre, a natural cross-roads for travellers from Asia Minor to India. The palace must have been very splendid with its marble pillars, gold and silver couches, mosaic pavements and silk curtains.

Introduce the lesson by talking about princesses, and about the difference between those born in the royal household and those elevated by marriage to the responsibilities of royalty. Use examples from the children's own knowledge. Lead into the story by stating that it is about an ordinary girl who became queen of a vast world empire. Introduce Esther as a Jewish orphan adopted by her cousin Mordecai. She was a beautiful and charming girl brought up in the Jewish tradition; her life far removed from the royal court.

Ahasuerus had been on the throne for three years when he held the magnificent banquet for his nobles and provincial governors at which he displayed the splendour of his possessions. Imagine the anger of the king when his command for the queen to appear was disobeyed, and the consternation among his guests. His pride was injured at being rebuffed in public, and he sought advice on how to deal with the offending queen. Note that the advice the counsellors gave affected not only Vashti, but the whole nation. With Vashti banished, another woman had to be found to take her place. Finding one girl from such a large empire took a lot of organizing. Even when the girls had been chosen from every province, there was a long period of preparation before they were presented to the king (it was four years before the new queen was proclaimed). Esther was among those selected. It is likely that not only her beauty but also her kind, God-fearing nature and sense of duty helped Esther win the favour of

Hegai, by whom she was given special privileges. But she must have found life in the court difficult because Mordecai had forbidden her to disclose her Jewish nationality.

Picture the excitement and apprehension among the girls when presented to the king, and the celebrations and rejoicing when Esther was chosen to be queen. The festivities following the coronation must have been magnificent and very costly.

Esther did not reveal her nationality or her relationship with Mordecai, but they were able to communicate with each other and, in spite of her elevated position, Esther was still guided by her cousin. Consequently she listened to his warning of a plot to kill the king and was able to help save his life. The conspirators were caught and hanged, and Mordecai's loyalty was recorded in the royal chronicle.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Mordecai cared about the king's safety and warned him of the danger he was in. How can we show our care for other people? What should we do if we see someone being bullied? What should we do if we know someone is doing something wrong, such as stealing, or damaging other people's property?

### **WORKSHEETS**

Esther becomes queen in place of Vashti:

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
V	A	S	H	T	I
V	S	S	H	T	I
V	S	T	H	T	I
V	S	T	H	E	I
E	S	T	H	E	I
E	S	T	H	E	R

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, thank you for caring for us each day. Help us to consider others, and to help them when we can. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found grace and favour in his sight" (Esther 2:17).



***Esther 3-8*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show that people who believe in God and who have the courage to stand up for what is right are helped by him, and that those full of pride and hatred are judged by him.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

As for previous lesson.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Start by questioning the children about the story so far, clarifying the characters in the previous lesson. Then go on to show that there was unrest at the court.

Ahasuerus had decided to promote Haman above all his other advisers. The seven counsellors were all highly privileged but Haman was granted a special honour: everyone in the court was commanded to bow when he passed. Maybe Mordecai believed this to be an act of worship, and so refused to obey; maybe he was just being obstinate. Haman might not have noticed Mordecai's action, but it was the other attendants at court who not only reported the matter but linked it with Mordecai's nationality. Note Haman's passionate and vicious reaction and his decision to destroy not only Mordecai but all of the Jews. He knew, however, that to obtain a royal decree for such an action, he needed the consent of all seven counsellors before it could be signed by the king, so he tricked and bribed Ahasuerus into giving him the authority.

Describe the terror and distress that the decree must have caused to all the Jews throughout the provinces and especially in Shushan: the weeping, wailing, fasting, and wearing of sackcloth and ashes. Convey the distress and concern of Esther when she heard the truth from her cousin and saw the writ, which had been brought back to her: she seemed to have won the loyalty of the servants. Her immediate reaction to Mordecai's plea for her to speak to the king was to send word that this was impossible. But when Mordecai's request was communicated to Esther a second time, she courageously decided to risk her life and commit herself to God's care, as her people gave themselves to fasting.

The dramatic events that followed should stimulate the children's imagination. Describe the tense moments as Esther approached the king, the waiting game, and the two sumptuous banquets; Haman's boasting to his friends and family about his invitation, tempered by his extreme hatred and rage against Mordecai which led him to seek his life; the providential reading of the chronicles and the reciting of Mordecai's loyal act; Haman's arrogance in anticipating his aggrandisement and the bitter shock and humiliation in having to confer the suggested honours upon the man he considered his enemy. The second banquet was the setting for the exposure of villainy and for the revelation of the true feelings and intents of all three participants. The king's anger, which Esther had feared, was justly turned on Haman, who was hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.

The planned massacre of the Jews, however, was not averted because once an edict bore the king's seal even the king himself could not countermand it. But with Mordecai now the chief minister, the Jews were empowered to defend themselves in whatever way they could. Draw together the

sequence of events that led to their triumph over persecution and show how God had put the right people in the right place, at the right time.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

What sort of man was Haman? Why did he hate Mordecai? Was Haman a happy man? Why not? What often happens to people who show off and are boastful?

### **WORKSHEETS**

The sentence reads 'Queen Esther pleased the king, and asked him to save Mordecai and the Jews from Haman. Haman was then hanged on his own gallows outside the palace'.

The solution to the code is 'I will bless them that bless you and curse him that curses you'.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, forgive us for the times when we have been boastful. Help us not to think too much of ourselves. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18).

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## **THE BIRTH OF JESUS**

**77**

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***Luke 1:26-38 and 2:1-38; Matthew 1:18-25***

### **AIM OF LESSON**

To learn of the unique birth of Jesus, God's only son.

### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Exodus 13:2; Leviticus 12:6-8; 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Isaiah 7:14-16; 9:6-7; Micah 5:2.

### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

The details of Jesus' birth will be well known to most children. In the narration of the lesson allow each child to tell part of the story, gradually building up the full account and supplying missing information where necessary. In this way the children will learn from each other, errors will be brought to light, which can be corrected, and you will be able to stress aspects of the story which need emphasis.

It is important not to embroider the scriptural account beyond what is necessary to convey its reality. The birth of Jesus is often romanticised to the extent that the poverty of his origin and the bare simplicity of his birth is lost.

Ask the children how they think the story of Jesus began. The perfect answer would be with the prophecy of his birth. However, the most likely answer will be that an angel visited Mary. Show that

Mary must have been a very special person to have been chosen by God to be the mother of his son, although she considered herself to be just an ordinary girl. Imagine, then, her fear and amazement at the sudden appearance of God's angel, Gabriel, in her humble home in Nazareth. The dialogue between the two lends itself to dramatisation, thus giving emphasis to Gabriel's words. Be sure the children understand that God was at work here. Mary's inspired and joyful words, when she began to understand the implications of the angel's message, show the wisdom of God's choice.

Introduce Joseph at this point and clarify the relationship between Mary and Joseph. It was similar to the engagement of a young couple today, though their promise to each other in those days would be considered more binding than in our society. Joseph was shocked when he learned that Mary was to have a child before they were married. Thinking that Mary had done wrong, Joseph decided that he couldn't marry her. Then Joseph himself had a message from the angel of the Lord, and he remembered the words of Isaiah, the prophet. Now that Joseph understood that God had caused Mary to conceive, he was at first relieved and then overjoyed. Now he felt honoured that Mary, whom he loved so much, was to be his wife. It would be a privilege to care for her and God's son.

While describing the distance and nature of the journey to Bethlehem brief reference to a map will be helpful, particularly if you can relate this to the children's own experience, e.g. a holiday journey, or visit to relatives in a remote area. Stress, however, that Joseph and Mary's journey was covered on foot, over very rough roads. Explain again how prophecy was being fulfilled (Micah 5:2). It is sad that there was no one to welcome the weary travellers on their arrival in Bethlehem. Tradition has it that they were unable to find anywhere to stay in Bethlehem, and pictures are painted of the couple wandering the streets trying to find lodging. Luke 2:6 however - 'while they were there' - suggests that they were staying in the inn until the birth of Jesus, and since there was nowhere in the public inn for Mary to give birth, Jesus was born outside, where the animals' feeding trough was. In passing, there is no mention in scripture of a stable, though no doubt Mary and Joseph would have sought what privacy they could find. Though well known, the details of Jesus' birth are so different from the circumstances in which babies are born in our country today that a little time should be taken to recreate the scene and to contrast it with modern clinical conditions. There is also the marked contrast between the simple occasion of the birth of this prince and the preparation usually associated with the birth of a royal child.

Ask the children who were the first people to hear the news of the birth. We would expect the great news of the birth of the Messiah to be widely proclaimed and to be known to the leaders of Israel, perhaps even to Herod himself. However, an insignificant group of shepherds on a dark hillside outside Bethlehem were the ones God chose to receive the news. They received special guidance and encouragement to find Jesus, and became the first witnesses (preachers) as they "made known" what the angels had revealed to them about Jesus.

Up to this point, the children will have been able to contribute to the narrative but in describing the incident in the temple, you will possibly be telling the children something new. It is a delightful incident, with several important lessons. When Jesus was six weeks old the family travelled a few more miles to Jerusalem in order to obey God's law - that of presenting a sacrifice at the temple after the birth of a firstborn son. This was a significant day in the life of the family and was further enhanced by their meeting with Simeon, and his blessing of them. Describe this very old and faithful man, his joy at seeing prophecy fulfilled, and his own solemn prophetic words. These words were taken up by Anna, the prophetess who, in turn, spread the news amongst the devout worshippers.

Gradually Mary and Joseph were becoming aware of the magnitude of their responsibilities and of their involvement in the working out of God's plan for the world.

## RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES

We think about this story at a particular time of year. Do people celebrate this anniversary in the right way? Instead of remembering the unique birth of Jesus, what sort of things are people busy doing? God intervened in the natural course of events in order to perform the miracle of sending his only son into the world. Isn't this event so important that we should remember it all the year round?

## WORKSHEETS

These should be self-explanatory.

## PRAYER

Dear Lord God, thank you for sending you own dear son, Jesus, and for the story of his miraculous birth. Help us always to keep Jesus in our minds. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

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## WISE MEN VISIT JESUS

78

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### *Matthew 2:1-18*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To show the faith of the wise men, who travelled far to see Jesus, and to show how God protected his son from wicked men.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

Isaiah 7:14 and Micah 5:2.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

We do not know for certain how old Jesus was when these events took place, though it is evident from Matthew 2:16 that two years had elapsed since the wise men first saw the star. Another indication may be that Jesus is described several times in verses 9-14 as a child rather than a baby.

Introduce this story by describing the scene at King Herod's palace in Jerusalem as he received the foreign visitors from an eastern country. (Tradition would have us believe that there were three wise men, probably because they brought three gifts. However, the children will be interested to learn that, in fact, the number three is never mentioned in the text so we should not assume there were three.) Emphasize the riches and splendour of this scene in contrast with the simplicity of Jesus' human origin. It would not be unusual for Herod to receive ambassadors who came to pay homage to him. Imagine the shock he received when they enquired where they could find the new king of the Jews.

It is interesting to speculate where the wise men came from and why they came. We can only guess that they may have come from an area east of Palestine where the people of God had lived some time in the past, such as Babylon. The wise men may have made the journey in response to a direct message from God, or their information about the new-born king may have been gained from writings. When the people of Israel had been captives in Babylon they had received some vitally important prophecies from Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah and others. The wise men may have had access to some of these and, if so, they could have learned a great deal about the promised Messiah. Whatever their source of information, it is clear that God was guiding them. Before they left home they had seen a star that was unusual in its brightness and/or its appearance. Interpreting the sight to mean that the King of the Jews had been born, they were drawn to visit the land of the Saviour's birth. The account does not tell us at this point that the star guided them, though it may have done.

The wise men probably thought that the birth of the Prince would already be the talk of Jerusalem. Imagine their surprise when they found that they were the ones who had brought the amazing news. Point out that Herod was a notoriously wicked and cruel man. He was filled with fear, jealousy and panic when he heard the reason for the wise men's visit. The source of their information must have been such that Herod was convinced of its validity and accuracy. He felt his position threatened and was determined to protect it at all costs. He gathered together the chief priests and scribes, who were able to quote the scriptures which foretold that Bethlehem was the place where Messiah was to be born.

Think how Herod must have flattered the wise men and charmed them into thinking that he, too, wanted to worship the baby king, while already he was concerned with plotting his death.

Eagerly the wise men set out for Bethlehem, which is about five miles from Jerusalem, and the special star went before them. If they had known the earlier scriptures they would have known that this town was already famous, for it was here that the great king David had been born. Some time had elapsed since Jesus' birth had been heralded by angels and wondered at by shepherds. Most of the visitors who had thronged the streets of Bethlehem for the census had already departed to their homes and there was now plenty of room for Mary, Joseph and Jesus in a house. There would be no small stir as these illustrious travellers approached the small town. With great joy, after their long and tiring journey, the wise men knelt before the young king, worshipping him, and presenting their gifts.

True to their word, the wise men had intended to return to the palace in Jerusalem to take Herod the glad news of the birth of Israel's king but God, knowing Herod's jealous heart and wicked intent, guided them again and directed them home by another route. Further intervention by God was necessary when Herod's frustration impelled him to order the killing of all boys in Bethlehem under two years of age. Hurriedly Joseph acted upon God's instructions and the little family fled from the cruel soldiers, under cover of darkness, into a foreign land, there to wait in faith until God told them to return.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

We see from this story how the wise men went to a great deal of trouble in their search for Jesus. They had carefully studied the scriptures, undertaken a long journey and were ready and eager to worship him when he was born. Develop the counterpart of this idea with reference to ourselves and the second coming of Jesus. Explain how the reading of the Bible will lead us to expect Jesus and make us determined to be ready to meet him when he comes. The theme can be extended to include the gifts that we can offer. (See the words of the hymn "The wise may bring their learning", Number 112 in 'Sing to the Lord')

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, please give us the desire to read about Jesus and make us determined to see him and welcome him when he comes. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

“When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy” (Matthew 2:10).

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## **THE BOYHOOD OF JESUS**

**79**

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### ***Matthew 2:19-23; Luke 2:39-52***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show how Jesus grew up like any other boy and how he learned obedience, not only to his earthly mother and father, but also to his heavenly Father.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Exodus 12:1-28; 13:3-10; Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Look into the history of the period, and the home life in a village in Palestine.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Very little is recorded in the Bible about the childhood of Jesus. It is clear however that their neighbours did not distinguish him from the children who were afterwards born to Joseph and Mary, so we can assume that Jesus must have been brought up in the same way as his brothers and sisters and the other children in the village. Also, since he is later referred to as ‘the carpenter’ (Mark 6:3) we know that he was brought up to follow Joseph’s trade. Although he was God’s son, there was to be no special treatment for him. No doubt this was how God wanted it to be; if Jesus learned the hardships of village life and the discipline of school, he would learn to understand his fellow men and gain wisdom for teaching them later in life.

Give the children some examples of the kind of things Jesus would have done as a child, such as going to the well, playing games with other children, hearing Bible stories from Mary, sharing in the Jewish feasts, attending school in the synagogue (where he would learn by heart the laws and commandments of God), helping Joseph in his workshop and learning the trade of carpentry. Reference can be made to everyday customs which Jesus observed, and to which he later referred in his teaching, e.g. the patching of old clothes with old material, the positioning of an oil lamp to give the maximum light in a room, the spoiling of clothes by moths and dust, the use of salt to season food, the payment of taxes, and many others.

One incident in the boyhood of Jesus is described in detail - the visit to Jerusalem for the passover when he was twelve years old. Explain the importance of this feast to the Jews, together with the part Jesus would have played in its observance each year. Whenever possible, Mary and Joseph would go to Jerusalem for the feast, thus demonstrating to their children how much it meant to them. Describe the bustle and excitement in Nazareth as preparations for the journey were made. Clothes

had to be packed, food prepared, water-skins filled, and camels and donkeys fed and watered. All the people from the village who were able to make the journey would travel together for safety and companionship. The children will appreciate the pleasure of anticipation before a journey, and will be able to imagine the excitement of the village children as they helped make ready.

Refer to a map in order to show the children the distance to be travelled and the kind of country they would pass through to get from Nazareth to Jerusalem. It may help to explain why they travelled in a large group, for the journey would take almost a week along rough roads and through barren country where robbers lurked and wild animals wandered. The travellers felt safe, and the days would have passed quickly as they chatted and maybe sang together.

Try to imagine the feelings of Mary and Joseph as they journeyed with their special son. They would recall the time when they had taken him to the temple as a baby, and had heard exciting and disturbing things said about him. Ask the children to try and imagine the effect upon the twelve year-old boy of his first sight of the capital city, Jerusalem. Describe its narrow streets teeming with people, and especially busy at this time of year. What a difference from quiet Nazareth. Describe the beautiful temple with its vast columns and ornate detail, and its series of courts; the money-changers and sellers of animals and birds for sacrifice, and the quiet places where the learned men of Israel sat and talked to one another about the scriptures. It is easy to see how Jesus, who loved God so much, would want to be with these men and talk with them about his Father. Imagine the joy of the family sharing the passover meal together and joining with fellow worshippers in the prolonged celebrations. After a week of busy and exciting events, the time came for the long journey home.

The company from Nazareth reassembled, eager to talk over everything they had seen and heard, and the journey began. It was easy for Mary and Joseph to think Jesus was with friends. He was such a good and thoughtful child that he had never given them cause for worry. It did not, therefore, occur to Joseph and Mary that Jesus had not joined the party at the appointed time. What a shock when, after travelling all day, Jesus did not appear. Imagine their growing concern as they searched and asked their friends if they had seen Jesus, and their self-reproach because they had not looked for him earlier in the day.

Anxiously they made their way back to Jerusalem in search of him and, to their relief, found him there in the temple. Jesus was so involved in speaking to and learning from the teachers, and amazing them with his questions and answers that he had lost track of time and was unaware of the worry he had caused. Mary and Joseph reproached him. The children will probably have experienced their parents' sharpness when finding them after they have been lost, and maybe understand that it is caused by relief rather than anger. Although Mary and Joseph had known from the start that Jesus was God's son, they were astounded by his calm and direct answer and his manifestation of maturity and single-mindedness. The incident was evidently a turning point in his life; it shows that he had learned that God was his father and that his real home was with him, not in Nazareth. Yet, we are told, he went back to Nazareth and obeyed his parents in all things, growing wiser and more prepared for the work that was to come in his Father's good time.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Jesus showed that from an early age he had a deep love of God. He was keen to learn as much as he could about his Father. We can follow his example and, however young we are, try to please God. Try to think of things that Jesus would have done as a young boy, that we could do also.

## **WORKSHEETS**

The solution to the code is 'Jesus grew in wisdom and in favour with God and men'. In 'Now Something Harder' the texts are taken from the NIV, but should be easily completed from other versions.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, thank you for the Lord Jesus, who was good and obedient even when very young. Help us to be like him. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49).

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## **JOHN THE BAPTIST**

**80**

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### ***Luke 1:5-23 and 57-66; 3:1-18***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show the character and work of the man chosen by God to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Isaiah 40:1-11; Malachi 4:5-6; Matthew 3:1-4; Luke 1:39-56; John 3:22-30. Study the work of the priests in the temple. Find pictures of the Judaeen wilderness and the Jordan valley.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

This story could well begin with the introduction of visual aids. Show the children pictures or models of a Levitical priest and Herod's temple, with its magnificent courtyards, the golden decorations and furniture of the holy place and the exquisite curtain which screened the most holy place. Help the children to imagine the subdued lighting from the candlestick and the reverent atmosphere as Zechariah went about his holy duties at the hour of incense.

Having introduced the priest by name, go on to explain that he was very old, that he was married to Elizabeth who was also devout and that, to their disappointment and in spite of having prayed for children, they had no child. Zechariah now devoted himself wholeheartedly to the Lord's service. Convey the sudden fear felt by the old man when he realised that an angel had appeared before him - something he had no doubt never before experienced and which, therefore, would have greatly disturbed him. He knew that angels brought messages from God and he wondered what the message could be. The angel was quick to reassure him and went on to tell him the one thing he most wanted to hear. Read the exact words Gabriel spoke. At this point, the children will no doubt recall that Gabriel was the angel who visited Mary. Explain that, in fact, the appearance to Zechariah preceded the appearance at Nazareth and that Elizabeth was related to Mary.



Zechariah was incredulous and questioned the message of the angel, who then added to his prophecy that the priest would be struck dumb until the boy was born. Describe the scene as the priest emerged from the holy place, by which time the people were puzzled by his delay. Although he was unable to say what had happened, it was obvious to all that something extraordinary had occurred. The children will be able to imagine something of the problems and frustrations felt by Zechariah as he endeavoured to explain first to the congregation, and later to his wife, about the angelic visitation.

Somehow Elizabeth was made to understand that she was to give birth to a son, John, who was destined to fulfil a very special role in God's plan. Refer briefly to the happy visit of Mary, and the joy both women shared in the knowledge that God had chosen and honoured them.

The account of John's birth and his presentation at the temple eight days later, in accordance with the law, is a moving one. In witnessing to the message he had received from Gabriel many months before, Zechariah proved his faith by confirming in writing (he was evidently deaf as well as dumb, so that the family had to make signs to him) that his son's name was to be John. The restoration of his faculties was a sign to all that the hand of God was at work in this family.

No doubt the growing boy was greatly loved and carefully instructed in God's ways. From the start John led a pure and simple life (comparable to that of a Nazirite) with strict rules and self discipline. He was preparing himself for his God-given task, and spent much of his time alone in remote places. Describe John in your own words, in order to convey his zeal and enthusiasm, the plainness of his clothing and the simplicity of his way of life. Conjure up a picture of the uniqueness of this man, who drew people to him with his message of hope and warning. He was single-minded, sincere and direct, and spoke with the authority of God, for he had been filled with the Holy Spirit from his birth. John stirred the hearts of his hearers, many of whom responded to his call for repentance, and were baptized. Yet he made it very clear that he was not the promised Messiah, but that his work was to prepare the way for the imminent appearance of the Son of God. When Jesus did begin his ministry, John knew that his own work was accomplished, and he directed those who would have stayed with him to follow the Lord Jesus.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

What did John the Baptist say was about to happen? Was he glad to be able to give the people this news? Did it make them glad?

What does the Bible tell us is shortly going to happen? Does this make us glad? How can we share what we know with other people, and make them glad?

### **WORKSHEETS**

The jumbled words (top to bottom, left to right) are: VOICE, VALLEY, CROOKED, FLESH, WAY, DESERT, MOUNTAIN, ROUGH, STRAIGHT, SALVATION, MANKIND, PREPARE, HILL, LORD, WILDERNESS, PATHS, SMOOTH.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we know that one day soon Jesus will be here. Please help us to tell our friends about this, and help us also to be ready to welcome him. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"I baptise you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie" (Luke 3:16).

***Matthew 3:13-17*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how Jesus declared his complete commitment to his Father's will, and demonstrated the importance of baptism.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Matthew 3:1-12. Where this lesson does not follow the "John the Baptist" lesson in the syllabus, see also the notes on the latter.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

The introduction of this lesson depends upon whether the "John the Baptist" lesson has preceded it; if not, a brief outline of John's work and mission must be given. He was a unique character who caused quite a stir among the people. Many, out of idle curiosity, went to see and to mock him, thinking he was just a poor simple man, but instead they found a man with a burning zeal and with a strong message - "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand". Repentance is a word that needs an explanation. The great mission of John was to declare the coming of the Messiah, and to motivate people to feel sorry about their sins so that they might turn from their old ways to a new and more godly way of life. John understood his role to be that of a herald, who would prepare the ground (people's minds) for Jesus' own ministry. A large number of people, who recognised their need of forgiveness for all kinds of wrongdoing, went to John to be baptised.

Into this scene stepped one who had never done wrong, the one for whom John and many others had longed. Jesus had grown to manhood, laid down his carpenter's tools, and had come to hear the preacher whose fame had spread through Judaea. Instead of asserting his authority as the Son of God, Jesus simply joined the group who were confessing their sins and asked to be baptised. Throughout his life Jesus had served God. At the age of twelve he had declared his loyalty and dedication to his "father's business", but now at the age of thirty he was ready to undertake the special work that God had planned for him. In humble obedience, he identified himself not only with the nation of Israel but with each individual sinner.

John, upon recognising his cousin whom he knew to be the future saviour of the world, was reluctant to baptise him, since only sinners needed to be baptised. John felt unworthy to perform such an act for Jesus whom he knew to be far greater than he, and the only man who was sinless. The children will readily understand John's feelings in this situation, but the conversation between the two will need to be put in a modern idiom, in order to show Jesus' determination to do everything that was right. His obedience was an example for all to follow.

Make sure that the children appreciate that baptism means total immersion. The occasion could be used to show the children a baptismal bath, and to explain the procedure.

Show how God distinguished, by two clear signs, the baptism of Jesus from that of the other baptisms conducted by John. Firstly there was a visual sign: the descent of a dove, representing the investing of Jesus with heavenly authority and power. Secondly there were divine words of approval and power, declaring Jesus as the Son of God, the recipient of his love and pleasure. It is important to think of the effect of these signs first on Jesus himself - it was from that moment on that Jesus began to preach

and perform miracles. The baptism of Jesus marked a turning point in John's life also. He realised that his mission was accomplished, and that the people must no longer follow him, but be directed to follow Jesus. In addition, the people who witnessed this remarkable incident had to decide how they would respond to the presence of the Son of God amongst them.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Jesus was determined to do everything to please God, because he loved his Father so much. You see, loving our parents does not only mean being nice to them and saying "I love you"; it also means doing what they ask us to do and obeying them. What sort of things must we do in order to obey our parents?

### **WORKSHEETS**

Year 1: God said 'This is my son, whom I love; I am very pleased with him'.

Year 3: These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, just as Jesus loved and obeyed you, please help us to be loving and obedient. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"And lo, a voice from heaven, saying, 'This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased...'" (Matthew 3:17).

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## **THE TEMPTATIONS OF JESUS**

**82**

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### ***Matthew 4:1-11***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show how Jesus overcame temptation through his faith in God and his knowledge of scripture.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Deuteronomy 6:13 and 16; 8:1-3; Psalm 91:11-12; Luke 4:1-13; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 2:18; 4:15-16; James 1:12-15.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Ask the children what they think temptation means. Explain the idea that thoughts which suggest wrong actions come into one's mind from time to time. Discuss examples which are common to the children's own experiences, such as the temptation to deny the responsibility for accidents, to take things belonging to other people, to disobey parents' instructions in order to go along with friends, etc. The children will realise that temptation comes from within and presents a personal challenge to everybody. Point out that such temptations have their roots in self-interest. This preliminary discussion will pave

the way towards a realistic approach to the experience of Jesus and help to obviate any misunderstanding about an outside tempter.

Explain that Jesus was about to embark upon his great work of teaching people, having just been baptised and endowed with special power from God. As so often happened in his life, he felt compelled to withdraw from other people in order to give his whole attention to praying to God and preparing himself for the hard years that were ahead. Explain to the children the physical nature of the wilderness - a dry, barren, rocky area where no one lived and very little grew. It would be hot in the day and cold at night; a very uncomfortable place and devoid of anything to eat. To fast was not an uncommon practice as an aid to meditation and spiritual awareness, and this should be explained to the children. This was Jesus' intention as he concentrated his whole being, without distraction, on the purpose that God his Father had sent him to fulfil. Try to impress upon the children that to spend six weeks in complete solitude, in a wild place and without food, must have been a tremendous ordeal.

Jesus must have been very hungry and physically weak at the end of this period, and it was at this point that he experienced temptation. He was keenly aware of the power he had from God. He knew that, if he wished, he could make stones turn into bread and that bread would satisfy his hunger. He also knew that God's power had not been given to him for selfish reasons but was to be used in his work for God. His love for God was stronger than his love of self, so he dismissed selfish desires and sought strength to obey his Father. The words of scripture sprang immediately to his mind and the matter was instantly resolved.

Having made use of his knowledge of scripture to conquer the first temptation, a second temptation presented itself to Jesus, and this was actually taken from scripture. His knowledge of scripture assured him that God's angels could be called upon to keep him from harm. In his mind, he imagined a situation in which he would be able to perform a spectacular proof that he was God's son, with power, and so enable him to attract the crowds to hear his message. Again Jesus recognised the human element of self-gratification, but he knew that God had not commanded him to do this. Had he succumbed, the act would have been one of self-will, not God's will. To cast himself needlessly into danger, and then to trust in God to rescue him, would have been to tempt, i.e. dare to test, God. But once again the deeply instilled commands of God were drawn upon to overcome his human reasoning.

The third temptation was less subtle and more searching than the preceding one, and constituted a battle of wills. The decision of Jesus at that moment was critical to the salvation of the world. Jesus wrestled with the opposing forces of his own human desire for immediate power and recognition, and humble submission to the will of his Father. He knew that he was destined to be king over the earth, but he recognised that the honour could only be granted by God as the culmination of a great plan, which first necessitated his coming to the world as a servant and as a pattern to show men how to worship and obey the Lord God.

Having brought the powerful word of God to his aid once again, the voice of temptation was silenced, and Jesus received the comfort and knowledge of the presence of angels to strengthen him. In order to prepare the children for their own Bible reading, it will be necessary to explain that the voice of temptation is personified and termed "the devil" in the scripture passage.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

It is easier to give in to temptation than to fight it, because we all like to please ourselves. But is what we want what is really best for us? Have you ever wanted very much to do something wrong, but managed not to give in to that temptation? What made you do what was right? (This discussion will need sensitive handling in order to allow for freedom of expression without undermining any child's security.)

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, please help us to know what is right and what is wrong. When we are tempted, help us to remember Jesus and his trials, and make us strong to do what will please you. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4).

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## **JESUS CHOOSES HIS DISCIPLES**

**83**

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***Mark 1:14-39; 2:13-17; 3:13-19***

### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show the meaning of discipleship, and how Jesus chose all kinds of people to be his disciples.

### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

John 1:35-51; 15:14-17.

### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

You may like to begin this lesson by asking the children what a disciple is. A dictionary definition is: "a follower, one who takes another as teacher and model". The children may be familiar with the word discipline. Show how this word is linked, and that discipleship is more than mere friendship. It is a commitment, requiring devotion, obedience and service. Then ask the question: "What type of men do you think Jesus would choose for disciples?" Would he choose only the cleverest men, those highly educated who would quickly understand his message? Would he choose only the richest people who would make his mission easier in material terms? Would he choose men who were important and well-known, so that they would be in a position to influence others? The answer is simply no. The men Jesus chose came from all walks of life. They ranged from hard-working fishermen to an unpopular tax-collector.

Briefly remind the children about John the Baptist. John had seen Jesus again (after the temptation) and he had turned to two of his own disciples and said, "Behold the Lamb of God". These two men, one of whom was Andrew, were interested in what John the Baptist had said, and they followed Jesus. When they heard what Jesus had to say, they were sure he was the Messiah, and the Son of God. Andrew went to tell his brother, Peter, the important news, and then brought him to Jesus. The young men talked over what Jesus had told them. If they decided to follow Jesus, there was to be much hard work ahead; they must think over seriously what he had said.

Recall the experiences of Jesus in being tempted to use God's power in the wrong way and how he overcame this temptation. With firm resolve he began the work which God, his Father, had set him to do. Explain that, in order to spread the message of God's kingdom, he needed the support of close associates whom he could instruct fully and to whom he could entrust the work when his ministry came to an end. Indicate on a map the Galilean area where Jesus began his preaching. Point out that Simon, his brother and his cousins, having already responded to John's preaching, had returned to their homes in Galilee, where they earned their living by fishing. How many hours during the long nights working on the lake had they talked about their meeting with the man whom John had said was the long-expected Messiah of Israel?

Describe their reactions when, one morning as they returned to shore, they saw and heard Jesus and answered his call to become fishers of men. They were ready and eager to follow this special man, whom they recognised to be the Son of God. This was more important to them now than their fishing. Just as they had had to learn the work of sailing and fishing, so now they needed to learn how to bring men to understand the kingdom of God, about which Jesus taught. Jesus took great pains to teach them, not only with words but by example.

Relate the incident of the healing in the synagogue. The congregation was already stirred by the powerful way in which Jesus had taught them, and the curing of the demented young man, no doubt a person familiar to them all, would have caused a sensation. News of the miraculous happening spread quickly through the region.

The healing of Simon's mother-in-law is worthy of note, and no doubt the four disciples were moved by Jesus' compassion for her, and for the many sick who were brought to him. Now, more than ever before, they were sure that Jesus was God's son, because only with God's power could such miracles be performed. Mention also the example that Jesus set them of the need to pray, an example that they were to witness frequently throughout their time with him.

In describing the call of Levi, explain how much the people of Israel disliked tax-collectors. The religious leaders, in particular, looked down on them and criticised Jesus for associating with them. They could not imagine God having any concern for people who were hated as traitors and despised because of their not uncommon dishonesty. Jesus, on the other hand, was not impressed by outward appearances, but held out the love of God to all who were sincerely seeking it. His words (Mark 2:17) pointedly expressed this idea to his critics. Explain that Levi's other name was Matthew, and that he is thought to be the author of the first gospel.

Having described how Jesus called specific disciples, explain that he chose others in a similar way, until he had selected twelve. (The children might be able to recall another group of twelve men, in the Old Testament). These twelve were from different walks of life, and were specially chosen to be Jesus' closest friends, although many others also became close followers. The list of these twelve would provide opportunity for class work. The children may care to write out their own list of names and then endeavour to memorise them.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Jesus is alive today. The work of preaching still goes on and new disciples are still being called. How do we hear the call of Jesus? How do we know what we must do if we wish to follow him? Some of the first disciples wrote down what they saw and heard so that we can read and learn what they learned.

## **WORKSHEETS**

The letters in number order read 'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men'.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, thank you for the faith of Jesus' disciples. Help us to follow Jesus and to love him all we can. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

"Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men'" (Mark 1:17).

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## **JESUS TEACHES HIS DISCIPLES**

**84**

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### ***Matthew 5:1-16 and 38-48; 6.***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show the children how followers of Jesus should behave in order to please God and be blessed by him.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Exodus 20:1-17; Matthew 4:23-25; Philippians 4:8-9; Hebrews 12:11.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Because of the great things that Jesus had done, "healing every disease and every infirmity among the people", he became famous throughout the country, and a great multitude of people followed him from many districts. These people had heard of his works in Galilee and they wanted to see and hear him for themselves. On one occasion Jesus withdrew from the crowd and went up into a mountain because he wanted to speak to his disciples (and to others who would listen) about how people should behave in order to please God and feel happy within themselves.

Jesus spoke of many things; there were some stern warnings of what his followers would have to face, rules of conduct, caution, compassion, encouragement and hope. Matthew 5:3-12 constitutes a lesson in happiness (blessed = happy). These verses are not easy for children to understand. It will be necessary for you to study them and have the meaning clear in your own mind in order to explain the blessings that come from a wholehearted following of Jesus - blessings now and blessedness in the future. Happiness will come to those who, poor-spirited in the world's estimation, have ceased to strive for wealth and influence and have concerned themselves wholly and humbly with God's way, for in the end they will inherit far greater than the world could ever offer. Those who mourn because of sin in themselves and in the world, and devote themselves to the pursuit of righteousness, will live to rejoice and will receive all their desire. Those who exhibit the godly qualities of mercy, purity and peace will be received with mercy by the Lord God in the kingdom of peace. Those who, because they follow the example of Jesus, are made to suffer by ungodly people will, when the wicked have been overthrown, be given the victory in the kingdom. Indeed, they can feel happy even while they suffer because the promise is firm and the future blessing assured. It is not an easy path to tread and courage is needed; but there will be happiness for those who keep on trying to follow Jesus' example, and they will make others happy, too.

Matthew 5:13-16 provides a vivid lesson of example. Explain to the children that it is no good just saying that we believe in Jesus and going to Sunday School if, for the rest of the week, we are selfish and unhelpful or unkind to others. Help them to see that by losing our temper, being rude, or by not doing the things we are asked to do, we are letting Jesus down because we are not doing as he has asked. At this point, the significance of verse 15 can be demonstrated by lighting a candle and showing how it will soon go out if placed under a pot or jar. If we are to be lit with the love of Jesus, we must let it show all the time. A number of hymns and choruses will spring to mind on this theme, and the idea of being a shining example is a concept easily understood by children. Read verse 16 to the children, and ask them to try and remember that whatever they do, to do it as if for God, so that he may be praised.

Ask the children if they have a special friend, then ask if there is someone they don't like very much, someone they never speak to or play with. Explain to them that we are all in the same situation; we do not have a natural liking for everybody. It is very easy to be kind and happy with people we like, but Jesus tells us that we must love everyone, which is not at all easy. Explain that Jesus goes even further than this (5:38-39) by showing the ideal way to behave towards those who hurt or bully. The natural response would be to retaliate rather than submit, and children especially would think that was fair. Ask them whether getting one's own back ever resolves the matter or improves the situation. Jesus teaches that to hurt others is wrong, and that to retaliate when we are hurt makes us as bad as the bully. Discuss with the children that this is a problem faced by children and adults, all of whom need courage to try to live up to the standard that Jesus set, not only in his teaching but by example. Show how, if we make a real effort to be kind to our "enemies" (and pray for them), we may find we could love them after all. That would make us and them happy and, more importantly, it would please Jesus.

Jesus taught that his followers should be kind and generous to those who need help, but that kindness should be shown for the right reasons; these are sympathy and genuine care for others. Those who make a show of giving, in order to impress others, do not impress God, and are giving for the wrong reason. The kind of people we are is seen not only in what we do, but in how we do it.

The same is true of prayer. God is not impressed by clever words that are not sincere. Tell the children that in giving his disciples the Lord's prayer Jesus was, in fact, teaching them what sort of things they should pray about. It would be interesting to hear what the children understand by the words of this prayer, which they may already know, and to correct any misapprehensions.

People tend from a very early age to equate possessions with happiness, and many children's stories foster this idea. The teaching in Matthew 6:19-21 is that riches can be of a different kind, and one needs to choose which treasures to seek. Those who spend all their time and energy accumulating material wealth have no time and consequently no desire to attend to the much more important work of becoming rich in wisdom and goodness. The following few verses demonstrate that a choice has to be made between serving God and satisfying one's own material desires. It is not possible to do both.

Matthew 6:25-34 is an ideal passage for reading in class prior to a discussion on its meaning. We should trust in God and not worry, for God knows our needs. The lesson ends on a very encouraging note, that those who look to the things of God will be looked after by him.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Jesus taught us to be kind to everyone, not just to our friends. It might be a good idea this week to make a special effort to try to do as Jesus says, and be especially kind to someone whom we don't like very much. Can you think of ways in which you could do this?



## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, thank you for the teachings of Jesus. Help us to be kind and loving to one another, just as he was. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

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## **THE WEDDING AT CANA**

**85**

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### ***John 2:1-11***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show that Jesus used the power God gave him, for the benefit of others.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Study Jewish wedding customs. Matthew 4:2-4.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Using a wedding photograph as a visual aid, introduce the subject of wedding receptions. Ask the children to talk about weddings they have attended.

On a map, show the proximity of Nazareth to Cana, and remind the children that this was the district in which Jesus had grown up. Elaborate on the wedding celebrations, the large number of guests, and the length of time the feast would last. Apparently this was no ordinary wedding since there were servants and a chief steward.

The celebrations had been going on for some time when the wine ran out. Ask the children to imagine the embarrassment resulting from a miscalculation of the amount of wine required. (Compare the situation to running out of food or drink at a party, when all the shops are shut). Possibly Mary was involved in the catering since she soon became aware of the situation. She was always conscious that Jesus was the Son of God, and knew that he could solve the problem if he wished to do so. She also knew that at this time his ministry had begun. With this knowledge Mary could say: “Do whatever he tells you”, and the servants obeyed his instructions to fill up the water-jars that were used for the ritual washing of hands and utensils. These jars were so big that, when full, each would hold between twenty and thirty gallons - 150 gallons (nearly 700 litres) of wine! Furthermore, the wine was of superior quality. Point out how much effort and time is needed before good wine is ready for drinking. The vine must be planted in good soil, and fed and watered. It must absorb the warmth of the sun to ripen the fruit. The grapes must be gathered at the right time and pressed. The juice must be stored

and left to ferment and mature. The power that Jesus used was from God, who is the Creator of the sun, the soil and the vine. The miracle, therefore, was a wonderful extension of God's creative power. Apparently only Mary, the servants and Jesus' disciples were aware of what had taken place. By performing the miracle as unobtrusively as possible, the happiness of the bride and groom and their guests was not affected. The action of Jesus had prevented the happy occasion from being spoiled, and the confidence of the disciples in their master was reinforced by this demonstration of power.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

To be a Christian we do not need to be always serious. We can enjoy ourselves at a party as Jesus did, provided we behave in a way that would please God. Think of ways in which we should *not* behave at parties, or when playing games.

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank you and praise you for the enjoyment we can have from eating, playing, singing and dancing. Please help us always to behave ourselves in a way that pleases you. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

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## **JESUS HEALS THE LEPERS**

**86**

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***Matthew 8:1-4; Luke 17:11-19***

### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show the power of Jesus to cure the incurable, and to show that Jesus is pleased when men give glory to God.

### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Leviticus 13:14; Deuteronomy 24:8; Numbers 5:1-4; Matthew 11:4-5; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16.

### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

It is important to know something about the terrible disease of leprosy in order to be able to convey to the children both the depth of Jesus' love and compassion, and the importance of the cure for the formerly incurable leper. There are several different types of the disease. The one prevalent in tropical countries today is typified by deformities of hands and feet and responds to treatment.

By contrast, the leprosy described in the Bible struck terror and loathing into the hearts of people who lived in and around Palestine: it affected the skin and was highly contagious. There was no treatment,

and the disease was very prevalent at that time. Because it spread quickly there were very strict regulations in the law of Moses concerning its diagnosis and isolation. Leviticus 13 tells us something of the nature of the disease. The progressive symptoms were white swellings or eruptions of the skin, raw bleeding flesh and hair turning white in the area of the affected skin. A leper was commanded to wear torn clothes, have his or her hair hanging loose, cover the upper lip and cry: "Unclean, unclean". Lepers were excluded from the camp or city and, in the time of Jesus, they were forced to live in caves beyond the city walls. The only way in which they stayed alive was by eating food which relatives would leave for them at a safe distance. On the occasions when lepers came near the towns, they would be looked at with horror and revulsion, and healthy people would keep a safe distance from them. It takes little imagination to realize what a wretched, lonely and hopeless life was led by those afflicted.

Use some of the above information to introduce this lesson, in an attempt to help the children imagine both the feelings of the lepers and the reactions of other people to the diseased. Follow this by describing the way in which Jesus was always thronged by crowds of people wanting to hear his preaching, and even more wanting to be cured of their various illnesses. Suggest the way in which the crowd would have recoiled in fear and revulsion as the leper made himself known. This man had such faith that Jesus could cure him that he felt confident in mingling with the crowd. Though he was sure Jesus could cure him, he did not assume that he would. Humbly he knelt before Jesus in praise and supplication. In marked contrast to the reaction of the crowd, Jesus stepped forward and touched the untouchable man, and the effect was immediate. Emphasize what that touch meant to the leper. It was a very long time since anyone had approached, let alone touched, him. Ask the children to suggest what the man's feelings would have been (joy, relief and gratitude), how the crowd would have reacted, and what it meant to Jesus. Ask what the man would have wanted to do first. It would have been natural for him to want to run home and to share his joy with his family and friends, or anyone who would listen. Jesus had to curb his excitement and remind him that first he must do what the law required.

Word must have spread among the colonies of lepers that the man Jesus could cure the disease. Many months later, when Jesus was entering a village on his way to Jerusalem, ten lepers, who must have heard that he was coming, were waiting for him. Describe the compassion and healing power of Jesus and his ready response to their plea. Not doubting his authority, they followed his instructions and set off to find the priests. Imagine their overwhelming joy as they became aware of having been healed. Excitedly they examined each other's healthy skin. No longer were they condemned to the pain of disease and the misery of isolation, but were free to return to the pleasures of normal family life. Now they quickened their pace, anxious to waste no time in having their cure confirmed by the priests.

Ask the children whether they think there was anything the lepers had forgotten to do. Guide the children to recognize that they had received the precious gift of health and that gratitude should have been their first reaction. Point out the joy that Jesus felt when one man returned to thank him and to praise God, and his disappointment that nine out of ten had failed to do this. The power of Jesus had combined with the faith of men to effect the miracle.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

How happy Jesus was when the man he had healed remembered to thank him and to praise God. What things should we be thankful for? To whom should we say 'thank you'? Jesus had the power to make the lepers better. He can also make people better-behaved, if they ask for his help. (The concept of sin as a form of uncleanness can be developed here, at your discretion. Much will depend on the maturity of the children.)

## **WORKSHEETS**

The code reads 'A man with leprosy came and knelt before Jesus and asked him to cure him. Jesus touched him and immediately he was cured. Another time ten men who were lepers met Jesus; they stood at a distance and called to him to have pity on them. He told them to show themselves to the priests. As they went they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet, thanking him.'

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, when we see people who are ill, teach us to remember them in our prayers. Thank you for good health. Teach us always to be grateful for your care, and help us to be better people. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"One of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice" (Luke 17:15).

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## **THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR**

**87**

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### ***Luke 18:9-14***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show that God is displeased with those who are proud, and pleased with those who humbly confess their faults.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Study the sect of the Pharisees, and the work of the tax collectors (publicans, AV), in order to have a clear picture of the role of each in New Testament times. It must be remembered that not all Pharisees were hypocrites, nor all tax collectors dishonest!

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Introduce the lesson by showing the children that Jesus met and preached to people from all walks of life - rich and poor, religious and worldly, young and old, ailing and strong, those in authority and those in servitude. Among those he met were Pharisees and tax collectors. Since these words are difficult for children to understand, some clarification will be necessary. The children must appreciate that the Pharisees were regarded by the Jews as leaders in religious matters and had, until this time, gained the respect of ordinary men and women. Throughout their history they had insisted on strict conformity to the law. However, Jesus exposed the pride that had developed within the sect and saw through the veneer of respectability.

In Palestine the Romans employed Jews as tax collectors, some of whom were notorious for exacting more money from the people than was due. By their dishonesty they made themselves rich, and were despised and hated by their fellow Jews.

Having paved the way for the story, explain to the children that you are going to tell them a story that Jesus told in order to teach people how to pray. The word parable can be introduced at this point. Explain that Jesus often told stories in order to teach lessons, and that these stories were always about people or events familiar to the hearers. Men prayed in the temple every day, so that as soon as the story began the listeners would have been able to identify with the situation. Relate the story vividly, portraying the pride of the Pharisee by suggesting what was going on in his mind as he looked for a prominent position, and adopted a pious stance. Paraphrase his words and demonstrate his manner, even overplaying the part to make the point clear. Children will appreciate how despicable it is to display such bragging and conceit. The Pharisee was not only intent on impressing others with his superiority, but was at pains to belittle those he considered outside the circle of God's favour.

By contrast, convey the sincerity and genuine humility of the tax collector, who longed for forgiveness for the wrongs he had done and which troubled his conscience greatly. He was unaware of the presence of others, being concerned only with communicating his repentance to God. His posture revealed his contrition and the words he said were intended for God alone. The tax collector was not interested in comparing himself with other men; he knew only that his actions fell short of what God required of him and that, therefore, he needed God's forgiveness.

By means of leading questions, try to glean from the children their impression of what it was Jesus was teaching through this story. Ask which of the two men had pleased God by his prayer, and how each man would have felt after praying. Find out if the children can identify the essential difference between the attitudes of the two men, guiding them to a realization of the implication for us today in seeking to be reconciled to God.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Have you ever met people who remind you of the tax collector or the Pharisee? Some children are honest enough to admit that they are not always good, while other children pretend they never do anything wrong. Which kind of children do you think please God more?

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, please forgive us for all the wrong things we have done, and help us not to think we are better than anyone else. We know that you see what we are really like. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." (Matthew 6:6).

***John 5:1-16*****AIMS OF LESSON**

To show that Jesus had the power to cure an invalid. To show how the Jewish leaders were antagonized by Jesus' healing on the sabbath.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Map showing Bethesda (Bethzatha, RSV). John 5:36.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Introduce the story with a discussion of modern medical and welfare provision for invalids, (e.g. government aid, home nursing, wheelchairs, walking aids, meals-on-wheels, etc.) in order to compare and contrast the hopelessness of the sick or disabled in Biblical times. It will be difficult for children to imagine the plight of the destitute, who were forced to rely on the generosity of others and on begging.

Set the scene. Because it was a feast time Jerusalem would be even busier than usual. The sheep market would be crowded with people purchasing animals for temple sacrifices. The streets would be thronging with pilgrims from many areas. Within the porches surrounding the pool the great numbers of lame, blind, diseased and paralysed people would have made a pathetic picture as they pinned their hopes on the remote possibility of a cure. Simply explain that the Jews believed the stirring of the water to be the work of an angel, without attempting to decry the efficacy of this belief or to write it off as mere superstition. Enter into the feelings of the man who for thirty-eight years had been hoping to be cured. The fact that he had come to the pool again showed that he had not given up hope even now despite his repeated frustration and disappointment.

Why did Jesus ask: "Do you want to be healed?" when the man would have been there for no other reason. Surely it would not only fasten the man's attention on Jesus but also focus his mind on his great need, by having to put it into words. The man's answer seems to indicate that he had no friends (cf. the man let down through the roof).

Draw attention to Jesus' utter compassion. He was not responding to a direct plea nor to a demonstration of faith. At the authoritative words of Jesus, the man was immediately cured and given the strength to stand and walk. Remind the children how weak one feels after a period in bed, yet after thirty-eight years of illness this man was able to get up at once and carry his bed. Jesus had proved that he had power even greater than the miraculous waters of Bethesda! The man's sudden ability to walk roused great interest and a crowd soon surrounded him. Meanwhile, Jesus slipped away from the commotion.

Explain to the children that this was the sabbath, a holy day, on which Jews were forbidden by God to work or to carry heavy loads. Show how the Jewish leaders' obsession with ritual and detail prevented them seeing the greatness and supreme goodness of the miracle.

The man went to the temple, not knowing who it was who had cured him. Jesus sought him out and his words made the man realize who it was who had cured him: he was then able to tell the Jewish leaders. Their jealousy drove them to hate Jesus sufficiently to want to kill him, though the miracle itself should have persuaded them that this man was from God.

## RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES

Jesus cured this man because he was sad to see him suffering, and wanted to help him. We want to be like Jesus as much as we can. We cannot make ill people well again. What can we do to follow Jesus' example? (We can show sympathy for the old and handicapped, talk to them, read to them, run errands for them, write letters to them, etc.)

## WORKSHEETS

The message reads 'Jesus has the power to heal'.

The jumbled words are (top to bottom, left to right), SIN, SABBATH, MAT, LAW, YEARS, WATER, BETHESDA, JESUS, FRIENDS, TEMPLE.

## PRAYER

Dear Lord God, thank you for Jesus' kindness. May we be sympathetic when we see the suffering of others, so that we are moved to do what we can to help them. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

"Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them" (Matthew 7:12).

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## THE FIVE FRIENDS

89

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### *Mark 2:1-13*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To show the faith of the paralysed man and his friends, and the power of Jesus to forgive sins and to heal.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

Study the design and construction of houses in New Testament times. Find a map to show the location of Capernaum. Isaiah 35:6; 43:25; Micah 7:18; Mark 1:21-34.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

With the aid of a map showing the location of Capernaum, and pictures of the Sea of Galilee, talk of the activities of Jesus in the early part of his ministry in this area. His friends the fishermen lived here, and the local people crowded eagerly to him, to hear his stories and to see the many miracles of healing.

Lead on from this introduction to the meeting of the four men who were concerned about the ill health of a friend. Suggest that they were excited by the recent return of Jesus to the town and were convinced that if only their paralysed friend could somehow be brought to Jesus, he would be cured. They realized that their friend had no hope of going to Jesus by himself and they planned together how they might bring about this meeting. Having found out exactly where Jesus was, they wasted no time





## MEMORY VERSE

“There are friends who pretend to be friends, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24).

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## THE WIDOW OF NAIN

90

### *Luke 7:11-18*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To show Jesus' compassion for a mother, and to show that he had the power to bring the dead back to life.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

Study Jewish burial customs and the Jewish laws regarding uncleanness.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Introduce the lesson by discussing the care and devotion of mothers towards their children, which is also seen in the animal world. (You may need to be sensitive to the family backgrounds of the children in your class). The bond between the mother and son in this story would be particularly close, since she had neither husband nor other children. The young man must have been her only means of support, and his death would have left her destitute. Compare her situation with that of a widow in our present welfare society.

The funeral procession was moving outside the city to the burial place, accompanied by a crowd of mourners. It was the custom for friends, neighbours and relatives to wail as a sign of sympathy. At the same time Jesus was entering the city, followed by a large crowd, and had to pause and make room for the funeral procession to pass through the gateway. Jesus, ever sensitive and concerned for others, was immediately saddened by the sight of the grieving widow, and felt impelled to comfort her. For a stranger to interrupt the procession would be startling and possibly an embarrassment. The body was being carried on an open bier, not in an enclosed coffin. It was unacceptable for a person to approach a corpse, and the mourners must have wondered what was about to happen as Jesus touched the bier. What did happen would have been beyond their imagining. Jesus had only to speak and the dead man sat up. His words of command held absolute authority. By his action, Jesus had transformed a mother's tears of anguish to tears of joy. The reaction of the spectators was one of awe and belief. A man who could restore life to the dead *must* have been sent by God.

It might be interesting to contrast today's news media with the way in which people in Jesus' day spread the news by word of mouth.

(Should you wish to ask the children to read the account in class, it would be advisable to explain words such as “bier”, “compassion”, “widow”, beforehand.)

## RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES

(You should know whether any scholar is without a mother. Should this be the case, it would be wise to substitute "parent" for "mother" at this point.)

Jesus gave this man life again, so that he could care for his mother. Can you think of ways in which your mother shows she cares for you? Can you think of ways in which *you* can show that you care for your mother?

## WORKSHEETS

The story reads: 'One day Jesus **saw** a very **sad thing**. As he was coming into **the** city, a funeral procession was passing by. A young man had died and his mother was crying. Her husband was already dead and now her only **son** was dead too. Jesus was very **sad to see** her **so** upset. He walked up **to the stretcher that the** body of **the** young man was on and looked at him. **The** people who were following **the** funeral were quite **surprised to see** him do **this** as people didn't usually come close **to** dead bodies. But when Jesus **touched the stretcher** and **the** young man **sat up they** were absolutely amazed! **The** mother was overjoyed! Her **son** who **she** knew had been dead was alive again and **she** and all **the** people who **saw this** happen knew **that** Jesus was **sent** by God.'

## PRAYER

Dear Lord God, thank you for our parents who care for us. Help us to show how grateful we are, by finding ways of being helpful at home. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

"Honour your father and your mother" (Matthew 15:4).

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## JESUS FORGIVES

91

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### *Luke 7:36-50*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To show the response of Jesus to one who is truly repentant.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

Study the customs of Jewish hospitality and the attitudes and behaviour of the Pharisees.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Introduce the lesson by talking about invitations. Jesus must have received many such requests from a variety of people, some of whom were his close friends, some in need of healing, some wanting to listen to his teaching and others to find fault. Simon invited Jesus to his house for a meal in order to provide an opportunity for him to question Jesus and put him to the test. He was curious to know why

Jesus was so popular, but the warmth of his hospitality left much to be desired. He did not even extend to him the customary courtesies.

The Pharisees were rich and powerful, and Simon's house would probably have been quite luxurious. Such things, however, did not impress Jesus; he knew that only the hearts, minds and actions of people are of importance to God. Simon knew that Jesus kept company with all kinds of people including the poorest, but he was amazed when a woman with a very bad reputation sought out Jesus in *his* house. She had obviously met Jesus before and had heard his message of hope and forgiveness for people like herself. It must have taken great courage to enter the Pharisee's house, for she must have known how Simon despised her, but her thoughts were on Jesus alone. In deep gratitude she had brought with her a most expensive gift of perfumed oil to anoint the skin of Jesus. This was her way of honouring him and for her it was an emotional moment. Her tears expressed both her shame and misery at what she was, her intense joy in acknowledging Jesus as her saviour, and relief that she could be forgiven for all the wrong she had done.

While this was happening, many thoughts were passing through Simon's mind. He was embarrassed at such a display of feeling, horrified that Jesus should allow such a person to touch him, and assumed that Jesus had failed to recognize the woman for what she was. However, he had not even opened his mouth to speak when Jesus revealed that he was able to read the innermost thoughts of both the woman and Simon himself. With masterly skill Jesus told the story of the two debtors to clarify the present situation. The story culminated in a question that forced Simon to recognize the extent of the forgiveness of God and to acknowledge his own need for forgiveness. Jesus then spelled out the comparison between his host's attitude and that of the woman. Her every action demonstrated deep humility and love. Because of this response to Jesus her sins were forgiven. By contrast, Simon's neglect of his guest's needs manifested his pride and lack of love. Moreover, his self-righteous condemnation of the woman suggested that he felt himself to be righteous.

This story contains a summary of the gospel of salvation. First must come an admission of sin, then sincere repentance together with absolute faith that Jesus Christ will forgive our sins. This is exactly what happened to the woman: she recognized her sinfulness and her need for forgiveness, she had complete faith that Jesus could take away her sins and her faith was demonstrated in her loving actions. Jesus knew her heart, saw her need and recognized her faith. He then reassured her by saying: "Your sins are forgiven ... your faith has saved you". She, who had felt worthless and wicked, without true friends or self-respect, now felt free and loved and could indeed go in peace.

### RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES

This lesson has been mainly to do with repentance and forgiveness. We all do wrong and unkind things at times and feel sorry afterwards. Can you think of times when you felt sorry after upsetting your parents, but found it hard to say: "I am sorry"? When you finally plucked up the courage to say the words, did you find that you felt happy and relieved afterwards? Perhaps, at times, you were not unselfish enough to apologize and continued to feel bad inside. Next time, remember how happy the woman in this story felt when she had been forgiven and show you really love your parents by asking them to forgive you.

### WORKSHEETS

The word change puzzle reads:

A	S	I	N	N	E	R
A	S	S	N	N	E	R
A	S	S	N	R	R	R
I	S	S	O	R	R	R

I	S	S	O	R	R	Y		
I	O	R	S	O	R	R	Y	
I	O	R	G	O	V	R	Y	
I	O	R	G	O	V	E	N	
AND IS	F	O	R	G	I	V	E	N

The remaining letters from the word search read 'Jesus said "Your faith has saved you"'.

**PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, thank you for teaching us that when we do wrong we can be forgiven. Please help us to admit the bad things we have done and not to be too proud to say that we are sorry. Amen.

**MEMORY VERSE**

"I acknowledged my sin to thee, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'; then thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin" (Psalm 32:5).

**CALMING THE STORM**

**Mark 4:35-41**

**AIM OF LESSON**

To show Jesus' power over nature, and the need for his followers to have confidence in him.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Mark 4:1; Mark 5:1. Use a Bible atlas and dictionary to study the main geographical features of the Sea of Galilee.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

With the aid of a map and, if possible, a picture or model of a fishing boat, set the scene. It was evening, and Jesus had been teaching from the boat all day. It must have been very exhausting. Think of the power of his voice to be able to reach such a crowd, and the effort required to sustain it. When evening came the crowd had to be sent away, for they would have lingered on, such was the appeal of Jesus' words and personality. He was tired, and his disciples gladly responded to his instruction that they cross to the quieter side of the lake, where he liked to go for rest and prayer. They would have felt protective towards him.

Convey to the children the difference between any park lakes they may have seen and, the size and characteristics of the Sea of Galilee. Galilee was subject to sudden squalls because of its position. On the eastern side there are mountains; on the west, hills intersected by narrow gorges through which violent winds sweep across the water.

When the storm first arose the disciples were probably unperturbed, having coped with similar situations many times before. It must have been a very bad storm for experienced sailors, who had

worked all their lives on the Sea of Galilee, to become afraid. Build up the drama of the storm as it intensified, stressing the increasing fear of the disciples, and the increasing roar of the sea and the howling wind, as the fishing boat was battered and swamped. Only when the situation became so serious that there was danger of the boat sinking and their being drowned, did they abandon their own efforts and turn in desperation to their sleeping master. In a state of panic, they shook him awake, feeling indignant at his apparent unconcern. They did not know what Jesus could do about the situation, but at last they felt the need to turn to him for help. Recall the deafening noise of the storm in order that Jesus' words (spoken slowly and quietly) might provide a striking contrast.

After a short pause, describe the sudden calm, the gentle movement of the boat, and the alleviation of the disciples' fears. Relief, at danger passed, is a feeling that perhaps the children themselves have experienced in some way. Show that, although Jesus had responded initially to his disciples' immediate needs and removed the cause of their fear, he nevertheless, when the storm had ceased, confronted them with their lack of faith. They could now see that their own skill and strength, of which they were undoubtedly proud, were as nothing compared with the power over the elements which was at Jesus' command. They stood in wonder before this unique man.

**RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Life is like a boat trip. We sail along through life. Is the voyage always smooth and calm? Are there days when there are storms, when we panic and think that something dreadful is going to happen? Who is in the boat with us? We can always ask Jesus for help, at any time. How can we do this? (By trying to remember his teaching; by prayer).

**WORKSHEETS**

The hidden words are:

D	I	S	C	I	<b>P</b>	L	E	S			
					<b>E</b>	V	E	N	I	N	G
	A	F	R		<b>A</b>	I	D				
					<b>C</b>	U	S	H	I	O	N
T	E	A	C	H	<b>E</b>	R					
					<b>B</b>	O	A	T			
	S	T			<b>E</b>	R	N				
W	A	V	E		<b>S</b>						
	F	A	I		<b>T</b>	H					
		W	I		<b>N</b>	D					
	A	S			<b>L</b>	E	E	P			
	C	A			<b>L</b>	M					

**PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we are not strong enough to be able to deal with all life's problems by ourselves. Please be near us, and help us all the time. Amen.

**MEMORY VERSE**

"Lo, I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20).

***Matthew 13:1-23*****AIM OF LESSON**

To create in the children the desire to respond to the word of God.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Psalm 119:105; 2 Timothy 3:15-17.

Investigate farming methods at the time of Jesus, and find pictures of the Galilean countryside and a man scattering seed.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

This lesson is one for which a visual aid can be used very profitably, in order to fix in the children's minds the various kinds of terrain mentioned - good soil, stony ground, weed-choked ground and a pathway. It is up to you to choose the aid that appeals most - prepared illustrations, drawings or a model. The latter could take the form of a miniature garden, either prepared beforehand or assembled in class. You could consider growing or buying ready grown mustard and cress in a fibre pack. By cutting the fibre to three different thicknesses, the height of the cress can be varied and made to appear to be thirty, sixty or a hundred-fold.

Show the class some seeds and let the children handle them. Discuss with the children the fact that the seeds will remain dormant, or seemingly lifeless, until the conditions are right for growth. Talk about the need for soil, sunshine, air and water. Just as Jesus used a familiar scene to help understanding, so now reference can be made to places known to the children where plants grow, e.g. own garden, a nearby park, school garden, etc.

At this point, tell the children that Jesus told a story about some seeds. Describe the scene - the huge crowds thronging the shore, the calm lake, the boat anchored a little way from the shore so that the maximum number of people could see and hear Jesus. Perhaps, even as Jesus was speaking, a farmer was scattering his seed on prepared ground on the slopes above the lake. Describe and demonstrate how the sower would broadcast the seed from a basket or cloth slung round his neck. As he walked along he would swing his arm from side to side in an attempt to scatter the seed as evenly as possible. Explain that you are going to tell the story that Jesus told to the people that day. Narrate the story simply and clearly, making use of the visual aids.

Ask the children why they think Jesus told this story. Point out that the disciples were not sure of the reason and that Jesus had to explain it to them. Introduce the word "parable", which the class may be meeting for the first time, and write it down so that the children can see it. Explain that a parable is a story of everyday life, but that it has a deeper meaning, which we can discover if we think about it. Encourage the searching mind and, as you expand the whole meaning of the parable, allow the children to contribute where they can.

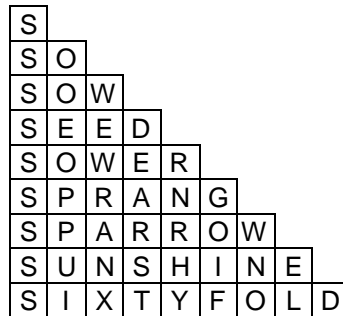
In conclusion bring the children's minds back to the scene where Jesus was standing in the boat, speaking to the people. Explain that at that moment Jesus was like the sower sowing his seed. His words were going out to all kinds of people in the crowd, just as the sower's seed was landing on all kinds of ground. Jesus' words made little impression upon some of the people; the interests or worries of others soon made them forget what he had said, but in a few people his words took root and grew.

## RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES

We read the Bible and we come to Sunday School to hear what Jesus has to say about God's word. We are the ground on which the seed falls. What sort of ground are we? Are we glad to hear God's message? Do we remember what we learn? Does hearing it help us to grow in goodness? (You will have an opportunity here to ask the children to prove that they remember what they learn. Can they still recite any of their earlier memory verses?)

## WORKSHEETS

The S puzzle reads:



## PRAYER

Dear Lord God, we thank you for the stories in the Bible. We want to learn and understand your words. Help us to grow in goodness. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

"All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching ... that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

***Luke 8:40-56*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show that those who come to Jesus with faith will be rewarded, and that Jesus has power over disease and death.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

John 11:25; Acts 9:36-43; Romans 10:9; Hebrews 11:6. Study the role of the synagogue, and mourning customs.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Because this is a very familiar story, it is suggested that the description it be given a particular slant. Describe the events of the whole day as witnessed by Jairus himself. At the outset he is found waiting by the lake for Jesus to return. It is not clear how long his daughter had been seriously ill, but the situation was now so acute that he was desperate to see Jesus. Point out to the class that Jairus' daughter was not much older than they are. If possible, compare her with a twelve-year-old girl whom they know.

The boat seemed a long time coming, and many other people were waiting to see Jesus. Explain to the children that since Jairus played a large part in the organization of the synagogue, which was the centre of village life, he would be well-known and a well-respected member of the community; perhaps for this reason he was allowed to get to the front of the crowd. The urgency of his plea caused him to humble himself at Jesus' feet and beg him to come quickly to save his much-loved daughter. Jairus was so confident in the ability of Jesus to cure her that he would have felt immediately relieved when Jesus agreed to go with him. However, the ever-increasing crowd surged around them and their progress through the streets was distressingly slow.

Jairus' impatience must have reached a peak when Jesus suddenly stopped and asked: "Who touched me?" Jairus was, no doubt, as surprised as the disciples by this question, for they were being jostled on all sides. When Jesus gave his reason for stopping, Jairus realized that someone else was seeking the healing power of Jesus. He scanned the faces of the crowd and saw the timid face of the trembling woman behind Jesus. How different was this woman from himself; she a shy, impoverished creature and he a prominent and wealthy dignitary. It was obvious that she had been too reticent to approach Jesus and ask for help as he himself had done, and she had hoped to avoid attracting attention to herself. She knew for certain that she need only touch Jesus' robe and she would be healed. Jesus, however, felt it necessary to draw from her a confession of faith and to commend her for it. She would thus be strengthened both in character and body. She testified to the crowd how she had been ill for twelve years and had now been instantly cured.

While Jairus must have felt great sympathy for the woman and shared her joy at being healed, he would nevertheless be constantly aware of the passage of time. The delay that this incident caused must have been agonizing to him. Help the children to imagine his deep distress upon receiving the news that it was already too late. Immediately, Jesus offered Jairus words of comfort, and reinforced these words by wasting no time in going directly to Jairus' house.



When they arrived at the house there was no doubt that the girl was dead. As was the custom, friends and neighbours had already gathered to mourn, and there was much sobbing and wailing. Jairus' heart sank, and he looked questioningly at Jesus. More reassurance was forthcoming. Jesus spoke with authority and conviction. The child would awake. Some felt he must be unaware of the reality of the situation. Those who are dead do not wake up.

Jairus stood there, helpless, allowing Jesus to take command of the situation. Firmly Jesus quietened the mourners and turned them all out of the house. Jairus and his distraught wife, together with Peter, James and John, accompanied Jesus to the girl's bedside. Jairus watched in wonder as Jesus took the child's hand and spoke one simple command, upon which she was instantly restored to life and perfect health.

The parents must have been so overwhelmed by this sudden and wonderful reversal of the tragedy that they stood staring in amazement. Gently and warmly, Jesus spoke to them, restoring things to normality. Their daughter had been too ill to eat for some time and would now be hungry. The parents could now meet her needs again. Jesus told them not to spread the news, but it was inevitable that word of this momentous miracle would soon be heard throughout the region.

### RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES

In this story, two people asked Jesus for help. Both received what they wanted because they approached Jesus with humility and faith. They *knew* he could help them. They were, however, very different from each other. One was an important and highly-respected religious leader; the other was a frail, nervous, insignificant woman. Does it matter to Jesus whether people are poor, rich, confident, shy, handicapped, clever, old or young? What is it about people that is really important to Jesus?

### WORKSHEETS

The path to Jairus' house reads 'Don't be afraid, just believe'.

The solution to the puzzle is:

					J	A	I	R	U	S								
					E	R												
		D	A	U	G	H	T											
T	W	E	L	V	E	Y	E	A	R	S								
					J	E	S		U	S								
					H	O	U		S	E								
					T	O	U	C	H	E	D							
					W	O	M		A	N								
					P	E	T	E	R	J	A	M	E	S	J	O	H	N
					F	A	T	H	E	R	M	O	T	H	E	R		
									S	Y	N	A	G	O	G	U	E	
									F	E	E	T						
					G				O									
									R	U	L	E	R					
					D				Y	I	N	G						
									O	N	L	Y						
					L	A			U	G	H	E	D					

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank you that we can come to you just as we are, and that you will hear our prayer, if we trust and believe. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

“Whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

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## **THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND**

**95**

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***Mark 6:30-46; John 6:1-13***

### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show how Jesus cared for the people, and miraculously fed them.

### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Matthew 4:12. Study information about food in New Testament times. Find the equivalent of a denarius in modern currency.

### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

This story will probably be very familiar to the class and, therefore, may need a fresh approach. Consider telling the main part of the story through the eyes of the boy referred to in John's account. The children will readily associate themselves with the boy's feelings. A useful visual aid would be five bread rolls and two sardines or pilchards, to be produced at the right moment in the story.

First set the scene by explaining that Jesus was both tired and hungry, having been beset by crowds all day and having been too busy to eat. Furthermore, the disciples needed to talk to him alone, and to tell him all that they had been doing in his name. In addition, Jesus had just learned of the death of John the Baptist (Matthew 4:12) which added to his desire for solitude. However, it was not to be. Try to convey in some way the number five thousand, by comparing it with school assembly or a large crowd at a football match (which the class will no doubt have seen on TV).

Despite his desire to be alone, Jesus felt such compassion for those who were “like sheep without a shepherd” that he put their needs before his own. The disciples had learned something from Jesus about concern for others, as can be seen by their suggestion in verse 36: “This is a lonely place, and the hour is now late ...” “You give them something to eat,” said Jesus to test their reactions. Their response to this challenge was a purely human one, that of offering to shop for some food.

It is at this point that the story can be continued as if told by the boy. Effect the change with words such as: In the crowd was a young boy who was watching events with interest. He might have told his friends about them later in words something like this: “I was actually there that day, and standing so near to Jesus that I could hear what he and his friends were saying. I thought to myself, I've still got

my lunch - I had been too excited to eat it - "I could share that. Let's see what my mother packed up for me ..." At this point, the "packed lunch" can be opened up.

Make a point of incorporating in the story the fact that Jesus gave us here the example - as he did on several occasions - of giving thanks for food. The boy must have watched with amazement as his little meal stretched into a seemingly endless supply of food, and the disciples would have been no less amazed. Note that the enormous crowd was satisfied not only spiritually, but physically, too, and there were still leftovers. God is always generous - "good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over" (Luke 6:38). It is astounding that the amount of food left over was far more than the original meal. What a memorable day it had been for those who shared in that feast of good things.

At last Jesus was able to be quite alone, so that he could talk to God. No doubt he thanked his Father for enabling him to help so many.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

In this story, Jesus prayed twice. When? We pray for food in the Lord's Prayer ("Give us this day ..."). What good prayer habits should we adopt, if we are to follow Jesus' example?

### **WORKSHEETS**

The code reads 'Jesus gave thanks and broke the loaves'.

The Bible sum is  $8 + 12 = 20 \times 5 = 100 \times 2 = 200 - 100 = 100 \times 50 = 5000$ .

### **PRAYER**

Here it may be suitable to say one of the well-known "grace" prayers. (The bread and fish, which may have been used as a visual aid, may perhaps be eaten by the children afterwards). For example:

Thank you, Lord, for all your care.  
Close about us everywhere.  
Bless people near and far away  
Who help to bring us food each day. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"Do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all" (Matthew 6:31-32).

***Luke 7:1-10*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show the centurion's outstanding faith in the authority of Jesus, and to show how Jesus recognized it.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Find out details about the Roman occupation of Palestine, the composition of the army and the attitudes that prevailed. Refer to a map showing the position of Capernaum. Find illustrations of a Jewish synagogue and Roman military dress.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Begin by talking about the Roman occupation of Palestine. Roman soldiers were a common sight in every town, with their colourful uniforms and gleaming armour. The Jews resented their presence, not only because they were subject to Roman rule, but because they had to pay heavy taxes to these overlords. Some of the Romans were very cruel, and the soldiers rough and arrogant. There were, however, some exceptions.

Introduce the centurion, an officer in charge of one hundred soldiers, who was based in the seaside town of Capernaum to which Jesus was a frequent visitor. Far from being unpopular, the centurion was highly regarded by the local Jews because he wielded his authority with kindness and with great respect for the Jewish way of life. Furthermore, he had provided the town with a synagogue, where the people could meet to worship and to hear the scriptures read. Thus he was, in fact, regarded as a friend. He had acquainted himself with the beliefs of the Jews and had, no doubt, also heard of the preaching and miracles of Jesus. Explain that one day the centurion hurriedly approached the Jewish elders. He seemed anxious and concerned; something was troubling him. He spoke earnestly and was clearly asking something of them. They nodded their heads and then walked away quickly. They set off purposefully and hastened to the place where they knew they would find Jesus. At this point, explain the object of their mission. Jesus was impressed as they spoke highly of the Roman and pleaded on his behalf. Convey the genuine affection that the centurion felt for his servant, and the good relationship which existed between the elders and the Roman. Jesus did not hesitate and went with them straight away, but before they reached the house they were intercepted by friends of the centurion.

The centurion understood the beliefs of the Jews, that they should not associate with Gentiles. Far from being arrogant, this man was humble enough and sensitive enough to recognise that Jesus, being a Jew, should not enter his home. Neither did he presume to exert his authority, but rather beseeched Jesus for help, via his friends. Moreover, the centurion saw no necessity for Jesus to actually touch the sick man, or even to see him, but believed that his power was such that only a word was needed. He acknowledged the truth, which many of the Jews could not or would not see, that here among them was one who had the power and authority of God. The centurion knew about authority, from his own experience, and recognized it in Jesus. Jesus marvelled at the man's confidence in him and commented upon it to the crowd. Jesus acknowledged that a man with faith like that deserved his help, even if he were a Roman, and he agreed to the suggestion.

Ask the children what they think the final outcome was. Then help them to see the effect of Jesus' compassion and healing power upon all those concerned.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Why was Jesus amazed at the message he received from the centurion's friends? The distance between Jesus and the sick man did not prevent him from curing him. Jesus is now in heaven. How can we get a message to him when we are worried about ourselves or someone we love? If we believe that he can help us, he will.

### **WORKSHEETS**

The code reads 'Faith is being sure of what we hope for'.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, please help us to know that Jesus is very near, even though we cannot see him, and that he will help us. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"Pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects" (James 5:16).

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## **WALKING ON THE SEA**

**97**

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### ***Matthew 14:22-33***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show that God is always willing to help us if we put our trust in him.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Study the main geographical features of the Sea of Galilee.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Begin this lesson by telling the children that the incident related followed immediately after the feeding of the five thousand, which you may need to summarise for them if they do not know about it. Although Jesus was tired, he chose to spend the night in prayer. Sleep clears away our tiredness, and prayer did the same for Jesus, making him fresh and strong and ready to carry on the work of God. Jesus went up on to the hillside alone and stayed there throughout the hours of darkness.

The suddenness of the storm was a typical feature of the Sea of Galilee, which is seven miles wide at its widest point. The disciples were half-way across. It had taken many hours to get this far because the wind was blowing strongly against them and the sea was very rough.

On the land, Jesus could see them, but at first took no action to save them - knowing that they were safer than they knew. The night passed, and it was the fourth watch (3 a.m. - 6 a.m.) before he left his prayers. The disciples were almost at the point of exhaustion when Jesus finally approached them, walking on the water. Imagine their state of mind as they became aware of this ethereal figure in the half-light of early dawn. They cried out in fear. Immediately Jesus reassured them with the words: "Take heart, it is I; have no fear".

It was hard for the disciples to grasp the reality of the situation, but Peter reacted with his customary impetuosity. His initial act of faith and courage, encouraged by Jesus, should not be underestimated, even though he did not wholly succeed. He did not falter *until* he took his eyes off Jesus and, on seeing the dark, surging waves around him, allowed his own fears to crowd out his faith. Having begun to sink, he reached instinctively towards Jesus again rather than back to the boat. Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and saved him. Peter had *some* faith: he had the right idea. Inspired by Jesus, he could dare to attempt the seemingly impossible. When he began to doubt, he had only to seek the help of Jesus and the impossible could be achieved again. Jesus' words to Peter contained a rebuke, implying that Peter should have known by then that he could put his entire trust in him.

As soon as Jesus and Peter got into the ship, the wind ceased; the storm subsided as suddenly as it had arisen. Their awareness of the presence of Jesus inspired a feeling of calmness to the situation and to their own hearts. The effect of the incident upon the disciples was to reinforce their belief that Jesus was the Son of God, for only with God's power could Jesus have walked on the turbulent water, and upheld his faltering disciple.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

What does this story tell *us about our* struggles to cope with things that seem impossible? Have you ever said: "I can't do it"? (Suggest such situations as apologizing, owning up after doing something wrong, getting out of bed in the dark, etc.) If we remember that Jesus is there, too, we will be able to say: "I know I can!"

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, sometimes we have to do things that we find hard or frightening. Please help us to remember that we can turn to you and to Jesus and rely on you to help us. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

***Luke 9:26-36*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how God strengthened Jesus and demonstrated to the disciples the pre-eminence of Jesus in his purpose.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Exodus 34:29; Malachi 4:5-6; Matthew 3:17; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 1:17; 24:26-27; Hebrews 12:2; 2 Peter 1:16-18.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Remind the children that Jesus often went to pray on a mountain. Usually he went alone, but this time there were to be witnesses. We are not told which mountain provided the backdrop to these events. It could have been Mount Hermon (9000 ft.), which towers above Caesarea Philippi, twelve miles to the south, from where Jesus had come. The tradition that it was Mount Tabor does not agree with the geography so well.

We read so often of Jesus helping others in their times of trouble that we forget that he, too, was human and in need of help at certain times. He always found this help by withdrawing from other people and communing with his Father in prayer. This was more important to him than food or sleep, and he sometimes spent many hours praying. When he set out this time, taking with him his three closest friends, he knew that this was to be a special occasion. He knew that his ministry was nearly at an end, and that soon his enemies would cause him to be put to death. He needed great support as he prepared to face the terrible ordeal of the crucifixion. As they climbed the high mountain, Peter, James and John must have wondered what was to happen, and why they were being privileged to accompany him.

Ask the children to imagine the scene by describing the event as seen and heard by the three disciples. They had stayed to one side while Jesus knelt alone to pray. As it grew late they became sleepy, but were suddenly dazzled by a brilliant light; the dark figure of Jesus had been transformed. His face shone, and his clothes had become sparkling white. None of the disciples' past experiences had prepared them for this vision of God's glory, manifested in their master. As they watched in awe, two more glorified figures became visible to them and they realized with wonder that these were Moses, the lawgiver, and Elijah, the great prophet.

We are not told whether the disciples could hear what was being said, but it seems that the words of those great men of faith were for the ears of Jesus alone. They understood, however, that they spoke of his death. As the vision began to fade, Peter spoke to Jesus, offering to make shelters he was overwhelmed and mystified but, being Peter, he had to say something. However, before Peter had finished speaking they were all enveloped in a cloud. They must have felt something of the fear experienced by the Israelites at the giving of the law, for now they heard the voice of God speaking to them out of the cloud. Then the vision, the cloud and the voice were gone, and they were left alone with Jesus on the dark mountain-side.

What was the purpose of this incident? Refer to the words of Jesus in verses 26 and 27. What had taken place on this mountain was a foretaste of the kingdom that is to come. The disciples witnessed

the vision of Moses and Elijah resurrected in glory, and Jesus the future king endowed with the glory of God. Later, after the resurrection of Jesus, Peter spoke of being “eye-witnesses of his majesty” and of having heard the voice from heaven. But there was another purpose behind this event. We understand from Luke that the three glorified men talked together about Jesus’ impending death. We forget how lonely Jesus must have been in carrying out the work given to him by his Father. Although he had many friends, none of them understood that he must lay down his life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. From this experience Jesus received sympathy and help, strength and encouragement to endure the hard task which lay ahead. This was a taste of the glory that would be his for doing the will of his Father, and it was the vision of this glory that helped Jesus to bear the cruel death which he was soon to suffer.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN’S LIVES**

Peter, James and John were very privileged to see Jesus as the glorified Christ. We are privileged, too, for we have the Bible in which we can read of Jesus - what he did, the things he taught, how he died and came back to life again, and how in the future he will come again as glorious king of the whole world. As God instructed on the mountain, we must listen to Jesus.

### **WORKSHEETS**

The letters in the box read MOUNTAIN.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank you for giving us the Bible, so that we may know what your son Jesus did and said. Help us to listen and learn about him so that we may be ready to welcome him when he comes back to the earth again as the king of the world. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

‘A bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased; listen to him” (Matthew 17:5).



***John 9*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how Jesus made a blind man see, and taught that many people, who can see, are spiritually blind.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Isaiah 35:5; Matthew 13:13-17; John 1:6-14; 8:12. Find information about the Pool of Siloam, the practice of begging, and the power of the Sanhedrin.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Describe the sad figure of the blind beggar whom Jesus and the disciples saw as they were walking through Jerusalem. Help the children to try and appreciate, in some measure, the isolation felt by someone who has never been able to see. Descriptive words like blue, beautiful, clear, patterned can have no meaning for the blind. The only shapes they can imagine are those to be felt. This man was unable to work and had resigned himself to standing in the crowded street and begging from passers-by. The disciples were so upset to see this man that they were compelled to ask Jesus why such a terrible thing should have happened to him. Was it a punishment for something his parents had done, or because the man himself was bad? Jesus dismissed this idea and explained that this presented him with the opportunity to demonstrate God's power and to show that he had come to bring light to the world. Unlike many who clamoured to be healed, this man seemed to be unaware of the work of Jesus, and it was Jesus who took the initiative and approached the man.

Neither the clay nor the water held miraculous properties, but Jesus, in his understanding of the man's disability, communicated his intention to heal by touch and roused the man to respond by giving him a clear instruction to follow. Hopefully, the blind man obeyed and his obedience was rewarded. To be able to see for the first time in his life was overwhelming. Joy came with the realization that he was no longer blind; then wonder, as he took in the colourful scene around him and the movement of people. There was the puzzle of identifying objects which he had previously only felt, because his brain had now to interpret what his eyes were seeing for the first time. As he tried to hurry back to thank Jesus, he discovered that walking by sight was a strange and new experience.

On meeting his neighbours again, there was confusion on both sides; he could not, of course, recognize their faces and had to listen to their voices in order to know who was who. They were perplexed for, although they recognized him as their blind friend, they could not understand how it was possible for him to see.

One might have expected that everyone would have been thrilled for the man, but not the Pharisees. Explain to the children that they were extremely strict in their observance of the law, which stated that no one must work on the Sabbath. When they learned of the healing they were at first sceptical and then indignant, regarding such a cure as work and, therefore, a serious infringement of the law. The Pharisees were also jealous of Jesus and tried to deny the evidence of his miraculous power. It would appear that the man knew very little about Jesus but, in defending him and refuting the blind prejudice of the Pharisees, he came to see that only the Son of God, as prophesied in the scriptures, could have given him his sight. His confession of faith so angered the religious leaders that they turned him out of the synagogue. This would no doubt have meant that many people would have nothing to do with him.

Jesus was aware of the controversy that had arisen because of the miracle, and when he learned that the man had been cast out of the synagogue he went to find him and make himself known to him. The man was seeing Jesus' face for the first time, but he gladly recognized him as the Son of God, thanked him and worshipped. Jesus was pleased that the blind man could now see him, not only with his eyes but with his understanding also; whereas the Pharisees had witnessed his healing power with their own eyes, but were blind to the fact that Jesus was their promised Messiah.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

What do we mean when we say: "I see", or "Don't you see?" We can read with our own eyes the stories in the Bible and we can enjoy them. But do we sometimes fail to see the messages in them, which tell us how we should live? God wants us not only to know, but also to understand.

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, open our eyes to see what is beautiful, our minds to know what is true, our hearts to love what is good. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'" (John 8:12).

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## **THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

**100**

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### ***John 10:1-18***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show that Jesus loves and cares for everyone who trusts him.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Ezekiel 34; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2:25.

Recall the great shepherds of the Old Testament such as Abraham, Jacob and David. Look into sheep farming methods in Bible times, so that the significance of the terms in the scripture are clearly understood and can be accurately described. Be clear in your own mind of the importance of the good shepherd in Old Testament teaching, especially in regard to God as the shepherd of the people, and the religious leaders who encouraged the people to accept false beliefs and practices, thereby leading them astray. Note the link, at the end of John 9, with the religious leaders at the time of Jesus who were blind and whose sin remained.

## **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Produce a selection of articles or clothes made of wool and/or a sample of sheep's wool or a fleece. Ask the children where wool comes from, and whether they have seen flocks of sheep. Try to draw from the class as much information as possible about sheep farming in this country. A picture should emerge of the farmer skilfully using his sheep dogs to round up the sheep by driving them before him. Discuss other features of sheep farming.

Then talk about the methods used by a shepherd on the hills of Judaea. Emphasize the fact that the sheep learned to trust him so much that they followed wherever he led. The shepherd truly cared for every one of his sheep. Refer to the shepherd's search for new pasture, safe from the threat of poisonous plants or dangerous animals. Describe how each sheep has a character of its own and is distinctive in appearance and temperament. Aware of these distinctions, the shepherd would give to each an appropriate name. When he called them by name the sheep would come to him. The children might enjoy suggesting possible names. The important principle to be learned from this story is that individuals matter. Paint the scene of the flock filing through "the door" under the rod, of each sheep being counted, and of one of them perhaps being stopped by the lowered rod so that the shepherd might clean a wound and soothe it with oil.

Discuss the character of the shepherd. What sort of person is required in order to make a good shepherd? Where appropriate make a list of the children's suggestions. Having ensured that all the features referred to in John 10 have been covered, draw the analogy of Jesus as the Good Shepherd who gave his life to save the sheep. Jesus, in the way he acted towards his followers, showed all the best facets of a shepherd. He, too, knows those who are his and loves them, as they grow to love him. He called them, tended the sick, fed them, healed them, sought the lost and, in a last great sacrifice for his sheep, he gave his life, so that they might be saved.

At night, the sheep were put into folds for safety. The way in was through a narrow entrance that could be easily guarded. Jesus said that he was also the door of the sheepfold and showed men that if they wished to belong to God's fold they must come to God through him.

Impress upon the children that, although we cannot see Jesus, he is still acting as the Good Shepherd to those who try to follow his way. He still loves men and women, and boys and girls, who trust him to lead them, and he is always ready to help whenever they need him. It is only by following Jesus that we can hope to please God.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

How are we like sheep? (Easily led astray, sometimes rather silly, accident-prone, needing protection and guidance). How is Jesus like a shepherd to us?

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank you for Jesus who loved people so much that he gave his life to save them. How happy we are to know that Jesus loves us and takes care of us. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Consider also Psalm 23.

***Luke 10:25-37*****AIM OF LESSON**

To emphasize that if we say we love God, we must show that we do by loving our fellow human beings, no matter who they are.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Look into the geographical, historical and social background of the story, so that your word pictures will be vivid and accurate. Jerusalem was built on a high plateau in the Judaeen hills. It was the centre of Jewish worship, and also the centre of politics and commerce. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho (a beautiful city of palm trees built in the Jordan valley near the site cursed by God centuries before) passed through lonely country that was rocky and desolate - ideal for outlaws and bandits. Joshua 6:26; Judges 1:16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 2 Kings 17:24; Ezra 4:1-6; Matthew 25:31-46.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Ask the class to think of places they know or have heard about, where they would not wish to travel alone. Find out why they think it would be unsafe or possibly dangerous. Unfortunately muggings are commonplace today. Talk about the sort of people involved in such an incident, both those who carry out the attack and those who suffer, and especially the latter's feeling of helplessness. Some topical news item might give a lead. Such violence is not a recent phenomenon; it has been a problem throughout the ages. It was not uncommon in Jesus' day and he used the event in order to teach a lesson.

Go on to introduce the lawyer - not a lawyer in the modern sense, but a student of the Mosaic Law. Relate the conversation that preceded the story and, in doing so, quote verse 27. Jesus was always ready to answer questions on the scriptures, but he wanted the listener to understand the meaning behind the Law. Instead of just giving him a simple answer, Jesus told a powerful story, which could well have been true.

Describe the steep, rocky road from Jerusalem to Jericho, on which robbers lurked to ambush the unprotected traveller. People used to travel in companies, or caravans, which provided protection from robbers. This man evidently had urgent business and decided to risk travelling alone.

Bring home the suddenness and violence of the attack, which was cruel and meaningless. The victim was outnumbered, and the callous robbers took what they wanted, caring nothing for his suffering. They took not only his money but his clothes and all his belongings, leaving him lying in pain and without protection from the scorching sun. How long he lay there we can only guess; it may have been hours. Perhaps he heard footsteps approaching, if he was conscious, but his raised hopes were dashed as first one then a second traveller passed by. The priest was perhaps on his way to worship in the temple in Jerusalem. Maybe he had a duty to commence at a certain time, and knew that he would be late if he stopped. Similarly the Levite would probably be going to serve in the temple or returning after having done so. These two people were very much involved with religion; they were both intent on pleasing God in their own way, but they had no compassion for a fellow man. Their worship and study of God's word was meaningless - they had missed the whole point, for we show our love for God by the way we treat other people. Contrast the attitude of the priest and Levite with the immediate, unselfish response of the unnamed Samaritan. He did not see an enemy Jew in front of

him but a man in desperate need, and he took great trouble to meet that need. Note the words, “he had compassion on him”, and show that this led the Samaritan to help the injured man in a practical way.

Although this is not a point you will wish to discuss in this lesson, there is a lot of symbolism in this parable. Jerusalem is God’s city; Jericho represents a place of curse. Christ came to save fallen mankind from sin and its effects and to bring them back to God. The priest and levite were going down hill, along with the rest of mankind, but Jesus (who at the time was travelling via Jericho to Jerusalem) was going in the opposite direction. The parable does not say that the Samaritan was going to Jericho, and it will help the children’s later understanding if you are either ambivalent about the direction in which he was walking, or teach that he was going to Jerusalem. After all, the first part of a Samaritan’s journey would be towards Jerusalem, not away from it.

When Jesus had finished telling the story he asked the lawyer a question, now that the answer had been made clear. The lawyer, who was no doubt a religious man as were the priest and Levite, walked away with much to think about.

### RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN’S LIVES

Does being kind to one’s neighbour simply mean helping the people who live next door? How do you feel when you see boys and girls being cruel to each other, old people in need of help, or pictures of people starving and homeless? Most people feel sympathetic about such suffering, but is feeling sorry enough?

### WORKSHEETS

The code reads ‘Man looks at the outside but God looks at the heart’.

The solution to the puzzle is:

	H	E	L	P	<b>F</b>	U	L			
			C	A	<b>R</b>	I	N	G		
			F	O	R	<b>I</b>	V	I	N	G
G	E	N	T	L	<b>E</b>					
S	H	A	R	I	<b>N</b>	G				
			K	I	<b>D</b>					

### PRAYER

Dear Lord God, help us to feel compassion for any who suffer. Please show us how we can do something to help them. Amen.

### MEMORY VERSE

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself” (Luke 10:27).

**Luke 15****AIM OF LESSON**

To show that because God loves us, he will forgive our wrongdoing if we repent.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Psalm 32:1-5; Psalm 103:8-13; 1 John 1:9; Deuteronomy 21:16-17.

Investigate the custom of dividing an inheritance. The lost coin was probably from a headband of coins called a "semedi" which was sometimes given by a bridegroom to his bride on the occasion of their wedding. It would, of course, be greatly treasured by its owner.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Talk about the joy of finding something which was lost; it is a feeling that all the children will have experienced. When telling stories Jesus always used familiar incidents. The idea of searching for something lost would be well known to all his listeners. Describe the great multitude of people who tried to get near to Jesus in order to hear what he was saying. Among the crowd were rich and poor, young and old, shepherds, housewives, and learned men. Jesus wanted all people to know about the love of God, and he varied his stories so that they would be understood by all his audience.

The story of the lost sheep would have a particular appeal to shepherds and farmers concerned for the safety of their animals, and would enable them to appreciate more readily the joy which God feels when a sinner repents and turns to him. The story of the lost coin would have helped many of the women in the crowd to understand the happiness of the woman in the story, and to learn the lesson that Jesus was teaching.

Hearing the first two stories would have helped to prepare the minds of Jesus' listeners to receive the third, the essential teaching of which is also that of rejoicing over the recovery of something which was lost. However, the details are more significant, in that they relate more closely to the relationship of God with men and their response to him.

Tell the story simply, explaining the right of the second son to inherit one third of his father's wealth. Unlike his brother, the younger son was rebellious. He was not content to settle for his father's way of life, and wanted to find adventure. No doubt the father was sad to lose the boy and reluctant to let him go, but he agreed to the arrangement.

The next part of the story is particularly colourful. The children will readily understand the excitement of having plenty of money to spend, and a number of friends with whom to enjoy new pleasures. Point out that while the younger son was enjoying life he was thinking of no one but himself. His father and home were far from his thoughts; he felt he could do without them. But his father had not forgotten him, and was daily hoping for his return. Glad to be independent, the boy was unaware that his new companions were not true friends. The realization came when his money ran out and he found himself utterly alone. Ask the children if they have noticed that some "friends" attach themselves to them only when they have sweets or a good game, and disappear when they are really needed.

Emphasize the increasing poverty of the young man and his growing sense of loneliness. He became absolutely destitute. In desperation he took a job that most Jews would shun, since handling pigs

would offend his religious upbringing. Thoughts crowded in on him. He experienced many feelings - anger, bitterness, depression, injured pride, self-pity, nostalgia, self-examination and finally recognition of his own foolishness and his need for help. At last he thought of his father, and realized the pain that he must have caused him and how he had let him down. With all his heart he felt sorry for what he had done. He decided to return home, to confess his wrongdoing to his father, and beg for his forgiveness.

Draw particular attention to the unceasing concern of the father who was still longing for a reconciliation with his son, and who was watching for his return. Convey the joy the father felt as he ran to greet his son; a joy shared by the son as he experienced the loving welcome, and forgiveness of his father.

Only the reactions of the older brother marred their happiness. Angry and jealous he remained outside. He, too, was lost because of his unforgiving attitude. The father first sent a messenger, and then went out personally to plead with his older son who could not bear to see such a fuss made of his younger brother. Some of the children may take to heart this part of the story. Help them to see the relevance of the incident in Jesus' time, and also its relevance to their own experience. It is easy for us to behave like the older son, failing to forgive others in spite of the fact that God forgives us for the things we do wrong, if we are truly sorry and turn to him.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

The greatest lesson of this story is forgiveness; no matter what we have done, if we are really sorry, we will be forgiven. Does this mean that we can do anything we like because God will forgive us? How do we feel when we have done something wrong? What was it in the story that gave the young man lasting happiness?

### **WORKSHEETS**

The stones in the sheepfold read:

sheep	coin	lamp	lost
pigs	calf	alive	found

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank you that, like a loving father, you will always forgive us when we are sorry for the wrong we have done. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

***John 11:1-46*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show the compassion of Jesus, and that God has given Jesus the power to raise the dead to life.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Find a map to show the proximity of Bethany to Jerusalem. Study burial customs of the Jews. Luke 10:38-42; 16:31; John 10:31 and 40-42; 12:1-3 and 9-11.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

This is probably the most outstanding of the miracles that Jesus performed. Although he had already demonstrated his power to raise the dead, this was the only occasion upon which the person had been dead for four days and had been entombed. The raising of Lazarus may be considered the climax of Jesus' ministry, occurring at a time when he was very conscious of his own fast-approaching death.

Introduce the story by describing the family at Bethany where Jesus had spent some happy hours relaxing in the company of his dear friends - Mary, a quiet attentive listener, Martha, always generously hospitable, and Lazarus, their much-loved brother. Naturally, when Lazarus became seriously ill, the two sisters sent for Jesus. They knew that he was on the east bank of the river Jordan, where he was safe from his enemies in Jerusalem, who were determined to kill him. On receiving the message that he was needed in Bethany, Jesus delayed his visit. He knew that it was God's will that Lazarus should die, in order that the glory of God might be made known. Jesus understood the great significance attached to the events of the next few days. When, at last, he was ready to leave, the disciples were anxious for his safety but, seeing his determination, were willing to accompany him.

Meanwhile, Mary and Martha were hurt and disappointed that Jesus had not come immediately. They had so longed for Jesus to come and cure their brother, but now it was too late. Lazarus had died; the funeral was over and Mary and Martha were grief-stricken. Martha's confession of faith, Mary's sorrowful words and the powerful declaration of Jesus are so important that they should all be quoted direct from the text. Let the children participate by reading the dialogue in parts. It may be advisable for you to prepare the parts as for a play, together with a narrative, from John 11:20-34.

Following the "play", you should expand on the important doctrine of the resurrection. It was clear that both Martha and Mary believed that one day Lazarus would be raised from the dead, together with all those who had served God faithfully.

Show how moved Jesus was at this time. Let the children talk about the reasons why they think Jesus wept. He was sad to think that Lazarus had suffered and he shared in the grief of Mary and Martha. Jesus wept, too, knowing that within a few days his own family and friends would be grieving over his own death, and he wept because he knew that his people would reject him and there would be many who failed to understand his mission.

Ensure that the children understand how different was the scene at the tomb from anything with which they may be familiar, namely that the body had been anointed and bound round with strips of cloth prior to being sealed up in a cave. This scene should be presented in such a way as to prevent children from feeling fear or horror. Concentrate on the strength and authority of Jesus and his spoken prayer, acknowledging God's will and power at work within him. Martha and Mary began to hope as the stone



was removed. Suddenly the voice of Jesus rang out with a loud command. Suggest that there was an air of expectancy among some of the onlookers, whilst others were sceptical, and even offended at what was taking place. Then they all saw something that had never been seen before - a man who had been dead and entombed, walking out into the light. Could any of the witnesses possibly doubt that Jesus was the Son of God? Yes, even after this, some of those who had seen the miracle did not believe. Had not Jesus said: "if they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead". But there were many who did believe, and who would never forget what had happened that day.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Although we always feel sad when someone we love dies, we need not worry about it. What hope is there for the friends of Jesus? How can we make sure that Jesus will want us to live for ever with him?

Although Mary and Martha were very sad that their brother was dead, they knew for certain that one day Jesus would raise him to life. Jesus has promised to all who follow him that, even though they die, they will one day come alive again, to live with him for ever.

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank you for showing us how Jesus raised a dead man to life. We have hope that, when Jesus comes back, he will raise to life all those who have believed in him. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live (John 11:25).

**Mark 10:46-52****AIM OF LESSON**

To show that faith in Jesus involves believing that he can perform miracles, and that Jesus gladly responds to people who have such faith.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Isaiah 35:5. Find a map showing the Jordan valley, Jericho and Jerusalem.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Introduce the lesson by attempting to convey the feelings of Bartimaeus as he was jostled by the crowd and could feel the excitement without being able to see what was happening. The following suggestions may be helpful: Ask the children to close their eyes while listening to a tape-recording of street or crowd noises, and ask such questions as: "What is happening? How many people are there? What sort of vehicles can you hear?" etc. It might be useful to ask someone in the class to help you with a dialogue along the following lines: "Don't you think this is lovely? I had it for my birthday." "Oh, yes, I have two of those. They are very useful", while the children keep their eyes closed. Another idea is to ask the children to put their hands into a bag of assorted objects. When the children have identified the objects, ask: "Whose photograph is it? What colour is the postage stamp? What is the title of the book?" These exercises should help the children to understand something of the frustration of not being able to see.

Bartimaeus was forced to beg in order to live, since there was no welfare provision or suitable employment for the blind at that time. At the time of the story he was sitting by the side of the road near an entrance to the city when he heard the excited crowd approaching. Having acute hearing, which the blind so often have, he was soon aware that the cause of the excitement was the visit of Jesus of Nazareth. He had heard of the wonderful things that Jesus had done. Now Bartimaeus had one great hope: now was his chance. He knew he *must* speak to Jesus. His confidence in the power of Jesus to cure him was total. He must shout loud enough for Jesus to hear above the crowd. He listened carefully and judged the right moment to call out. Point out the implications of the expression "Son of David". The use of this title reveals that Bartimaeus knew that he was addressing the king, the Messiah. Bartimaeus underwent the extremes of tense anxiety, trembling hope, and then intense relief as willing hands helped him forward. In his eagerness he flung aside his cloak. Nothing must get in his way.

Everybody, including Jesus, knew perfectly well what Bartimaeus wanted so desperately, so why did Jesus ask that question? Jesus evidently required Bartimaeus to declare his faith, not only for his own benefit, but for that of the crowd. Jesus' reply showed the importance of that faith which was now being rewarded. Jesus did not even touch the man. The cure was immediate and complete. What joy to be able to see at last! Now Bartimaeus could begin to do all the things he had been prevented from doing; and the thing he most wanted to do was to follow Jesus.

**RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Bartimaeus must have wished: "If only I could see ...". We are not blind, but we may have similar feelings about other problems and disappointments. Do you sometimes wish: "If only I could have this

...” or, “If only I could do that ... “? Our best plan is to do what Bartimaeus did and call to Jesus. How can we do that? If we show the same confidence in him, we know Jesus will gladly answer our call. The answer may not necessarily be the one we expect, but we can be sure it will be the best answer.

## WORKSHEETS

The jumbled words are:

(in the moon)	ROADSIDE, FEET
(in the leaf)	CROWD, FAITH
(in the star)	JESUS, RABBI
(in the sun)	BEGGING, JERICHO
(in the flower)	HEALED, JUMPED
(in the butterfly)	SON OF DAVID, DISCIPLES
(in the apple)	MERCY, CLOAK
(in the bird)	BLIND, SHOUT
(in the tree)	BARTIMAEUS, FOLLOWED

## PRAYER

At this point, rather than voicing a prayer for the children to follow, suggest that everyone in the class will have his/her own words to say to God. A preliminary discussion will help the children to put their thoughts into words. Ask them to close their eyes and, after beginning in this kind of way, “Dear Lord God, today we ask you to listen to our thoughts as we each tell you about our own problems ... “ allow a brief silence and then conclude: “We thank you, Lord, for hearing us” or words to that effect.

The children will react to the sincerity of your own example as you participate in this silent prayer.

## MEMORY VERSE

“All things are possible to him who believes” (Mark 9:23).

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## ZACCHAEUS

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### *Luke 19:1-10*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To show that Jesus saved Zacchaeus and changed his way of thinking.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

Find out information concerning the collection of the Roman taxes.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Tax collectors were even less popular in the time of Jesus than they are today. They had the added stigma of working for the hated Roman conquerors, and it was well known that they took a “cut” for themselves. Ask the children whether they realize that their parents have to pay taxes, and explain the

reasons why. Being the chief tax collector in Jericho, Zacchaeus held an important position. However, his apparent wealth belied his honesty and sincerity and gave rise to people's suspicion and distrust of him. He was an unhappy man. His fellow countrymen avoided him, and his feelings led him to realize that something was wrong in his life. Zacchaeus had heard about the preacher and healer, Jesus of Nazareth and, when he learned that this godly man was coming through Jericho, he felt compelled to see Jesus.

Ask the class to imagine ways in which Zacchaeus may have tried to get a better view. The children will have experienced this difficulty. But, whereas children are often helped by being lifted up or invited to the front, Zacchaeus no doubt met with resistance to his efforts because of his unpopularity. Anticipating the route that Jesus would take, he ran ahead of the crowd. Then, with a flash of inspiration, he scrambled up a tree. He had found an ideal observation point, high above the taunts of the crowd.

When Jesus reached the tree he looked up, straight into the eyes of Zacchaeus. He had probably never seen or heard of Zacchaeus before, yet he called him by name. It must have astounded the tax collector to be singled out in this way by Jesus, and to be further honoured by being invited to give him hospitality. Was there pride in his heart as he led Jesus away from the muttering crowd, or did he experience a feeling of humility in the presence of Jesus?

Zacchaeus must have listened eagerly to the words Jesus spoke - words which touched his heart. He felt genuinely sorry for his past way of life, and publicly stated that he would make amends for any dishonesty to the extent of paying back four times any amount which he may have fraudulently obtained. He needed to put right the wrongs he had done so that he could start a new life in Jesus. Having made this commitment to his new master, Zacchaeus felt happy, relieved of his burden of guilt. Zacchaeus, who was lost, depressed and friendless, had been saved, uplifted and befriended by the Lord Jesus. Jesus, recognizing the genuineness of Zacchaeus' conversion, was able to say: "Today salvation has come to this house".

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

At the beginning of the story we learned that many tax collectors like Zacchaeus was greedy, rich and unhappy. At the end, he was planning to give away much of his money and was extremely happy. In what way was he richer at the end of the story than at the beginning? Do we feel ashamed when we have been greedy or have cheated someone? Can we try to remember the example of Zacchaeus and feel so sorry that we want to put things right and start again? We know this will make *us* feel better, and please Jesus, too.

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, help us to know and to admit when we have cheated someone because we were greedy. Please give us the courage to say that we are sorry and help us to do our best to put it right. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

"The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

***Matthew 20:1-16*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show that God is loving and generous, and that we should not question his wisdom.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Matthew 19:6-30; Luke 17:10; Romans 6:23; Romans 9:20. Look into methods of vine-cultivation in Bible times.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

This is a difficult parable to teach children because it is concerned with a kind of thinking that is contrary to human reasoning. Consequently, you must have a clear idea of the message. This is why the context of Matthew 19 is important; it leads into Jesus' illustration of service and reward. Note the question of the young man (19:16) followed by Jesus' answer, and the question that this produced from Peter. Both questions reflected the human idea of reward for efforts. Jesus wished to show that God's "reward" is by grace, and not earned by works.

If available, a bunch of grapes could be used both as a visual aid and a starting point. Failing this a good picture would do. Let the children share some of the grapes, and then talk about them. Ask if they know how grapes grow: some children may have seen them growing in greenhouses. Extend the discussion by drawing on any knowledge that the children might have of the cultivation of grapes in Mediterranean countries today, and what they know about vineyards in the Middle East in the past. Build up a picture of the vineyard enclosed by a wall for protection or growing on terraces, with luxuriant vines bearing huge clusters of grapes; the winepresses and vats hewn out of the rock, the tending of the vines by hired workers, and various other tasks. Describe the time of the harvest and the treading of the grapes during long, hard but happy days of work by the hired men.

Recount how the owner left his vineyard and went into the market place where people gathered who wanted work, and where business was usually transacted. There he engaged some labourers to work for him. The word "idle", or "doing nothing" (20:6) simply means unemployed. Note that it was the owner of the vineyard who sought them, and not they who sought the owner, and that all who were called accepted willingly and readily. Emphasize the different times of day when new workers were called. Those called early in the day made an agreement for a fixed sum. Do not become involved in how much a denarius is worth by today's reckoning. Sufficient to say that it was a silver coin paid for a full day's work. Make the point that the arrangements were different for each transaction.

The conclusion of the story presents an opportunity for imaginative description. Describe the scene at the end of the day as the sun was setting and the men, tired but satisfied, left their work, dressed and assembled to receive their wages. Convey the reaction of the various labourers - those first in line would be surprised and overjoyed at being so well paid, but those paid last would naturally assume that they would receive more than one denarius.

At this point let the children convey their reaction. There will probably be a good deal of sympathy in the class for those who had worked all day long. Some may even say that it was unfair, as did the workers. Emphasize strongly the stern reproach of the master. At the end of the story make it clear that there were three ways in which those who grumbled were wrong: firstly, they had entered into an

agreement which had been honoured; secondly, they had no right to challenge the decision of the owner of the vineyard because he was the master and they were servants; thirdly, they were at fault in comparing themselves with the others and in being jealous.

Remind the children that Jesus told his stories for a specific purpose. Try to draw from them the fact that in the story God is represented by the master. It is he who calls people to his service, and he who will reward them all in his wisdom and by his grace with his gift of eternal life, whether they have served him for a long or a short period of time.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Many people today grumble when others appear to have more than they themselves. The words "it's not fair" are often heard. Next time you hear yourself saying "it's not fair", stop and think. Is it really not fair, or are you just comparing what you have with that of somebody else? If we wish God to choose us, we should be learning to think less of ourselves and more about the kind of people God wants us to be.

### **WORKSHEETS**

The code reads 'The free gift of God is eternal life'.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank you for the gift of Jesus, who teaches us how to think and how to behave. Help us to be the kind of boys and girls you want us to be, so that we can prepare to receive your great gift of living with Jesus in his kingdom. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

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## **JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM**

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### ***Luke 19:28-42***

### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show the humility of Jesus and his steadfastness of purpose.

### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

2 Kings 9:13; Psalm 118:22-29; Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:1-9.

### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

In order to help the children to gain a realistic mental picture of this scene, it might be useful to begin by showing them photographs of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives as well as artists' impressions of

Herod's temple and the landscape in Jesus' day. Point out the dry, stony road, winding over the hill from Jericho and Bethany, down the western slope, across the brook Kidron and up to the city.

Describe vividly the groups of pilgrims making their way along the road to the city. The travellers would be in a happy mood as they looked forward to this highlight of the year, the serious but joyful feast of the passover. There would be much singing of psalms, the sharing of news and happy laughter as friendships were renewed and praise to God expressed. When this time of year came round, most Jews did their utmost to get to Jerusalem for the celebration of the feast, and it was natural that Jesus and his friends would wish to be there. The disciples were doubtful about Jesus going up to Jerusalem, because they knew that their master's life was in danger. But Jesus knew he had to go, and that momentous events at that time would bring about the culmination of his ministry. The disciples sensed his mood of determination and set out with him from Jericho for the last part of the journey to the capital.

They travelled on foot, as they usually did. Upon arriving at Bethphage, however, the disciples were surprised to be given some unusual instructions. They had no knowledge of any prior arrangements having been made, but when they followed the instructions to collect the colt (young ass) everything worked out as Jesus had said it would. The bewilderment of the disciples turned to excitement when they saw that Jesus intended to enter Jerusalem riding on the colt. By riding an ass, and not a war-horse, Jesus was demonstrating that his mission was one of peace. Many of the people who saw Jesus ride by would have recalled to mind the words of Zechariah. Let the children find this verse for themselves and read it aloud. Tell them that because the people recognized that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, they also knew that he was the promised king. They had been waiting for him to make himself known to the nation and to claim the throne of Israel, for he was the rightful heir. When they saw Jesus riding in majesty towards the city, they assumed that the moment had come. In their excitement they cheered him and praised God and called to the crowds around them to acknowledge him.

Convey the atmosphere of rejoicing that accompanied Jesus on his way. Many recognized him and greeted him gladly. There were those who recalled the prophecy and were overjoyed to see it being fulfilled before their eyes. Filled with religious fervour they expressed their praise in the words of Psalm 118. Many more were caught up in the exhilaration of the moment and added their voices to the clamour. It may be helpful at this point to ask the children whether they have experienced the thrill of witnessing a procession involving a visiting celebrity, and their remembered excitement could be used to fire their imaginations. Children would have been waving and shouting, eager to get a better view, and helping to spread palm branches and coats to form a carpet along the road.

Contrast this euphoria with the heaviness of heart that Jesus felt. He was fully aware that their adulation would be short-lived. They misunderstood his present mission and were soon to be disillusioned. Jesus knew that he was about to face his greatest ordeal; his people would reject him and put him cruelly to death. He was saddened, too, because he foresaw that the judgement of God would fall upon his beloved city and upon his misguided people. He took little pleasure, therefore, in the cheering crowd, and was moved to tears at the sight of the city of Jerusalem and its magnificent temple, doomed to destruction. This was to be the city of the great king, the centre of the kingdom of peace, but its leading men were about to cause the death of God's anointed. Jesus understood, however, what his disciples had yet to learn, that what was to follow was God's will and was necessary in order to bring about salvation and the everlasting kingdom, which had been prophesied.

The Pharisees' reaction was predictable. They were very worried by this demonstration of loyalty and affection towards Jesus. It seemed to them as if "the whole world" was following Jesus, the man they hated and feared and had planned to arrest. Feeling inadequate to deal with the situation, they

appealed to Jesus to use his influence to stop the demonstration. They must have been even more frustrated by Jesus' reply.

Although Jesus did nothing to curb the disciples' excitement, there was no air of victory about him. His ride was not that of a conquering hero but that of a meek and lowly man of peace. His disciples could not, at this time, comprehend the true significance of this incident. Little did they know how much the events of the next few days were to test their allegiance to their king and widen their understanding.

**RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Would you like to have been in that happy crowd, which cheered Jesus and shouted "Hosanna" as he rode into Jerusalem? Why would you be glad for Jesus to be king? What does the Bible tell us about the day when Jesus will be king? On that day, we shall be able to welcome him with joy.

**WORKSHEETS**

The solution to the puzzle is:

	<b>C</b>	O	L	T	
	<b>H</b>	I	L	L	
J	<b>R</b>	U	S	A	L
E		S	A	L	E
	<b>D</b>	I	S	C	I
		P	L	E	S
	<b>S</b>	A	T		
	<b>T</b>	W	O		
I	<b>T</b>	H	E	L	O
S		R	O	R	D
	<b>H</b>	O	S	A	N
	<b>E</b>	N	N	A	
B		T	H	A	N
	<b>K</b>	I	L	L	
O	<b>I</b>	V	E	S	
L					
B	<b>R</b>	A	C	H	E
	<b>N</b>	C	H	E	S
	<b>G</b>	A	R	M	E
		N	T	S	

**PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we pray that your kingdom will soon come, when we will be able to shout with joy and welcome Jesus as our king. Amen.

**MEMORY VERSE**

"The crowds that went before him and that followed him shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!'" (Matthew 21:9).



***Mark 11:15-18*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show the reverence that Jesus felt for his Father's house, and to show Jesus as God's appointed judge over his people.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Isaiah 56:7; Jeremiah 7:1-20; Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:11-14; Luke 19:45-48. Study the practices of temple worship in Jesus' day.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

As a setting for this lesson, lead the class on an imaginary excursion through the temple to the very centre and heart of Jewish worship: through the great arched gateways leading to the Court of the Gentiles, with its columns and colonnades, to the marble screen separating this from the inner court, with its notice above the entrance steps "Let no foreigner enter within this screen and enclosure around the Holy Place"; and beyond that to the Court of the Women, and further still the court where only the men of Israel were allowed to go. In the centre stood the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place separated by the veil.

Jesus had been to the temple many times since his first visit at the age of twelve, and would no doubt have seen it at passover time on many occasions. Particularly at passover there would be great activity. Money changers were required because pilgrims came from many different countries and their coins needed to be changed into shekels. Foreign currency bore the heads of emperors or pagan gods and goddesses, and were unacceptable in the temple. Animals needed to be sold because those who had travelled long distances were unable to bring a sacrifice with them.

It was evident, however, that excessive charges were made for money changing - sometimes as much as twenty per cent on each transaction. Traders selling animals and birds, because they had a monopoly, charged enormously inflated prices. One can imagine the constant confusion and noise - the shouting, haggling and grumbling, together with the bleating of sheep, the fluttering of birds in their cages, and the din of the clamorous crowd. This was the prelude to the act of worshipping God. No wonder Jesus' anger was aroused. In the very place where God should have been revered and worshipped - an act demanding humility and obedience to his commands - the basest human attitudes of greed, selfishness and irreverence were dominant. The House of God was being desecrated.

Following his entry into Jerusalem Jesus had visited the temple and seen what was going on, then had left to spend the night in Bethany. No doubt he had spent time pondering what to do about this corruption of God's house. He could not allow this to continue unchecked. The words of Isaiah came into his mind: "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples", and he must have shared his Father's displeasure at the people's failure to understand what it was he required of them. The next day, with complete authority, Jesus returned and interrupted their trading by driving out the merchants and scattering the coins on the floor. Quoting from the scriptures, which the people should have known, Jesus then declared that the temple was a holy place for the worship of God and must not be profaned. His quotation from Jeremiah should have reminded them that the glorious temple of Solomon had been destroyed because the people of Israel had angered God with their wicked deeds.

There was an immediate reaction. The traders recoiled in fear and indignation, and the chief priests were furious, but powerless, because they knew that Jesus was right. They were offended by his challenge to their authority, within the temple precincts, and refused to accept that he had any right to intervene. They resented his condemnation of them and his popularity with the people, and they determined to have him put to death. The disciples had been stunned by Jesus' demonstration of righteous anger, and feared the hatred of the Pharisees. Now they were even more anxious for Jesus' safety, and very relieved when he took them out of the city before nightfall.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

In Sunday School we pray together. God invites us to talk to him and has promised to hear us. He is great and holy and all-powerful, and we must remember this. How can we show God that we respect his greatness, when we pray? How should we behave in Sunday School? What kind of attitude will please God most?

### **WORKSHEETS**

The code reads 'In this place is someone greater than the temple'.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank you that Jesus had the courage to stand up for what was right. Help us always to remember the reverence that is due to your name. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him" (Habakkuk 2:20).

***Matthew 25:1-13*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show that we should be always ready and watching for the return of Jesus, and that we should put his work before anything else.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Familiarize yourself with marriage customs in Bible times. The wedding ceremony comprised various steps, not all of which were taken at every wedding. These included the garments of the bride and groom; bridesmaids and friends waiting for, and accompanying the bridegroom to the bride's home, and the wedding supper - sometimes held in the bride's home though more usually held in the groom's home to which the bride was subsequently escorted, often accompanied by singing, music and dancing. A model or picture of a lamp would be a useful visual aid.

Matthew 24:29-51. Warnings against unpreparedness and exhortations to watchfulness lead into this parable.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Find out how many children have been to a wedding or perhaps been bridesmaids. Talk about the importance of the occasion, the preparations and the excitement, and refer briefly to the duties of a bridesmaid today. Describe as clearly as possible, an Eastern wedding, with the lengthy preparations, lively music, rich food and beautiful dresses. Because of the hot climate weddings took place in the evening, necessitating the use of lamps for the procession. Describe the type of lamp used and, if you have a model, trim the lamp as the bridesmaids would have done. All the bridesmaids had lighted lamps with them, but the bridegroom was delayed. Throughout their long wait the bridesmaids' lamps burned as they slept. But not until they were awakened by shouts heralding the approach of the bridegroom and they rose to trim their lamps, did five of them realize that they were running out of oil. In vain they tried to borrow from their companions, and their attempt to buy oil also failed. By the time they returned from their search the procession had moved on to the marriage feast and the door was closed to them.

When relating this part of the story, help the children to imagine the panic, the pleading, the desire to rectify matters, the disappointment, and then the remorse. How the bridesmaids would have wished that they had prepared themselves properly. Draw on the experience of the children who will have known the regret of leaving something undone until it is too late.

Not only had the bridesmaids let the bridegroom down by failing in their duty; they had also arrived too late to be welcomed at the feast.

Remind the children that Jesus told this story to teach a lesson. He wanted to make his hearers think about preparing themselves for his own arrival on that day when he would return again to the earth. He hoped to find people watching and waiting for him, well-prepared and ready to greet him. He was warning the people that he would come suddenly, and unexpectedly, and that those waiting for him must be prepared and ready at all times.

## RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES

It is easy to be like the foolish bridesmaids and leave undone important matters until it is too late. Can you think of an example of this? Some of us leave our Sunday School homework until the very last minute, and do it just before we leave for Sunday School. Would it be a good idea to get into the habit of preparing carefully by thinking ahead?

How can we be ready for Jesus so that when he comes we shall be happy to see him, and he to see us? (Try to show how precious the Bible is and that we should never take it for granted. Each of us must learn to know and love Jesus personally, by reading our Bibles and putting into practice what we learn, before it is too late.)

## WORKSHEETS

The messages are 'Lamps but no oil' and 'Oil in jars'.

The code reads 'Watch for you do not know the day your Lord is coming'.

## PRAYER

Dear Lord God, we thank you that we can pray to you, and read the Bible which is a personal message to each of us. Help us to treasure your teaching and to prepare ourselves for Jesus by reading it and by praying every day. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

"Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:42).

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## THE STORY OF THE TALENTS

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### *Matthew 25:14-28-*

## AIM OF LESSON

To show that we should use the abilities and opportunities God has given us to serve him.

## BACKGROUND STUDY

Matthew 24:45-47; 1 Corinthians 12:4-26.

## SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

At the commencement of the story, point out that the master had to go away for a while and leave his servants in charge of his property. Show the trust he had in them in giving them the responsibility of managing his affairs. Note also the wisdom of the master in dividing the responsibilities according to his knowledge of each servant's ability. He left them in no doubt as to what was expected of them during his absence. They were to *use* what he had entrusted to them.

Describe what each servant did with his portion. The first two servants set to work immediately and made the most of their opportunities for their master's sake. Perhaps one of them bought a farm. He would buy seed and grow crops, and later buy cattle and sheep and make still more money. The other servant may, perhaps, have been interested in trading, buying wine, oil and spices to sell to people who were unable to go to the market. The third servant thought about his own talent and decided that it was no use trying to do anything with it. He didn't want to lose the money, and he also wanted to forget about it - not to be reminded all the time that he should have made use of it. He decided to hide it in a hole in the ground, and then went on his way without a thought for the return of his master.

Note the reaction of their master when he found out what each servant had done with the money he had entrusted to them. They each had to give an account of their labours. The master was pleased with the first two servants, because they had proved themselves to be loyal, obedient and hardworking and had sought to please him. They were generously rewarded. The master dealt harshly with the third servant because of his idleness and disobedience, and because he had given no thought to his master's wishes. Furthermore the third servant proved himself unworthy by making excuses for failing his master.

There are several important lessons to be learned from this parable. The first and most straightforward for the children to understand is that God has given us the money we have, since all we have comes from him. Some have more than others, but no matter how much or how little we have we can use it in ways which please or displease him. Secondly, discuss the English meaning of the word "talent" and the way in which we can describe people as talented, meaning that they are endowed with differing strengths or abilities. God has given us these gifts as well. Thirdly, talk about the different kinds of personalities of people, which fit them for different kinds of service. Most of us have abilities, talents, attributes of one kind or another, and have opportunities to use them to the full, either in God's service or exclusively for ourselves.

Remind the children that in the story the master went away and came back, and that when he returned the servants had to give an account of what they had done. Ask the class who they think is represented by the master in the story. Explain that when Jesus returns, those who have dedicated their lives to him will receive far more than they could possibly imagine, and will be overjoyed to hear the words: "Well done".

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

What do you think are your strong points? What abilities have you? Are you talented in any way? How can we use such qualities to serve God? What work did Jesus ask his disciples to do while he was away? (Mark 16:15). Is there any way in which you can help do this?

### **WORKSHEETS**

The talents are (left to right): running, writing, singing, games, drawing, baking, sewing, making things, swimming, gardening, painting, reading, maths, listening, and talking. The squares left should read 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation'.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, thank you for making us as we are, and for giving us the abilities we have. Help us to use our talents well, so that you will be pleased with the things we try to do. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

“Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21).

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## THE LAST SUPPER; JESUS IS ARRESTED

111

### *Matthew 26:14-56*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To show the significance of the memorial meal. To show how Christ submitted himself to God's will, and was strengthened through prayer.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

Genesis 37:2-8; Exodus 12:1-20; Psalm 41:9; Hebrews 5:7-10.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Talk to the children about the attitude of the high priest and other Jewish leaders towards Jesus, and of their determination to have him killed. They had been looking for an opportunity to apprehend him but, for a number of reasons, they had failed. Wherever Jesus went he was surrounded by people, many of whom were his followers. It would have been difficult, therefore, for his enemies to take him in public. A riot would probably have ensued, arousing the anger of the Roman authorities. When the Jewish leaders tried to trap Jesus by their artful questions, Jesus confounded them with his wise answers. Another reason for their lack of success was simply that the time was not yet right (John 8:20). The solution to their problem presented itself unexpectedly, in the form of Judas Iscariot who offered to assist them by leading them to Jesus at an opportune moment. The children will be shocked to learn that Jesus was to be betrayed by one of his disciples, and that it was to be done for a sum of money. The similarity to the selling of Joseph by his brothers is obvious.

At this point, explain that Jesus was aware of Judas' intentions and yet, as preparation was made for Jesus and the disciples to share the passover meal, Judas was nevertheless included. The children will need to be reminded that the passover was a special religious feast which the Jews observed annually, to remind them of the way in which God had rescued them from slavery in Egypt. All Jews regarded this feast as fundamental to their faith, and a vitally necessary part of their worship. The meal that Jesus and his disciples shared that night was a moving and solemn occasion. Describe the scene in the upper room, with the group spread out around a low table, lit by flickering oil lamps. Try to convey the atmosphere of intimacy, and the tension that the disciples felt; they sensed that this was a special occasion and that Jesus was greatly moved. When Jesus spoke of being betrayed by one of them, they were disturbed and incredulous. Only Judas was unmoved by the talk of betrayal; rather, his resolve was strengthened as he left them in order to carry out his evil plan.

If possible, demonstrate the simplicity of the sharing of the bread and wine by showing the class a plate of bread and a cup of wine used in the breaking of bread service. Explain that Jesus attached great importance to this simple ceremony, and describe simply the symbolism of the bread and the

wine. Thereafter this memorial meal was to be repeated regularly, to remind the followers that he had died to save them. The children may begin to appreciate the parallel with the death of the lamb that had saved the Israelites so many years before. Draw the simplest kind of parallels between the two sacrifices - the spotless lamb and the sinless saviour, the blood shed, the salvation which was accomplished, and the need for the regular commemoration of the event. For the children who may not already be aware of the fact, point out that every Sunday the command of Jesus to keep the memorial feast is obeyed.

In spite of all that Jesus had told his disciples, they did not fully appreciate the significance of what had taken place in that upper room although they felt troubled and apprehensive. On the way to the Mount of Olives, every word that Jesus spoke added to their sense of foreboding. Peter was moved to declare his determination to support his master to the utmost, no matter what might happen, and he reacted indignantly to the prediction that this would not be the case, vowing that he was ready to die if necessary.

Describe the walk out of the city and up the hill to the cool and quiet place that Jesus often visited. In the darkness Jesus knelt to pray. Only Peter, James and John were near enough to hear what he said and to feel something of the anguish that he expressed. Emphasize that Jesus felt a very great need to talk to his Father about the awful suffering that he was shortly to endure. In his prayer he expressed his complete trust in God's love, and prayed not that he should be spared, but for strength to accomplish his Father's will. In this we have the perfect example of prayer. For a long time Jesus struggled to express his innermost feelings, and to concentrate his mind upon the will and purpose of God. His desire for communion with his Father was so compelling that it transcended his need for sleep. Suggest the loneliness and disappointment he felt at finding his closest friends asleep when he needed their prayers, and their support.

Contrast the serenity of this scene with the violent commotion that followed. Jesus and his companions were suddenly aware of the noisy approach of many people, and the sight of flaring torches. The disciples were panic-stricken when they saw the armed soldiers, but Jesus stood calmly as Judas approached him. Convey the heartless treachery of Judas, who used a sign of affection to betray Jesus to his enemies. Describe the expressions on the faces of Jesus' captors, as the guards secured him. Desperately Peter lashed out in defence of his Lord and was rebuked for it. Describe how composed Jesus was; he accepted his arrest without resistance but, as he had predicted, his friends felt so helpless and afraid that they deserted him.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Jesus is an example to all his followers. Did you notice, in today's lesson, the ways in which Jesus showed us how to behave - in caring for his friends, in his attitude towards his enemies, in prayer, and in doing what he knew God wanted him to do? How can we follow his example in our lives?

## **WORKSHEETS**

Year 2: The code reads: 'This has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled'.

Year 4: Jesus prayed: 'My father, if it is possible may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will'.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank you for sending Jesus to be an example to us. Help us to think of him every day and to follow his ways. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41).

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## PETER’S DENIAL; JESUS’ FORGIVENESS

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*Luke 22:54-71; John 21:15-17*

### AIM OF LESSON

To show how Peter failed his master and suffered remorse, and to demonstrate the understanding and love of Jesus in forgiving him.

### BACKGROUND STUDY

Matthew 26:31-35; Mark 16:7; Luke 22:31-34; 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5; Hebrews 4:15-16.

### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

The scene for this lesson has already been set in the previous one. Jesus had been led away, and his disciples had fled in fear and confusion. Although Jesus had warned them that he was to suffer and die, they were unprepared for the cruel reality of his arrest. The forceful Peter wanted to be near his master and to know what was to become of him. Imagine his feelings as he followed at a distance, alone and apprehensive. He was anxious about his master, whom he loved, and afraid for his own safety.

Describe the scene in the courtyard of Caiaphas’ house, and try to capture the atmosphere - the lateness of the hour, the intense darkness of the night, the bitter cold, the flickering yellow light from the guards’ brazier, lamps and torches, and the speculation as to the outcome of the night’s work, now that their mission had been accomplished. Peter, frightened by the situation into which his impetuosity and concern for Jesus had led him, hoped to remain an anonymous observer in the crowd. Convey the shock he must have felt at being recognized. As the light from the fire illuminated Peter’s face, the maid uttered a loud accusation and pointed him out to her companions. Instinctively, Peter lied to protect himself. Children will all have experienced this natural defence mechanism. Perhaps Peter then moved away from the glare of the flames to become less conspicuous among the shadows. The second challenge was direct, and also directly denied. Again Peter moved away and the long night dragged on. Perhaps he grew impatient for news and began to ask questions. He spoke, of course, with a Galilean accent, which was very noticeable to the local Judaeans. His anger in response to the third accusation was symptomatic of a man desperate to cover up a lie. All his fear and anxiety about the future, his tiredness, discomfort and guilt, welled up inside him and culminated in a vehement outburst.

We are told that the cock crowed while Peter was still speaking, so that it was the strident crowing of the cock that silenced and mortified him. Ask the children to recall the significance of this sound and the prophetic words of Jesus (Matthew 26:34). At that moment, Peter caught sight of Jesus, either through an open door or because Jesus was being brought out. Stress the poignancy of the moment



as the eyes of the two men met. Words were not needed to convey the sorrow of Jesus and the shame of Peter. Wretchedly Peter turned away, stumbled out of the courtyard away from the crowd, and gave way to despair.

Allow the children to talk about the feelings of Peter at this point, and his wretchedness at not having the opportunity to be reconciled with Jesus before he was put to death. Without developing the story of Jesus any further, point out that Peter was unable to talk alone with Jesus again and to tell him how sorry he was. How full of remorse he must have felt after Jesus had died, but it was too late for him to put matters right. Tell the children that it would be wrong to leave the story here because, in fact, Peter was to have the opportunity of talking to Jesus again, after Jesus had been raised from the dead. Immediately after the resurrection, the women who had visited the tomb conveyed a message from an angel, which specifically mentioned Peter, reassuring him that Jesus wanted to see him.

Remind the children that Jesus did appear on a number of occasions to a large number of people, and of the twelve it was Peter who saw him first. We are not told what passed between them at this first meeting, but a later conversation is recorded.

The details of the incident concerning the miraculous catch of fish are to be covered in a later lesson and need not be described here. The only thing that remains to be dealt with now is the exchange between Jesus and Peter. Do not attempt to expound the subtle play on words, but make the point that Jesus challenged him three times, so echoing the three challenges that led to his denial. On this occasion, Peter responded with fervent expressions of loyalty and devotion. The commission that Jesus gave him, to be a leader in the church, would have convinced Peter that he had been forgiven and that his master had confidence in his future strength. Tell the children that this confidence proved to be well-placed, for Peter never again let Jesus down, but went on to become a wise and powerful preacher who played a leading role in the early church. Show them that he wrote letters of advice and instruction to other Christians, which we are able to read today.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Why did Peter feel ashamed? What had he done wrong? Did Jesus understand how he felt? Did Jesus forgive him? Have you ever felt that you have done something so bad that no one could forgive you? Do you know that, even if you felt like that, Jesus would know about it and would understand how unhappy you were feeling? All you would have to do would be to say you were sorry, and mean it, and you could be sure you would be forgiven.

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank you for the promise that if we are truly sorry when we do wrong you will forgive us. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

'Jesus said to Peter: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren"' (Luke 22:32).

***Matthew 27:1-26*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how Jesus was falsely accused by the Jewish leaders, and how he maintained dignity and courage throughout his trial.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Isaiah 53:3-7. Find out about the status of Jews under the Roman occupation.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Link this lesson with the previous one by reminding the children that Jesus had been arrested and taken to the house of Caiaphas. Establish that Jesus was now in the hands of a foreign authority, accused by his own people and deserted by his friends.

This is a lesson of sharp contrasts - between the behaviour of Pilate and the humility of the Lord Jesus; and between the hatred and envy of the Jewish leaders and Jesus' loving submission to his Father's will.

Tiberius, the Roman Emperor, had appointed Pontius Pilate to be Governor of Judaea. Pilate controlled the occupying forces, whose presence would have been all too evident in the streets of Jerusalem. As Governor, he could endorse or reverse death sentences passed by the Sanhedrin, which had to be submitted to him. Historians tell us that Pilate disliked the Jews and that he was responsible for acts of brutality, which provoked them to riot on a number of occasions.

Jesus was led in chains to stand before this man. What a visual contrast the two presented: the one bruised and in fetters, the other, richly attired, regal and forbidding. And yet, in the gospel account, there is an overwhelming impression that the one in command of the situation, with his quiet dignity, was the prisoner, Jesus Christ. It is clear that Pilate was both impressed and affected by the prisoner's bearing. Furthermore, he was disturbed by his wife's urgent message (Matthew 27:19). Pilate's doubt about the prisoner's guilt gave rise to the Jews' anger and frustration. They had to persist in pressing the case since they were powerless to implement the death sentence. Pilate's apparent confidence began to crumble when he sensed the beginnings of a riot. The leaders of the Jews had lost all sense of right and justice, and even resorted to inciting the crowd to shout for the release of a robber and murderer, in order to secure the crucifixion of the man whose death they sought. It was imperative for Pilate to avert a breakdown of law and order (having already been in trouble with Caesar for mishandling Jewish affairs). Faced with a dilemma - to condemn an innocent man or to risk a violent disturbance - he demonstrated visually that he had abdicated his responsibility.

With the self-convicting words - "His blood be on us and on our children!" - the Jews sent the Son of God to his death.

**RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

In this account we have a very challenging lesson for ourselves. We will probably never have to face such a terrible ordeal as Jesus endured, but his faith and courage are an inspiration to us all. He remained calm and unprotesting, even though he was innocent, because he knew that God was in control. Can we think of occasions when we have strongly protested, even when we were guilty?

## WORKSHEETS

These should be self-explanatory.

### PRAYER

Dear Lord God, whenever we are tempted to get our own back on people who hurt us, we will try to remember to follow the example of your son, Jesus. Amen.

### MEMORY VERSE

“Like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7).

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## THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS

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### *Matthew 27:27-66*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To describe the events of the crucifixion in order to evoke the children's sympathetic response. (At this stage one can but sow the seed, hoping that it will grow into fuller understanding later). To show that Jesus allowed himself to die, because he understood God's purpose.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

Isaiah 53. John 19:19-42.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

It is not easy to convey the significance of Christ's sacrifice to children of this age group. However, your personal conviction regarding the importance of the account will be transferred in some measure to the class. While the story should provide a moving experience, it should not cause distress. A good teacher will be sensitive and adaptable to the response of the children.

It is important for you to be fully conversant with the sequence of events, so that the narration is accurate and fluent. Brief notes will aid the memory and leave you free to concentrate on bringing the story to life with colourful description. Paint a mental picture of the actions of Jesus' tormentors. Children will be able to identify, to some extent, with the distress and humiliation Jesus felt.

Explain that when a person was crucified, the cause of death was asphyxia; children require simple facts. Strike a careful balance throughout the lesson between the disturbing elements and the interesting details. Note, for instance, the part played by Simon of Cyrene, the fulfilment of prophecy (Psalm 22:18) regarding the robe, the irony of the inscription above the cross, the darkness in the middle of the day, the veil of the temple being torn in two, the earthquake, and the confession of the centurion.

It will be appreciated that further details appear in the other gospel accounts. Although one should not attempt to present a fully comprehensive picture, some of the other incidents may be used at your discretion to supplement the material in Matthew. In particular, refer to the words of Jesus on the

cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34) and "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46). Use these verses to demonstrate the love of Jesus for man and for God.

Point out that it was customary for caves to be used as burial places, and for a stone to be used to seal the entrance. It is particularly interesting that the chief priests and Pharisees, who had refused to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, were unable to forget his words: "After three days I will rise again" and they persuaded Pilate to set a guard.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

The story today is a very sad one. We feel sorry that Jesus, who brought such happiness to others, was so cruelly treated. Why do you think Jesus did not use his power to save himself? Why is the crucifixion of Jesus such an important event for us? (Having found out, by questions of this kind, the stage of understanding the children have reached, you should be content to lead just one step further and avoid the temptation to go beyond the limits of their understanding.)

### **WORKSHEETS**

Year 2: These should be self-explanatory.

Year 4: The letters in circles read 'After three days I will rise again'. The answers to the questions are 'Joseph', 'Simon', 'Mary Magdalene', 'Pilate'.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we are sad that Jesus had to die, but we know that it was part of your plan for the world. Help us to want to obey you, as Jesus always did, and help our understanding to grow. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

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## **THE RISEN LORD**

**115**

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### ***John 20:1-18***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To establish the fact of the resurrection of Jesus, and its significance for us.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Acts 17:30-31; 1 Corinthians 15:1-26; 1 Thessalonians 4:14 and 16.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Describe the feelings of the disciples following the crucifixion. Jesus, whom they expected to become king, was dead. They were distressed, bewildered and in despair. Peter was filled with remorse,



**PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we praise you and thank you for bringing Jesus back to life. Please help us to be more like him and so be chosen to live with him for ever. Amen.

**MEMORY VERSE**

“We believe that Jesus died and rose again” (1 Thessalonians 4:14).

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**THE ROAD TO EMMAUS**
**116**


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***Luke 24:13-43*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how Jesus comforted his disciples by revealing himself to them after his resurrection.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Psalm 16:10; Isaiah 53; Luke 24:1-11; John 2:19-22. You should be familiar with the details of a room at an inn, or a typical living-room in New Testament times. Emmaus was seven miles north west of Jerusalem.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Remind the children of the lesson about the discovery of the empty tomb, and set the scene for this sequel. Talk about the reactions of the disciples to the death of Jesus, their sorrow, bewilderment and acute disappointment. They had acclaimed him to be the Messiah, God's own son, the prophesied king of Israel, and they were greatly distressed by his crucifixion and the apparent triumph of his enemies.

This incident may be told effectively from the viewpoint of the unnamed disciple, who may have been Cleopas' wife Mary. Ask the children to imagine that you are that disciple and begin with such words as: “As Cleopas and I were walking the seven miles back home to Emmaus, we were feeling very unhappy ...”. This narrative should convey the depression and confusion of the two travellers, who were prevented from recognizing Jesus. As he joined them, they assumed he was a stranger, never for once considering that he could be their Master. However, they were surprised to discover that even a stranger in Jerusalem had not heard about the crucifixion, which had aroused such strong feelings among large numbers of people. Tell how they confided their troubles and their dashed hopes to this “stranger”, and how they spoke of the visit of the women to the tomb. They had found it hard to believe the report of the women that angels had declared Jesus to be alive. Some of their company had rushed to the tomb and found the body gone, but they had not seen Jesus. This retelling of the distress and confusion experienced by those disciples will help the children to understand their state of mind, and should help to provide a sharp contrast with the latter part of the lesson.

The disciples' spirits lifted when the “stranger” talked to them, helping them to understand what the scriptures had to say about the coming of the Messiah. This made them eager for more of his

company, and they persuaded him to accept their hospitality. Help the children to gain a clear picture of the room into which they went - dark and shadowy, lit only by an oil lamp, since it was evening. Expressive hands and face can help in recounting the blessing and the breaking of the bread, which Jesus handed to them. Convey the impact of their sudden recognition and Jesus' equally sudden disappearance. Discuss the reasons why this particular act of his should have brought recognition. The two were now alone, stunned by the realization of what they had witnessed. When Jesus left them so, too, did all their doubts and despair, and they knew for certain that Jesus was alive. Despite the lateness of the hour and the dangers of travelling at night, they could not wait to hurry back to Jerusalem with the news. Describe how they found the other disciples already excited by the news that Jesus had appeared to Simon Peter. In an atmosphere of elation, they told the story of *their* thrilling meeting with Jesus and the way in which he had explained to them the reason for his death and resurrection, and how prophecy had been fulfilled.

Describe the effect of Jesus' further appearance to the company of disciples, while they were all gathered together, and impress upon the children the assurance that his resurrection was a physical, tangible one. They could see and touch him, and he shared their meal.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Why were the disciples so excited when they recognized Jesus? You have heard other stories of people who, by means of a miracle, were brought back to life. How was the resurrection of Jesus different? (Jesus was to die no more, and had risen in fulfilment of prophecy). When we are sure that Jesus rose from the dead, what can we hope for, with confidence?

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we praise you and thank you that Jesus rose from the dead and is alive for evermore. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke 24:32).

***John 21:1-14*****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how Jesus gave his disciples further positive proof of his presence after his resurrection, and demonstrated his continuing care for them.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Matthew 26:32; 28:10; Luke 5:4-6; Acts 1:3. Study methods of fishing on the Lake of Galilee.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Begin this lesson with questions and answers. "What did Peter, John and some of the other disciples do for a living before they met Jesus? What do you think they would do now that they needed to earn some money? Where did they fish? Where were they when Jesus first appeared to them after his resurrection?" At this point, you could refer to a map, showing first the position of Jerusalem and then Galilee and Tiberias, to which the Galilean disciples had now returned.

Ask whether anyone has seen fishing boats, or nets drying by the seaside, or seen a film showing fishermen casting nets from boats near the shores of the Lake of Galilee. If possible, show or draw appropriate pictures and describe the lakeside scene. Lead from this description to the story of Peter, tired of inactivity, declaring one evening his intention of going fishing, and his companions willingly accompanying him. Imagine their pleasure at pulling out once more on to the beautiful, familiar lake, and of handling the nets as they used to do. As the night progressed their enthusiasm waned and disappointment took its place, as again and again they pulled in the empty nets. Dawn broke, and tired and dispirited they prepared to return to shore.

Convey the drama of the situation when, in the half-light of dawn, they saw someone standing on the beach and heard a voice calling over the water: "Lads, have you any fish?" and telling them exactly where to cast their nets to find fish. Perhaps they looked questioningly at one another, remembering an earlier, similar occasion. Without comment, they cast the nets out again. This time they were overwhelmed by the result. It was John who first realized that the man on the shore who had performed the miracle was Jesus. Note Peter's characteristic impetuosity, which heightens the drama, as he rushed ahead leaving the others to follow with the amazing haul. The significance of the number one hundred and fifty three is unclear, but children find such details interesting. Perhaps they were counted for the purpose of equal distribution later.

The scene on the beach will appeal to the senses of sight, smell and taste. The disciples were tired and hungry, and the sight and aroma of a cooked breakfast must have been very welcome. In providing it, Jesus showed his love for them and his concern for their physical well-being. Their hearts would have been full because of the miracle they had witnessed and because of the reappearance of their Lord. How exhilarated they must have felt, to be sharing a meal with him again. Perhaps he reminded them of this earlier promise, that he would see them again in Galilee (Matthew 26:32), and used the opportunity to further their understanding of his teaching and the significance of his death and resurrection. Perhaps they were too over-awed to question him, but were happy to be in his presence.



## RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES

Can you say how you would have felt if you had been one of those disciples in the boat? How would you have felt when a stranger suggested, at the end of the night, that you cast the net again? How would you have felt when you saw the nets bulging with fish? How would you have felt when you returned to the beach and found Jesus waiting there with breakfast ready for you? What makes *you* feel certain that Jesus really is alive now?

## WORKSHEETS

These should be self-explanatory.

## PRAYER

Dear Lord God, thank you for teaching us two things about Jesus in this lesson - that Jesus is alive now, and that he cares for all those who follow him. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

"After his suffering, [Jesus] showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive" (Acts 1:3, NIV)

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## THE ASCENSION OF JESUS

118

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### *Acts 1:1-14*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To give assurance that Jesus is still alive and will come back to the earth as king.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

Ezekiel 21:24-27; Luke 1:1-4; 24:44-54; Ephesians 1:15-22; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 2:79. Have ready a picture or description of the Mount of Olives.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

This is a short lesson and allows time to consider the interesting detail of the authorship of the Acts and the reason for the writing of the record. Read together the first verse of the book to show that it was in the form of a second letter to someone called Theophilus, and that the writer had sent an earlier letter telling about the life of Jesus. Then ask the children to turn to Luke and read the first four verses, thus establishing the author of both records to be Luke, the doctor. Point out the significant fact that he acquired his information from eye-witnesses. Therefore, we can be sure that both the gospel record and the Acts are true accounts of what happened. In fact, as Luke says in verse four, the only reason for writing it down was to make sure that the truth of the matter was known. God has preserved what Luke wrote, over nineteen hundred years ago, and it has now been translated from the original Greek language in which it was written, into our own language so that we can read it for ourselves and be sure of what really happened.

Remind the children that one of the most important things that Luke recorded was that Jesus rose from the dead three days after he was crucified. Ask the children what they remember about the incidents that proved to the disciples that Jesus was really alive, and remind them of the joy and the amazement of his friends. Discuss the kind of questions they would have asked Jesus. Many times during a period of forty days Jesus talked to them and taught them from the scriptures about his mission, and about God's wonderful plans. He also told them that they must stay in Jerusalem until they had received power from God when the Holy Spirit came upon them.

The climax of the story is set on Mount Olivet, about a mile from the city centre - the maximum distance one might travel on the sabbath. Describe the hillside scene where Jesus walked with his disciples for the last time. They had been there with him on many occasions, but this time it felt very different. They so longed for the kingdom to come, for which Jesus had taught them to pray, that they asked him whether the time had come at last for the kingdom of Israel to be re-established with Jesus as its king. Convey their hopefulness, perhaps subdued by the answer that they were not to be concerned about dates or periods of time, since these are in God's hands. The answer to their question was 'no', but at the same time it confirmed that their hope was the right one. Their prophets had foretold that a descendent of David would take the throne and rule for ever, and the disciples knew that Jesus was that promised king.

Jesus' parting words to his disciples were in the form of an instruction and a promise. He repeated that they were to receive special power from God, and told them that they were to make the name of Jesus known not only in their own country but all over the world. They were to tell everyone about the coming kingdom, and they would be helped in this work by the spirit. The event that followed was both dramatic and beautiful, and would live in the disciples' memories for the rest of their lives. On this occasion Jesus did not simply vanish from their sight, but was miraculously taken up from the hilltop, within a cloud. Unwilling to take their eyes from their master, the disciples continued to peer upwards into the cloud, in astonishment and awe. They were further excited by the sudden appearance of the two men in white (angels) who gave them a promise from God. Let the children read this key verse and explore the clear implications of the message. Link this promise with the future kingdom and the kingship of Jesus, for which we still wait with firm hope.

With confidence in the assurances they had been given by Jesus and then by the angels, the men returned to Jerusalem in obedience to Jesus' instructions. Luke records, in the last verses of his gospel record, the reactions of the disciples. Joyfully they met with other believers to worship God and to prepare for the work of preaching which was now theirs.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

When the disciples saw Jesus go up into heaven, did they feel miserable? Did they feel that Jesus had deserted them? How did they feel? Why were they so glad? Are we ever really alone? What can we do to help us feel that Jesus is very near?

## **WORKSHEETS**

The code reads 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky?'

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we know that you never leave us, but sometimes we forget this. Please help us to feel your presence more and more. We are happy knowing that Jesus will one day return. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

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## **PENTECOST - THE HOLY SPIRIT**

**119**

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### ***Acts 2:1-42***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show how Jesus gave the disciples special power to preach more effectively the good news of salvation.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Leviticus 23:15-16; Joel 2:28-32; Luke 24:49; Acts 1.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

It is not necessary to go into every detail of the Feast of Pentecost but the children should know that it was an important annual festival, a thanksgiving for the harvest, and was observed fifty days after passover. Jesus was crucified at the time of passover. He was on the earth for forty days after his resurrection, and so the Feast of Pentecost would have taken place about a week after his ascension. Jews from surrounding districts and countries came to Jerusalem for the festivities and to worship at the temple. They spoke different languages and dialects.

Help the children to imagine the apostles gathered together, probably in an upper room, praying and thanking God for the life and resurrection of Jesus. They were waiting in Jerusalem for the gift from God, as Jesus had commanded them, though they did not know how it would come to them. Would it come as it had come to Jesus? (One or two of them may have been present on that wonderful occasion when Jesus had been baptized, seen the dove alight upon him, and heard God's voice acknowledging his beloved son). Suddenly the room was filled with the noise of rushing wind, and they saw on each other's heads a visual sign, which looked like tongues of fire. They knew they were being strengthened and comforted by the Holy Spirit, the power by which God works. Then, as they found themselves able to speak in other languages and dialects, and with great power, they recognized the way in which the gift was going to help them preach. The power they had received was to be used only for preaching about God and Jesus.

It was not long before the occurrence became widely known. People came running to the scene and very soon a huge crowd had assembled. They would have been amazed to hear the apostles speaking in words which they could understand, for even the Galilean dialect was normally difficult to follow. The apostles wasted no time and immediately began to teach about God and Jesus. The people were astonished and asked what it meant, although some realized that a miracle had been wrought by the power of God. Others, who did not wish to obey God, mocked and accused the disciples of being drunk.

Show how Peter's refuted the accusation of drunkenness as it was only nine o'clock in the morning. His courage in defending them revealed how his knowledge of the resurrection, and the power of the Holy Spirit, had transformed him. At one time he was a man who was so frightened that he denied even knowing Jesus. Now he was so bold that he was willing not only to speak publicly about Jesus but later to suffer imprisonment and even give his life for him. Peter was now the chief spokesman, and his preaching from Joel confirmed that he knew that he and the other apostles were being specially gifted.

Peter's message was so compelling that it touched the hearts of the people and they felt the urgent need to repent of all they had done to Jesus. They now realized that he was God's own son. On that day three thousand men and women gladly gave their lives to God's service and were baptized. So the Christian church was born in a thrilling way, and the message of Jesus Christ, the saviour of the world, was taken back to many countries and made widely known as God had planned.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

The gift of the Holy Spirit changed the apostles from timid men to people who were bold enough to preach about Jesus without fear. Because they were able to speak so that men from other countries could understand them, the good news of Jesus spread rapidly throughout the Roman Empire. Because the apostles were bold and spoke openly of Jesus, despite the risk of attack from the religious leaders, many people came to believe that Jesus was the Son of God. If they had not had the courage of their convictions and used the gifts that God gave them, we might never have heard about Jesus. How should we feel about the message they taught, and for which they were willing to give their lives?

### **WORKSHEETS**

The message reads 'Jesus said, "You shall receive power and you shall be my witnesses"'

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, thank you for helping the apostles to become men who were not afraid to talk about Jesus. Help us to learn all that the Bible tells us about him and to value the words of men who were willing to give their lives for him. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8).

**Acts 3:1-11****AIM OF LESSON**

To show that the apostles had been given the power to heal, and that the lame man gave the praise to God.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Isaiah 35:5-6. Investigate details of the temple.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Let the children imagine what it would be like to be unable to walk; having to be carried everywhere, and never able to join in running and jumping games with other children. Compare the welfare benefits and aids for the disabled available today, with the circumstances of the lame man in the narrative. Mention the custom of alms and the begging bowl. Being unable to work meant having no money for food. Beggars would be unpopular because it was incumbent on passers by to give food or money to the less fortunate, if able to do so. The temple gate was a profitable place for those who had to beg for their daily food, since many people passed through on their way to worship.

After this discussion the story could be told effectively in the first person. The lame man might tell of his childhood, hampered by lack of mobility and his life as a young man, ashamed and worried at having to resort to begging in order to live. Perhaps he had no family to look after him or maybe he had to beg to support a mother as well as himself. In words a beggar might use, describe the incident on that momentous day, e.g. "I was sitting in my place at the temple gate. As the hour of prayer approached, in the middle of the afternoon, there was the usual stream of worshippers going through the gate, among them two men walking together. I asked them for money, and I was hopeful of receiving something, when one of them said: 'Look at us'. They weren't richly dressed. In fact, they were ragged-looking and I later learned that they had been fishermen at one time..."

Build up the man's changing emotions as the story continues - his hope for money and the disappointment when told there was none, his curiosity about their intentions and his astonishment at being told to walk. Emphasize that it was in the name of Jesus Christ that the miracle was performed and the man was given the strength to stand and walk, a gift more precious than any amount of money. Portray his feelings as he went into the temple, praising God, enjoying the sensation of walking and jumping for the first time in his life. The amazement of the bystanders, who recognized the man, provides a spectacular scene, as the man stood with Peter and John, while the people crowded around them. With delight he would have described the sudden strength which had come to his limbs, so that he had no need to *learn* how to walk.

Peter would remember Jesus saying to the disciples at the last supper (John 16:23-24), that if they asked anything *in his name* he would give it to them. Peter claimed no power of his own but gave the glory to Jesus Christ. Above all, this incident, which caused such a stir, brought glory and praise to God, and the good news of Jesus was preached.

## RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES

The account of this miracle performed by Peter and John shows how they were given power to heal people just as Jesus had done. Most of us are very fortunate today. If we are born lame we can often be helped by doctors, and do not have to sit and beg for our food. The lame man praised God when he was healed. Do we remember to thank God when we are made better, perhaps after an illness or an accident?

## WORKSHEETS

The lame man could not:                      run, jump, leap  
walk, skip, kneel, kick

## PRAYER

Dear Lord God, please help us to remember to thank you for all the good things in our lives, and especially for the way you care for us. Thank you for the doctors and nurses who help us. Please send Jesus back to the earth soon, so that there will be no more lame people. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

"Then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy" (Isaiah 35:6).

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## STEPHEN

121

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### *Acts 6 and 7*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To show how Stephen was both courageous and willing to die for his Lord.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

Acts 5:34-39; 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Introduce this lesson by explaining why the church in Jerusalem needed some form of organization as the number of believers grew. Emphasize the care that was taken over the poor and widows. Show the family spirit that can prevail when people give and take as willingly as the early Christians, shown in the events described in Acts 6.

Compare the attitude of the believers with that of the Jewish leaders towards the growing church. Recall the fact that the religious leaders thought their problems were over when they crucified Jesus; they believed that he would soon be forgotten. However, just the opposite seemed to be happening as men and women flocked to the church. The Jewish leaders felt it their duty to stamp out Christianity. They disagreed with its teaching, which they regarded as a threat to the Jewish religion, and they beat and imprisoned Jesus' followers. But many of the people saw how different was the way of Jesus from

the way of the Jewish leaders, and were baptized into his name. Not all the Jewish leaders, however, agreed with this persecution and some were worried that they might be contravening God's commands.

Explain why the seven deacons were chosen, what their duties were, and what qualities were required in these men. Show how Stephen's qualities were exactly those required for the pastoral ministry. Lead into the way in which these same characteristics helped him to handle the questions put to him by the Jewish elders. Show vividly how they argued with him and, when they realized that they could not establish a case against him, they acted as they had with Jesus and brought liars to falsely accuse Stephen of blasphemy.

Explain, briefly, about the Sanhedrin. Try to help the children imagine the scene as Stephen stood alone (yet not alone) before his accusers. Point out that the trial should have proved Stephen's innocence, had it been conducted fairly. Outline Stephen's defence, as he related the history of Israel from Abraham to Solomon and demonstrated that God had always been with his people even when there was no building for him to 'dwell in'. Explain that Stephen was showing that God's people had always resisted his purpose with them. They had failed to see that the tabernacle and the temple were temporary and that they should have been preparing to welcome their Messiah. Stephen fearlessly strove to persuade the Jews to face up to their long and violent rejection of God's chosen messengers, culminating in the terrible crucifixion of the promised Messiah. With the authority of the Holy Spirit Stephen condemned them.

Discuss how people react when they know they are wrong, but cannot admit it to themselves or to God. Stephen's accusers, moved by bigotry, acted violently and unlawfully when they dragged him beyond the city walls to kill him. Contrast their passionate rage with the calmness of Stephen who knew that his Saviour was close to him as he looked and saw the vision of Jesus on the right hand of his Father. His accusers shut their ears and could not, would not, open their minds when Stephen told them of the vision, and their hatred turned to murder.

It is important to show how close Stephen was to Jesus as he prayed: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them". He was so close that he was able to express the same selfless forgiveness of his executioners that Jesus had expressed on the cross.

Finally, introduce Saul standing aside and looking after the clothes of the stoners. Children are often confused by people of the same name, so make clear that this is not the same man who was the first king of Israel. Prompt the children to begin thinking about how the brutality of his friends and the calm of Stephen might have affected him.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Our lives and that of Stephen are very different. In what ways? What remarkable qualities did he demonstrate in the way that he died? (Courage, faith, calm, joy). Why was he able to be like that? We are not persecuted for following Jesus. Does this story make you wonder if you could behave as Stephen did?

## **WORKSHEETS**

The remaining letters in the word search should make the word 'BIBLE'.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, help us to forgive when people hurt us. Show us how to see good in others. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

“And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them...’” (Acts 7:60).

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## PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN

122

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### *Acts 8:26-40*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To show that God reveals himself to all those who seek him, and that an understanding of the Bible teaching about Jesus leads to a desire for baptism.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

Isaiah 53; Matthew 7:7-8; Mark 16:15-16.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Try to obtain a picture or model of a scroll, and a map of Palestine in New Testament times. Show the children Jerusalem, Samaria to the north where Philip had been preaching, and the valley from Jerusalem towards Azotus with the river crossing the route to Gaza.

The narrative can begin with Philip's diversion towards the road to Gaza where it passed through desert land, or with a description of the eunuch's status. He was a man of high authority, in charge of the treasure of Queen Candace of Ethiopia, and he had a chariot of his own, which was a mark of wealth and position. The long journey from Egypt to Jerusalem would not have been easy but the Ethiopian was prepared to undertake it as he evidently wished to please God. Although he was not a Jew, he had learned to believe in the true God. No doubt he used his limited time in Jerusalem to the full, spending as much time as possible in the temple, hearing the scriptures read, and discussing with other devout worshippers. Perhaps he had heard of Jesus and the controversial preaching of the apostles. He determined to use the opportunity of the long journey home to search the scriptures. Explain that the “book” meant a scroll, which was quite rare for an individual to own, and it must have cost a great deal. At this point, turn to the passage which the Ethiopian was reading and read it to the children (Isaiah 53:7).

The meeting of Philip and the traveller was dramatic. It was not a coincidence, but a meeting especially arranged by God through his spirit. The question and response, the invitation and its acceptance lead into a description of Philip teaching, and the Ethiopian learning, the greatest lesson it is possible to learn. Outline Philip's instruction which led to an understanding of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in fulfilment of prophecy, and the call to all men to follow him. Describe the keen attention of the Ethiopian, his growing understanding, and his excitement as everything began to fall into place. By the time they had reached the water he knew he must respond to the command to be baptized.

Describe the scene as the two men entered the water and Philip immersed him, and the joy the man felt as he climbed out. He would be grateful to God for calling him, and to Philip for showing him the way. How fondly they would take their leave of each other before Philip was taken miraculously away



by the power of God, and the Ethiopian returned to his chariot to continue his journey, knowing that he was a new man.

Since baptism is the focal point of the lesson, relate this to the children's experiences. Ask if any of them have attended a baptism. Consider alternative venues when the sea or rivers are too cold for outdoor immersions. If there is a baptismal bath in your meeting room, this could be shown to the children.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Why did God send Philip to meet the Ethiopian? What was the Ethiopian trying to find out? Do we sometimes have difficulty understanding what we read in the Bible. Jesus promised that if we really want to know all about him, we will be helped to understand. Who will help us to understand the gospel message?

### **WORKSHEETS**

The foot prints read 'Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved'.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, thank you for your precious book, the Bible. Help us to read it regularly, as did the Ethiopian, and to understand it, because we know that it contains a message for us, too. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8).

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## **SAUL'S JOURNEY TO DAMASCUS**

**123**

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### ***Acts 9:1-31***

### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show how God chose Saul to preach the gospel, and how he responded wholeheartedly.

### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Acts 7:58; 8:1-3; 22:3-21 and 25-28; 26:3-20. Galatians 1:11-17.

### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Introduce the lesson with a series of questions, e.g., "Have you ever been convinced that what you were doing was right, even when others told you that you were wrong? Have you played a game with friends and thought you knew all the rules, even though your friends may have argued with you, and

you felt sure you were right and insisted on playing your way? Perhaps, after all, you realized you were wrong. What then?"

Continue then with Saul's conviction that he was right to persecute the Christians. Show how he loved God and was certain that the people who believed in Jesus were wrong. He thought they were going against the laws of the God of Israel and were, therefore, worthy of death. Remind the children of the incident when Stephen was stoned to death, and Saul's part in it. Describe Saul in detail. He was highly educated, a Pharisee, a Roman citizen, and proud to be one of God's people, a Jew. Explain why he needed the letter from the high priest, and what he intended doing to the Christians at Damascus.

Tell the children that one day something happened which altered Saul's whole life and convinced him that what he had been doing with such dedication for God had been, in fact, against God's wishes. In describing the dazzling vision, convey the suddenness of the revelation, the personal impact upon Saul himself, and the confusion that prevailed amongst his companions as a result. Stress the fact that the moment Saul knew that the voice which came from heaven was that of Jesus, he had to face the shock of realizing that he had been wrong. Then Saul, who had been the authoritative leader, had to be led, shocked, blind and helpless, into the city. In describing the consequences of the vision, explain that God had made Saul blind in order that he should "see" and recognize the truth about Jesus. Ask the children to try to imagine the emotions and thoughts experienced by Saul during the period of blindness, for he could not have known at first that his sight was to be restored.

Saul was not the only one to experience a vision on that occasion. In the city of Damascus, Ananias had heard about Saul and together with the other Christians would have been filled with apprehension pending Saul's arrival. No doubt they had heard of the persecutions in Jerusalem. The information and instructions Ananias received in a vision regarding Saul's change of heart were difficult to accept, and only the authority of the words of Jesus convinced him that God had deliberately chosen Saul to carry out his purpose. When Ananias confronted Saul he found not a proud persecutor but a humbled and devout man of God, praying earnestly for forgiveness and understanding. Explain that Saul had been converted, meaning that his whole life and outlook had now been changed around. Ask the children what Saul would most want to do, now that he knew about and believed in Jesus. He would want to be baptized. Explain the significance of baptism and the way in which Saul's past wrongs were wiped away and he was able to make a completely new start; later he even changed his name. Describe the joy of having his sight restored, of being baptized, and endowed with the Holy Spirit, followed by the making of new friends and experiencing the warmth of their fellowship. Contrast this with the anger of the Pharisees who awaited Saul, and their amazement at finding him in the synagogue preaching about Jesus.

During the days that followed Saul left Damascus and went into Arabia, where the deeper truths of the gospel were revealed to him by the Lord Jesus. Returning to Damascus, he devoted himself to teaching, to the amazement of the people and the anger of the Jewish leaders. It seemed to them that he had betrayed God and that, in joining the ranks of the Christians, he also deserved to die. Using a hushed voice and suitable facial expressions, convey the tension of his escape along darkened streets, under the shadow of thick stone walls, up steep stone steps, treading softly to avoid the attention of the watchful guards, and then being lowered in a basket.

Describe how Saul fearlessly preached the Christian gospel in Jerusalem until, because of another threat to his life, he had to flee again. That which he had in the past inflicted upon others he was now in danger of receiving himself.

## RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES

Do you remember that, at the beginning of this story, we talked about finding out that we were completely wrong about something when we had been sure we were right? When we are shown to be wrong, how do we feel? Is it easy to admit our mistake, or are we sometimes obstinate and continue to argue? What *should* we do?

## WORKSHEETS

The solution to the jumbled words is 'The Jews tried to kill Saul so his friends let him out of the city in a basket'.

## PRAYER

Dear Lord God, when we realize that we have made a mistake, help us to admit it. Teach us the way you want us to live. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

"And in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, 'He is the Son of God'" (Acts 9:20).

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## DORCAS

124

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### **Acts 9:36-43**

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show that in order to put Christianity into practice we must use the gifts God has given us to help others; and to show that God gave power to the Apostles to help them in their work of preaching the gospel.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Proverbs 31:29-31. Try to find a map and pictures of Joppa.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Set the scene by describing Joppa, the seaside town where Dorcas lived. It was a busy Mediterranean sea port, the only natural harbour on the coast of Israel south of the Bay of Haifa. Today it is known as Jaffa and provides the trade name for citrus fruit from Israel.

Introduce Dorcas who, together with some other people, had become a follower of Jesus. Her Christian beliefs made her want to help others. She must have had an exceptionally generous and loving nature because we are told she was "full of good works and acts of charity" and she was much loved. The help she gave was obviously of a very practical nature, and much of her time and money must have been spent in buying cloth and making clothes to give to those in need. Draw on the children's imagination as to the kind of people she might have helped in this way.

The death of Dorcas had a profound effect upon the disciples in Joppa. They were filled with sorrow and a deep sense of loss. How could they manage without her? Who would take her place? What could they do? Their immediate thought was to send for Peter whom they knew to be at Lydda, only a few miles away. Peter did not hesitate. He went with the messengers immediately. Describe the scene when he arrived at Dorcas' house and was taken upstairs to the room where she lay. Picture the sad women who surrounded him with tears in their eyes, showing him all the garments Dorcas had made and talking of her kindness and goodness. The children may have had some experience of death - a friend, a member of the family, a pet, or perhaps a bird found in the garden. Even at this age they can recognize the finality of death and the inability of the bereaved to restore life. Having established this point, the raising of Dorcas will be seen to be truly miraculous.

Peter gently sent the believers outside and then, in the quietness that followed, he knelt down and prayed to God, the creator and sustainer of life. He must have felt that God had given him special power in answer to his prayer, because he went over to the dead body of Dorcas, spoke to her and told her to rise. Imagine his joy when her eyes opened and she sat up. He helped her to her feet, and then called in the group of disciples and friends who had been waiting, grieving outside her house. It is hard for us to imagine what the feelings of her friends were as the door opened, for today we have no instances of the dead being raised; but there would be a little fear, perhaps awe, then a great feeling of overwhelming joy at seeing their beloved friend again, alive and well.

Encourage the children to talk about what they think the friends of Dorcas would have said and done. Use their answers to show how the news spread quickly through Joppa. This miracle not only gave Dorcas more years to serve God and help her neighbours, but also helped to spread the gospel message in Joppa and beyond.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Jesus taught us to love God and to love our neighbours as ourselves. This means, among other things, using the gifts he has given us to help other people. In what practical ways can we help people, both those who live near and those who live far away? Who knows what our own actions may do in helping others to do what is right?

### **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank you for our health and strength and all our abilities. Help us to use these for the good of other people. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"Do good ... be rich in good deeds, liberal and generous" (1 Timothy 6:18).

**Acts 10****AIM OF LESSON**

To show that God's love and his offer of salvation extend to people of all nationalities and from all walks of life.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Leviticus 11; Mark 16:15-16; John 3:3-7.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Instead of introducing Cornelius at the start of the lesson, it might prove useful to begin with the account of Peter's bewildering vision. Point out that what he saw appeared to contradict the laws that he had so carefully observed all his life. Describe the design of a building that allowed for access to the flat roof - a quiet and suitable place for meditation and prayer. The demands made upon Peter at this time were very heavy and, following the example of Jesus, he withdrew himself from his friends to pray and meditate alone. Peter had received much guidance from the Lord, but this vision puzzled and disturbed him. The idea of killing and eating snakes, vultures, bats, crocodiles (Leviticus 11) and other such creatures would have filled him with horror. The children will no doubt share Peter's revulsion, in some measure, although *his* feeling was born of adherence to divine instruction rather than mere natural disinclination. The repeated statement: "What God has cleansed, you must not call common", ran through his mind again and again as he tried to understand its meaning. It would seem to him that he was being instructed to break the law.

God's timing was perfect. As Peter awoke, still puzzled by what he had seen, some Gentile visitors arrived at the house. God left Peter in no doubt about what to do and instructed him to accompany these men. Remind the children that Peter was a Jew, with a deep-rooted prejudice against the Gentiles and who honestly thought that salvation was offered only to the Jews. (The Jews called the Gentiles "dogs", and would never enter their houses or eat with them - they considered them to be "unclean"). In order to widen Peter's horizons and to show him that the gospel was for anyone who would hear and obey, God had spoken to him in a spectacular way. Peter must have learned the lesson quickly and accepted God's guidance because he "called them in" to be his guests. He, a Jew, was entertaining Gentiles.

Describe Peter welcoming the visitors and relate the experience of Cornelius as it would be told to Peter. Spend a little time talking about the Romans and their impact on the Palestine of Peter's day. Point out the relatively important position of Cornelius in the Roman army (today his position would be equivalent to that of a captain), and the remarkable fact that he and his family had turned away from the idols worshipped by the Romans, to worship the God of the Jews. Sincerely wanting to please God, Cornelius had prayed regularly and had given generously to those in need. Such actions do not go unnoticed in heaven. God had sent an angel to give Cornelius an important message, which had led to the visit of his servants to the house where Peter was staying.

The more Peter learned about Cornelius and the intervention of God in his life, the more clearly he understood the significance of his vision on the rooftop. He realized that it was God's will that he should go with the men, and he accompanied them willingly to the home of the Roman centurion.

Cornelius had gathered together his friends and relations, and they were eagerly awaiting Peter's arrival. They felt that something momentous was about to happen. Cornelius was so honoured to receive Peter that he fell down at his feet as if to worship him. Peter's reply proved how much he had learned since the vision. The way of salvation was open to Jew and Gentile alike. Show how gladly and enthusiastically Peter talked to these Gentiles about the Lord Jesus, drawing on their experiences of the happenings of the last three days. When Peter, and the other disciples, saw that Cornelius and his family had received the Holy Spirit, there was no longer any doubt in his mind that "in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable". He baptized them gladly in the name of the Lord.

Salvation is offered to all men, and we who are Gentiles give thanks to God that he has provided the opportunity for us to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

What lesson did Peter learn in this story? Can we learn a similar lesson? You may wish to develop a discussion about some of the different kinds of prejudice which exist, and which the children may have experienced, e.g. intellectual, colour, status, physical differences etc., and give the children guidelines for overcoming prejudice.

### **WORKSHEETS**

Something to remember: 'Jesus Christ is Lord of all'.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we are glad that you love and care for us, no matter whether we are rich or poor, strong or weak or whatever the colour of our skin. Help us not to be unkind to those who are different from ourselves. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35).

**Acts 12:1-19****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how God is able to look after people who serve him faithfully, and that he hears and answers sincere prayers.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Familiarise yourself with the persecutions of the early Church as recorded in the early chapters of Acts.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

At the beginning of the lesson it will be necessary to provide a background to the situation in which the apostles found themselves at that time. Endeavour to stimulate the children's imagination by conveying the dramatic impact of the series of events that occurred. The Christian church had been rocked to its foundation by the death of one of its foremost apostles, James, who had been one of the three disciples closest to Jesus. His public execution had been ordered by Herod. When Herod saw how this killing had pleased the Jews he arrested Peter, planning to kill him, too, when the passover was ended. Here was a real test of faith for the believers. Peter, held in a maximum security prison, was bound in chains and guarded by two soldiers inside the cell and sentries outside the cell. Clearly there was no means of escape. In spite of the danger to themselves the rest of the church, fearing that Peter would suffer the same fate as James, gathered together to pray that God might help Peter.

Endurance was tested to the limit as the night before Peter's trial and possible execution arrived. Describe Peter's incredible and dream-like experience. The earnest prayers of the church were answered in a most extraordinary way as, with the help of God's angel, Peter made his escape. Little wonder that Peter thought he had been dreaming. The eventual realization that he was free and that God had rescued him from a seemingly impossible situation must have greatly strengthened his faith as he hurried to the home of Mary, John Mark's mother, where he knew he would find friends. Rhoda, in her excitement, left Peter outside the gate, but as soon as he entered the house he told them the amazing story of his escape; then departed quickly so that they would not be implicated. Ask the children to imagine how the disciples must have felt when they saw Peter. It must have been almost impossible to believe that he was there with them and that God had answered their prayers before they had finished praying! What excitement, as they realized that the wonderful power of God had been directed towards saving his apostle.

The lesson would be incomplete without some mention of the sensation that the news of the escape caused the next morning. Describe the scene at the prison as the soldiers searched in vain for their prisoner, and Herod's angry reaction, which led to the ruthless killing of innocent guards. Possibly as a result of the incidents connected with Peter's imprisonment, Herod left Judaea and took up residence in Caesarea. This may have meant an easing of the persecution of the Christians in Judaea, at least for a time.

**RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Do you say your prayers? What do you pray about? Do you pray for other people? When praying, should we always be asking for something? If not, what else should our prayers include?

## **WORKSHEETS**

The words on the stones are Peter, prison, night, get up, clothes, iron gates, street, Mary, John Mark, Rhoda.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, thank you for looking after us and giving us everything we need. We know that if we pray to you, you will always listen. Teach us how to pray. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

“Pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects” (James 5:16).

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## **PAUL BEGINS HIS WORK; LYSTRA**

**127**

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### ***Acts 14:1-23***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show the courage and humility of Paul and Barnabas, and their commitment to the work of spreading the gospel to the Gentiles.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Acts 4:36-37; 11:22-26; 13. Find a map showing Paul's first missionary journey. (Four separate simplified maps are recommended for use in the following series of lessons, showing clearly the routes of the missionary journeys and the journey to Rome.)

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Beginning with a map of Palestine and Asia Minor, point out to the children the area in which, so far, all the events of the New Testament have occurred, i.e. Palestine. It was here that Jesus and his disciples lived and worked, for this was, and is, the land of the Jews. To these people God had given the Law, and sent judges and prophets, and finally his son, to teach his purpose. Explain that Saul was a Jew, and as such was keen to teach his own people what he had so dramatically learned, that Jesus was the Son of God. However, God gave him a specific mission - to take the good news of Jesus to the Gentiles in other lands. You should explain the word “Gentile” and the idolatry that characterized the non-Jewish population of that day. Point out that these people believed in deities of their making, personifying the forces associated with human emotions and natural elements, e.g. love, war, thunder, the sea, etc. Children will probably be familiar with some of the Greek and Roman myths. Discuss with the class the difficulties of beginning to preach about Jesus and about God's purpose to people with no knowledge of the Creator. This difficult and often dangerous task was not to be tackled alone. Introduce Barnabas at this point, referring briefly to his background and his dedication.

Indicate on the map the progress of the journey made by Saul and Barnabas to Cyprus by ship, and then to Asia Minor. Explain that from now on Saul is known as Paul. We are not told why this was, but



the probable reason is that Saul was a Hebrew name, by which Saul would be known to the Jews; now that he was going abroad to preach to the Gentiles he took a Roman name.

Explain that in all the towns they visited there was a community of Jews. Naturally they approached the Jews first, with the good news about Jesus. Some gladly believed, but many scorned the message. Quote chapter 13:46-49 to show how God directed the mission of Paul and Barnabas towards the conversion of the Gentiles, and blessed their work with success. Explain that this very success brought them into danger because the unbelieving Jews were so angry and jealous that they attacked the two men, driving them out of some of the cities they visited.

Undaunted by this frightening experience, Paul and Barnabas passed on to the city of Lystra and immediately began to preach. Among his audience he noticed one particular man who was listening intently. Describe in visual terms the crippled man, unable to stand, his legs and feet deformed, his muscles wasted. He must have had to depend upon others for his livelihood and to help him get about. When Paul spoke of Jesus the man was filled with hope and wanted to know more. What followed caused a sensation. Explain that Paul had received from God a measure of the power Jesus had shown, in order to demonstrate that his words were of God. The people interpreted the miracle in the only way they understood. They knew that no ordinary men could do such a thing and, therefore, thought that Paul and Barnabas must be gods in human form.

Paul and Barnabas were horrified to think that the very sign which was intended to demonstrate the power of the one true God had, in fact, been misinterpreted as the power of pagan gods. In spite of Paul's heartfelt witness to the evidence of the Creator in their own lives, the crowd's reaction could not be changed. The demonstration that followed hindered the work of Paul and Barnabas, and roused the people to a state of excitement that led them to riot when the Jews from the other cities arrived. Vividly describe the hysteria that swept through the crowd, resulting in a complete change of attitude towards the missionaries, from misguided worship to hostile rejection. Describe the frightening power of the mob who, without recourse to legal procedures, took it upon themselves to condemn and execute Paul. The method was cruel and primitive. Convey the distress of the other disciples and their fear that Paul was dead. However, as Paul was to declare later, God preserved him for the great work he had planned for him. With what joy he and Barnabas met with the other disciples on their return to Palestine and recounted their mission.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Paul and Barnabas were very glad that they had learned about the good news of Jesus. They knew that all people needed to believe in him, and they were eager to tell people about him. Why do you think they wanted to teach other people? Why should people have wanted to listen to them? What should this teach us about our attitude to the word of God?

## **WORKSHEETS**

The crossword solution is:

Across: JUMPED; CITY; LYSTRA; FAITH; LAME, GOD, KINGDOM-OF-GOD, BIRTH, UP, DEAD, BULLS, STONED, PRAYER. Down: MEN, EARTH, TORE, SYNAGOGUE, BARNABUS, GOOD-NEWS, KINDNESS, DERBE, PAUL, SEA.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, when we have the chance to tell other people about you and your son Jesus, give us the courage, the words and the wisdom, so that others may come to know and love you. Amen.

## MEMORY VERSE

“The Lord has commanded, ‘I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth’” (Acts 13:47).

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## PAUL AND SILAS AT PHILIPPI

128

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### *Acts 16*

#### AIM OF LESSON

To show how the good news of Jesus was preached to all kinds of people, and to show how Paul and Silas trusted in God despite their suffering.

#### BACKGROUND STUDY

Acts 15:40-41; 2 Corinthians 11:25; Ephesians 2:13-18; Philippians 1:1-6 and 27-30; 2 Timothy 3:12. It is essential to select or prepare a simplified map that shows clearly the route of Paul’s second missionary journey.

#### SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON

Engage the children in a discussion on the ways in which news is spread today. News media, which we now take so much for granted, and by which information can be conveyed instantaneously from one side of the world to the other, were not known in Paul’s day. Messages and news were conveyed in person or by letters delivered by a messenger who travelled along the excellent Roman roads. Paul could and did communicate with his fellow Christians by means of letters, but in order to convert more people to the Christian faith, it was necessary to contact them in person. He was eager to take the gospel to as many people as possible and made this his life’s work.

Having chosen Silas as his travelling companion, Paul set off, from Antioch in Syria, on his second journey. Show the position of Antioch on the map. The two travelled overland and first re-visited Derbe and Lystra, where the young Timothy joined them. Trace their progress as far as Troas, but avoid confusing the children with too many place names. Perhaps Paul wondered, upon reaching the west coast of Asia Minor, where he should go next, but God left him in no doubt; the vision gave clear direction. The three travelling companions shared the same conviction that this guidance was from God. Ask the children to read verses 8-10, and help them to recognize the change of pronoun from “they” to “we”, indicating that Luke, the writer of Acts, had joined the party at Troas. Now there were four who set sail across the sea to Europe. They disembarked and made for the nearest big city - Philippi, a Roman colony. Apparently there was no synagogue in Philippi, so on the sabbath day they sought a quiet place for their own devotions. Here they were presented with an opportunity to preach to a group of serious-minded women. In describing the conversion of Lydia, show how the common bond of a shared faith removed normal human barriers. These men, who had approached her as foreigners, were welcomed as brothers into her house.

It seems that the riverside became the regular meeting place for people to hear Paul’s daily preaching. Describe the embarrassment to Paul of being pursued by the demented slave girl, who shouted

persistently after him and chanted trite religious phrases. In using the power to cure, which God had given him, Paul was to bring more trouble upon them than he could have foreseen. It is noteworthy that on the two chief occasions mentioned in Acts when Gentiles violently opposed the gospel, it was because of its threat to vested financial interests, the other occasion being at Ephesus.

The owners of the girl fabricated charges against Paul and Silas. Motivated by their own prejudice against all Jews, they appealed to similar feelings in the magistrates and the onlookers, who responded by prejudging the foreigners. Without any form of inquiry or court hearing, the apostles were summarily stripped, cruelly beaten with rods and thrown into prison. Try to convey the injustice and severity of the ordeal and contrast this with the calm acceptance and hopeful confidence of the inflicted men who, despite their pain and their grim situation, sang praises to God for all to hear.

Describe how their singing was cut short by a sudden rumbling. The whole building began to shake. In total darkness the prisoners were thrown about. Stocks cracked open and all was noise and confusion, as prisoners screamed and doors burst open. As the quake subsided, the stunned prisoners fell silent, and the jailor's first thought was of his own responsibility for the security of those in his charge. As he groped his way through the prison and found open doors and broken chains, he assumed that some must have escaped. He knew that if this were the case he would be severely punished and executed. Rather than face that ordeal he was prepared to take his own life. His eyes could not penetrate the darkness of the dungeon, but he was visible to Paul because of the torch he carried, and the apostle quickly intervened to prevent further tragedy, and reassured him that no one had fled.

The continued presence of the prisoners seems to have been attributable to Paul's personal hold over them. The jailor recognized that Paul and Silas were no ordinary prisoners and he appealed to them for help. Paul grasped the opportunity to offer him the joy of knowing Jesus. Imagine the thrill for Paul and Silas, knowing that God had used their suffering to bring about the salvation of this man and his family. Mark the sequence of events - the jailor's recognition of his need, the instruction in the word of God, conversion, the physical response of obedience in baptism, and the changed attitude that was seen in kind actions and hospitality. The result of all this was pure joy.

Describe briefly the events of the following morning, and Paul's insistence upon fair treatment, so that they were exonerated from all blame. No one in that city would have been in any doubt about the integrity of these men, and their powerful message. Although they felt it expedient to leave the city, they were happy in the knowledge that they had laid the foundation of the Philippian church. God had touched the hearts of a variety of people who, in spite of their marked differences in background, became united in Christian fellowship.

Show the children the letter to the Philippians, to show them that the letters are to real people. Chapter 1 verse 30 indicates that later the disciples in Philippi were being ill treated as Paul himself had been.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Isn't it remarkable that Paul and Silas did not feel sorry for themselves in prison, but felt inclined instead to sing praises to God, and so strengthen each other. It is easy to praise God when everything is going well for us, but how do we feel when we are in pain, cruelly and unfairly treated, or in a hopeless situation? When something makes us miserable, what sort of things can we do or say in order to stop feeling sorry for ourselves?

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, please help us to show that believing in you makes us happy people, even when things look black. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, to be content” (Philippians 4:11).

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## **PAUL AT ATHENS**

**129**

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### ***Acts 17:16-34***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show the power and courage with which Paul preached the gospel wherever he went.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Study the background of ancient Greece at that time, and find a suitable map, and pictures of the Areopagus and its buildings.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

In order to make this chapter live for the scholars, it will be necessary to “paint in” the background before bringing out the vitally important lesson of Paul’s teaching.

Not discouraged by the happenings at Philippi, or by the persecution that followed him to Thessalonica and Berea, Paul, with the help of the Berean brethren, had reached Athens. While he was waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him, he had time to look around.

Build up for the children a word picture of this busy city: the market-place with its merchants, masters and slaves, soldiers, athletes, and students from the university; the beautiful buildings, sculptures and statues, and the altars and shrines where people stopped to place offerings and to pray to their gods. Athens was overlooked by the Acropolis, crowned by the magnificent building of the Parthenon with its enormous statue of Athena, the “goddess” of wisdom. It was to seek wisdom that students came from many countries to this city, and Paul must have seen and heard them discussing and debating with the philosophers. Among these were the Stoics who believed that by their own efforts of rigid self-discipline they could attain wisdom and perfection, and the Epicureans who believed that the pursuit of pleasure would bring them the happiness and satisfaction they sought.

No wonder Paul’s spirit was stirred up within him. Knowing that there is only one God, the source of all wisdom, he felt compelled to speak to as many people as possible, to teach them the truth about God and his purpose. He went to the synagogue, as was his practice in all cities, and to the market-place, where he spoke to anyone who would listen. Among those who heard him speaking were the Stoics and Epicureans who, intrigued by what he was saying, invited him to address them on Mars Hill (Areopagus) - the ancient court of Athens where debating and discussion took place.

Speak to the children about the courage it must have needed for Paul to stand up in a foreign city, in front of people who were known throughout the world for their wisdom, and tell them how little they really knew. Paul himself was a scholar and would have been able to address them in their own language. He must also have had some knowledge of their literature since he quoted from their poets. Paul always had the ability to get through to his audience by speaking in terms they could understand. In this instance he gained the attention of the Athenians by speaking of the idols they worshipped, especially one altar that he had seen, inscribed to an “unknown god”. Here was his opening to preach the gospel. “I will tell you,” he said, “about the God you call unknown.” No doubt Paul’s hearers listened with interest to what he had to say.

Paraphrase Paul’s speech in words the children will understand, and show how he reached a climax in the fact of the resurrection of Jesus. Up to this point he had held their attention, but at the mention of someone being raised from the dead some of his hearers scoffed; others wanted to hear more at some future time. It seems that Paul did not stay long in Athens, but his preaching did have some effect because a few people were converted to Christianity and we even know the names of two of them.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN’S LIVES**

God is the Creator of the world and everything in it. He provides us with everything we need. Isn’t it right, then, that we should love him, trust him and do as he asks? How can we do this?

### **WORKSHEETS**

The solution to the code is ‘For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed’.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we worship you, our Creator, and thank you for speaking to us through the Bible. Help us to obey you so that we may please you and find wisdom and happiness. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man” (Acts 17:24).

**Acts 18:1-18****AIM OF LESSON**

To show how Paul was guided by God to preach the gospel and to establish a church in Corinth.

**BACKGROUND STUDY**

Acts 20:2-3; 1 Corinthians 1:20-31; 2:1-5.

**SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Corinth was a great commercial sea port and a flourishing centre of trade and industry, with people coming and going from all parts of the known world. Try to capture the scene of this noisy and bustling place, with ships constantly entering and leaving the port, sailors chatting on the quayside telling their tales of other lands, traders loading and unloading wares, sightseers and visitors milling around on the sea-front. When Paul landed, many thoughts must have passed through his mind; he had heard of Corinth's reputation for immorality of the worst kind. Was this the kind of place for preaching the gospel? He would have realized that, in many ways, it was ideal. Here people from all parts of the world came together and reported and listened to the latest news, so where better for preaching the good news of Jesus Christ, which would then be taken to many different places and to all kinds of people? It was also an ideal place for preaching because the further away from God people are, the greater their need to hear the gospel message.

Paul had arrived alone in Corinth, but he soon had the companionship of Aquila and Priscilla, with whom he was to form a lasting friendship. They proved to be so loyal to Paul that at one time they risked their lives for him (Romans 16:3). They had much in common as all three were Jews and skilled in the craft of tent-making. Working together at their trade during the week would, no doubt, have created a close bond between them. One can imagine the stimulating conversations that went on while they worked. Paul worked in order to be able to support himself and not have to depend on the financial help of others while he preached. Every sabbath day they would go together to the synagogue where Paul debated and persuaded and tried to open the eyes of the other Jews to the wonderful truth about Jesus.

Paul's preaching was so dynamic that the Jews were forced to make a decision - to accept or reject his teaching. Those who accepted were baptized and became the founder members of the Christian church at Corinth. Those who rejected Paul's teaching became violently opposed to him, and a bitter argument developed. Paul realized at that point that he could do no more in that community, and he turned his attention to the godless Gentiles. Paul must often have felt very sad and discouraged because of the attitude of the Jews, and in despair when he saw the sinfulness and ignorance of the majority of the Corinthians. The Lord saw his need for encouragement and spoke to him with firm assurance. Greatly encouraged, Paul preached in Corinth with energy and enthusiasm for eighteen months. He built up the church, teaching the new converts, and helping them to overcome their many problems, realizing that it was not easy for them to break away from the influences which surrounded them and to which they were accustomed.

The violent incident recorded in verses 12-17, is complex and difficult to convey to children. Suffice it to say that the Jews, who sincerely believed Paul was wrong, tried to stop him preaching. Remind the children that Paul himself had once violently opposed the Christians in a similar way, and for the same

reason, and that he in turn was often the victim of Jewish fanaticism. However, the Greek authorities did not want to concern themselves with religious arguments, and ignored even the violent clash outside the court.

Soon after this Paul, with Aquila and Priscilla, left Corinth to carry the good news of Jesus further afield, leaving many in Corinth believing in Jesus and waiting for his return to the earth. Although he had to leave them, Paul continued to be concerned about their spiritual well-being, and wrote letters of encouragement to them. Show the children the two recorded letters and, if time permits, read suitable extracts to them.

**RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN’S LIVES**

We have seen what loyal friends Aquila and Priscilla were to Paul. They even risked their lives for his sake. Talk together about loyalty and friendship, and think of ways in which we can show these qualities to our friends. Discuss the kind of friends you should choose.

**WORKSHEETS**

The solution to the grid is:

C	R	I	<b>S</b>	P	U	S				
			<b>Y</b>	E	A	R				
	C	E	<b>N</b>	C	H	R	E	A		
S	I	L	<b>A</b>	S						
			<b>G</b>	E	N	T	I	L	E	S
T	I	M	<b>O</b>	T	H	Y				
			<b>G</b>	A	L	L	I	O		
C	L	A	<b>U</b>	D	I	U	S			
			<b>J</b>	E	W	S				

**PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, thank you for friends who help and support us, as Aquila and Priscilla helped Paul. Guide us in our choice of friends, and help us to form good and lasting friendships. Amen.

**MEMORY VERSE**

“Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you” (Acts 18:9).

***Acts 19:1 and 8-41; 20:1***

### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show how Paul taught people about Jesus and explained to them the error of their pagan beliefs.

### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Deuteronomy 5:6-10; Psalm 115:1-8; Matthew 4:10; Acts 20:17-38. Study historical and geographical details of ancient Ephesus, with particular reference to the worship of Artemis (Diana, AV).

### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Begin by discussing with the children the excitement felt when arriving in a strange city, with its new sights and sounds, unfamiliar market, buildings and shops. The novelty is especially marked in a foreign place, with its different customs and language. Help the children to imagine, on the other hand, how lonely this could be and how glad one would be to meet someone there whom one knew. Go on to explain that, on his journeys abroad to spread the message about Jesus, Paul arrived during his third missionary journey at Ephesus, the most important city of the Roman province of Asia. The use of maps and pictures will help to illustrate the wide colonnaded streets, splendid stone and marble buildings and impressive temples. Being a port (long since silted up) and the centre of trade and commerce, the place would have been bustling with activity and interest, and is said to have accommodated a population of a third of a million.

Summarize Paul's activities in Ephesus during his two years' stay; his preaching to the Jews in the synagogue, his miracles of healing, his condemnation of the "magic arts", and his success in making known the gospel and converting many, so that a thriving Christian church was established.

In introducing the incident with Demetrius, talk about the present-day practice of selling souvenirs. The children will probably all have seen trinkets symbolizing local features, which are sold to tourists as mementoes of their visit. Give examples, and go on to explain that this trade also existed on a grand scale in ancient Ephesus. The people worshipped a statue housed in a fine temple, and superstitiously believed that it had fallen out of heaven and was a goddess. Emphasize the fact that it was just a man-made figure which had no power and which could neither speak nor move; yet many called themselves priests of this goddess and thousands flocked to the temple to worship it. On market stalls there were replicas of the idol for sale. Many of these were made of silver and were the work of silversmiths who had made themselves rich with this trade.

Because of Paul's effective preaching about the worship of the one true God who had given Paul the power to do miracles, many had now recognized the worthlessness of their old beliefs, rejected the worship of idols and were no longer interested in buying the miniatures. Trade in them declined sharply and Demetrius' livelihood was threatened.

Ask the children how they think Demetrius and others like him would have reacted to this change in their fortunes. Vividly describe what followed, conveying the way in which Demetrius incited his fellows to action, beginning with an impassioned speech that touched on their feelings about money and religion. He led them, stirred by repetitive chanting, to rise up in anger against the Christians.

Talk about how frightening it would have been for the apostles, as an hysterical mob bore down on them and dragged two of Paul's companions away. Describe the earnest reasoning that was required



to prevent Paul from putting himself at risk, and the confusion that reigned throughout the city as the ever-growing mob continued their chanting for two hours. At last, when they realized how explosive and potentially dangerous the situation had become, the city authorities were forced to take action. Reference could be made to a present-day riot of which children may have heard. It says much for the authority of the town clerk that his intervention succeeded in quietening the crowd, and made the people see reason. Paul was not deterred by this experience but moved on to other cities, confident that he was doing what God had sent him to do.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

In this story, a selfish and angry crowd got out of control. What problems can you see in joining this sort of crowd? What might it lead to? If your friends decide to have a demonstration or to organize a protest, would it be right to join in? Remember that people who love Jesus do not act in anger; they are never violent, in word or deed.

### **WORKSHEETS**

The solution to the code is 'Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong'.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, show us the way of peace, and help us to control any angry or violent feelings we may have. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"Live in harmony with one another ... Live peaceably with all" (Romans 12:16 and 18).

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## **PAUL AT TROAS; EUTYCHUS**

**132**

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### ***Acts 20***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show Paul's great love for his fellow Christians, and his concern for the newly-formed churches.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Acts 21:1-16; 2 Corinthians 11:26-28; Ephesians 1:15-18; Hebrews 10:24-25.

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Point out Ephesus on a map and remind the children of the dramatic incidents that occurred there. Show clearly but briefly the progress of Paul's third missionary journey, in which he visited and strengthened all the churches in Macedonia and Greece, knowing that this was to be his last opportunity to do so. Wherever Paul went he exhorted the followers of Jesus, enjoyed their fellowship and gave them encouragement. His journey was not without danger, from the natural elements as well as those men who opposed him, particularly the Jews. Many companions chose to accompany him,

and the children will enjoy hearing the list of their uncommon names in verse four. Show how Luke also joined Paul at Philippi (verse six) for the remainder of the journey back to Jerusalem. A voyage of five days brought them to Troas, their first port of call, where they had to wait a week before re-embarking. We can be sure that Paul spent the time profitably, preaching the gospel and discussing the scriptures with his fellow believers. The Christians in Troas naturally arranged for him to speak to them at their breaking of bread service on the first day of the week, before he left.

Picture them gathering together for the service in the upper room of a large house, three storeys high. The believers would have crowded in, young and old, whole families, and probably the only place Eutychus could find to sit was on the window-ledge. Describe the style of house, with thick stone walls and unglazed window openings. As darkness fell the lamps would be lit. Paul addressed the meeting for several hours and his words held the rapt attention of his responsive hearers. However, the young children present would have become tired and settled down to sleep on their mother's knees. Paul was still speaking long after midnight and possibly the flickering light, the warmth of the room and the lateness of the hour caused some to become drowsy. Eutychus, seated comfortably by the dark window, was overcome with sleep and fell three storeys to the ground.

Imagine the consternation and disruption when this tragedy happened. No doubt Luke, the doctor, would have been among the first to rush down to him, and he must have been greatly distressed when he saw how still and lifeless the young man lay. The crowd parted as Paul came down the steps and joined them, and they would have watched anxiously as he bent over the body. Briefly Paul held Eutychus close to him and then, straightening up, he quietly assured them that their friend would live. His friends were able to take him home, marvelling at the power Paul had from God, not only to heal but to raise the dead. This incident did not interrupt the service for long. Paul went back upstairs, broke bread and drank wine with them, and then stayed until dawn, talking to them and answering their questions.

In his keenness to spend every available moment conversing with his beloved fellow Christians, Paul had stayed up with them all night and had missed his sleep. Yet as soon as dawn broke, he had to set off again on the journey homeward.

At this point refer again to the map and show how at every port of call he eagerly made contact with the Christians. They greeted him with great affection, and expressed their sorrow at his departure. Describe the emotional meeting with the Ephesian elders at Miletus and summarize his words of farewell. This scene was to be repeated several times during his exhausting journey to Jerusalem. Some pleaded with him not to return there but, like his master before him, Paul had "set his face" to go to Jerusalem, even though he knew that suffering and imprisonment awaited him there.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Paul's third missionary journey was mostly concerned with revisiting the those who had responded to his earlier preaching. Why did he want to do that? Why was it important for them to meet? What did he feel for these people, and they for him? Have you noticed that believers call each other brother and sister? Why should they do this?

## **WORKSHEETS**

Paul said 'However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me - the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace'.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank you for the example of Paul, who cared for the believers. Help us to be caring in our attitude to others. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

“Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24).

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## **PAUL IN JERUSALEM**

**133**

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***Acts 21:15-19 and 27-40; 22; 23:1-11***

### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show that Paul was prepared, if necessary, to face suffering and death for his Lord, and that he used every opportunity to witness to the truth.

### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Deuteronomy 16:9-12; 1 Corinthians 9:20; 1 Peter 3:14-17.

### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

Attempt to convey to the children the enthusiastic welcome of the believers who awaited Paul in Jerusalem. How pleased they were to see him safely returned and how eager they were to hear about his mission. Paul recounted in detail all that had been accomplished. With God's blessing, many Gentiles had learned and believed about Jesus Christ, and communities of believers had been established in many cities. However, Paul had also to relate that he had experienced many dangers, not the least from the hand of his fellow Jews, who had persecuted him, as he had once persecuted the Christians. Paul, for his part, was overjoyed to have reached Jerusalem in time for the feast of Pentecost and to be able to participate in the temple worship. The city and the temple were crowded because Jews from many cities near and far had travelled there for the feast. Among the crowd were many of the Jewish zealots who had bitterly opposed Paul in his campaign to offer the gospel of salvation to all.

Having described the religious occasion and the acts of worship in the magnificent temple, contrast this with the eruption of aggression and anger caused by these fanatics. They influenced the other worshippers against Paul, with their wild accusations about Paul undermining the Jewish law and defiling the temple, and the clamour which resulted brought others running to swell the hysterical crowd. Try to get the children to imagine how frightening it must have been for Paul to be caught up in this tumult and to be dragged out by this violent mob who intended to kill him.

The riot quickly came to the notice of the officer in charge of the Roman guard, who was responsible for maintaining the peace. Soldiers came running and pushed their way through the crowd, upon which those beating Paul immediately stopped, being reminded that they had no right to take the law into their own hands. The officer recognized that the disturbance had something to do with Paul and assumed, therefore, that he was a trouble-maker. He failed to discover from Paul's accusers the truth of the

matter, for everyone shouted at once and there was danger of further rioting. He saw fit, therefore, to have Paul removed to a place of safety, where proper enquiries could be made. Even so, the soldiers had to lift Paul shoulder high for his own protection. How many people after an ordeal such as this would be able to control themselves sufficiently to speak as Paul did? First he spoke in Greek to the officer, seeking permission to speak to the crowd, and then in Hebrew so that the Jews would be able to understand him. No wonder the crowd fell silent.

Paul's ability to identify with his accusers comes out strongly here. He spoke of things they would know and understand. He was a Jew himself, he said, brought up in Jerusalem and educated in the law by Gamaliel, one of the leading rabbis. He, too, had hated the Christians and, with the support of the Sanhedrin and the high priest, had set out to destroy them. He went on to describe in detail what had happened to him on that journey to Damascus. Perhaps the children may be able to recall, by way of revision, what Paul would have recounted. He told how Ananias had been sent to tell him that he had been chosen by God to be a witness for Christ. He spoke of his conversion, his baptism, and of his immediate enthusiasm to preach Christ in Jerusalem and of the vision he had of Jesus telling him to go instead and preach to the Gentiles.

Until that point the crowd had listened intently, but the word "Gentiles" inflamed them and drove them into a frenzy of anger. There was such confusion that the officer had Paul taken inside the garrison to be examined by flogging. Emphasize here the courage of Paul. Already bruised and bleeding from the vicious attack by his fellow countrymen, he was now tied up ready for flogging. Quietly he asked the centurion if it were lawful for a Roman citizen to be flogged without a trial. Imagine the consternation of the centurion on duty when he learned that Paul was a Roman citizen! Hurriedly he reported the matter to his superior, released Paul and put him safely in a cell for the night.

The following day the Roman officer summoned the Sanhedrin so that formal charges could be brought against the prisoner and evidence presented. However, there was such violent disagreement amongst the members of the council that violence erupted again and the hearing broke up in confusion. Once again the soldiers rescued Paul and returned him to his cell. Read aloud in class verse 11 of chapter 23 and discuss with the children the implications of this message and the encouragement that it gave Paul.

## **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

What led the crowd to become angry with Paul? What did they believe about Paul? Was what they believed true? They had simply jumped to the wrong conclusions, and with serious results. Do we sometimes accept too easily what somebody tells us about another person, instead of finding out for ourselves and being sure about the truth of the matter? Can you think of examples?

## **WORKSHEETS**

These should be self-explanatory.

## **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, help us to be fair in our attitude towards other people and not to listen to things which may be unkind or untrue. Amen.

## **MEMORY VERSE**

"Take courage, for as you have testified about me at Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also at Rome" (Acts 23:11).

***Acts 23:12-35; 24; 25; 26***

### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show how Paul, with conviction and courage, witnessed for Christ before many different people.

### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

Matthew 5:11-12; 10:24-33; Philippians 3:5-6. Consult a commentary for factual information about the Roman administration during this period, and the historical characters involved in this lesson.

### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

To prevent this lesson from becoming a rather tedious recounting of trials and speeches, extract highlights from these events and do not attempt to give a detailed chronological resume. Spend some considerable time in preparation for this lesson by studying and assimilating the text. Moreover, if the children are to understand and remember the sequence of events, the main characters and the essence of the defence, the lesson must be simplified and accompanied by some visual representation.

Begin the lesson with a dramatic account of the plot by the Jews to kill Paul. Convey the speed with which Paul's nephew gained access to the prison, and how the information was gravely received first by Paul, then by the centurion and finally by Claudius Lysias. This officer made immediate plans to have Paul transferred secretly at night to Caesarea, where the Roman governor of Judaea was to be found.

Remind the children that the Romans held sway over the Jewish nation, and that this particular area was controlled by a governor called Felix, who had been appointed by the emperor in Rome. It is suggested that, in order to differentiate between the main characters, puppets or cut-out figures might be produced. The one representing Felix could be given an expression of severity to indicate his cruelty. He presided over the trial at which the elders of the Jews again accused Paul of being a trouble-maker and a heretic. Paul was allowed to speak in his own defence, and he did so boldly and truthfully. He denied the charge of having instigated a riot but confessed to being a follower of Jesus and declared his belief in the resurrection. The case was adjourned. Though Felix listened to Paul's testimony on many occasions he postponed making any judgement, for fear of incurring the wrath of the Jews and hoping to receive financial gain in the form of a bribe. Meanwhile Paul was detained in prison. Consider his frustration at being prevented from continuing God's work. He accepted the situation, however, as being under God's control.

After two years, Felix was recalled to Rome and Festus was appointed in his place. Illustrate this by removing the figure of Felix and introducing the more kindly representation of governor Festus. Even after all this time the Jewish leaders were still actively plotting to kill Paul, but their conniving merely succeeded in drawing the attention of Festus to Paul's case. He lost no time in resuming the proceedings, during which Paul appealed for his trial to be taken to the highest court in Rome, before the Emperor Nero himself.

At this point introduce the third character - the richly-attired, and proud king Agrippa. Stress that Paul had to speak for himself yet again in front of both of these men, and many other prominent officials. Describe the pomp and ceremony, although Paul was not overawed by the occasion. Eloquently he

recounted his early life and his conversion to Christianity, and professed his loyalty to God throughout. His judges were impressed with his integrity, his sincerity and religious fervour. They judged that he was innocent of the charges, and that had he not insisted on being tried at Rome they could have released him.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

In this lesson we have seen how Paul used every opportunity to tell people what he knew to be the truth about Jesus. He was so glad to know this that he wanted to share his happiness with any who would listen. Can we do the same?

### **WORKSHEETS**

The solution to the code is 'Never be afraid to tell others about our Lord'.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we thank you for the faithful and courageous witness of Paul before all kinds of people. Help us to tell our friends about what we know to be true. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"Every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32).

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## **THE SHIPWRECK; PAUL'S LAST YEARS**

**135**

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### ***Acts 27 and 28***

#### **AIM OF LESSON**

To show the quality of Paul's character during a time of stress and danger, and his complete trust in God. To show that Paul faithfully continued with the work God had set him to do, even when a prisoner in Rome.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY**

2 Corinthians 11:24-27 and 12:10. Isaiah 6:9-10; Romans 1:15; 1 Corinthians 15:58; 2 Corinthians 11:24-28; 2 Timothy 2:8-10; 4:6-8. Find information about the kind of ships in which Paul would have travelled, and Mediterranean sailing conditions. Study Roman history of the period (Nero).

#### **SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF LESSON**

This chapter contains a graphic description of one of the most exciting adventures in the New Testament. Not only are we told a great deal about ancient seamanship but we are also given a portrayal of Paul in circumstances that reveal his strength of character. It is under great pressures and trials that heroes sometimes emerge, and Paul is the hero of this story.

Make use of a simple map of the Mediterranean area, but do not refer to all the place names given in the account as these may detract from the main point of the story. A picture or model of an early wooden sailing ship would also be useful.

Begin the narrative simply, allowing the suspense to build up gradually. Immediately, Paul won the respect of Julius, the centurion in charge of him during the voyage, and Julius trusted Paul sufficiently to allow him ashore at Sidon to visit his Christian friends. By the time they reached Crete, the weather had turned against them, and a gale was blowing. Sailing became dangerous in the Mediterranean after the middle of September and was avoided altogether after early November. The crew realized it was getting late in the year for safe sailing, and Paul strongly advised against going on (God had shown him what would happen, verse 10). But Julius, the chief officer on board, decided to accept the advice of the ship-owner and the helmsman, and to press on to Phoenix, a more sheltered harbour of Crete. It is interesting to note the repeated use of the term "we" in this account, showing that the writer, Luke, was an eye-witness and fellow traveller. This is why the description is so detailed and vivid. Use these details to bring the story to life.

The children's appreciation of the reality of the scene will depend upon your well-prepared and imaginative choice of words to describe a storm at sea. Include in this the desperate measures taken to avert the break-up and capsizing of the vessel. Convey what it would have been like to be storm-tossed for two whole weeks with no sight of the sun or stars, their only means of navigation. They had no way of knowing in which direction they were being driven or how near they were to the treacherous quicksands. The sailors were terrified and abandoned all hope of being saved; Paul and his Christian friends were the only ones on board who were confident that they would survive. Paul stood out as the one man who could take charge of the "hopeless" situation and inspire his fellow passengers with hope. He assured the men that God was with them.

For two weeks they had been without food, no doubt for several reasons such as sea-sickness, difficulty of cooking, contamination of food by sea-water, etc. Paul urged everyone to eat in order to gain strength for their coming ordeal, and he led the way by thanking God and then eating bread himself.

Paul had become a tower of strength to everyone on board and, with food in their stomachs and words of encouragement in their ears, they lightened the ship and prepared to beach her. It was because of Paul's command of the situation and the impression he had made upon Julius that the centurion forbade the killing of the prisoners, and no lives were lost. God had kept his promise.

Although no lives had been lost, all were suffering from exhaustion and exposure. Vividly describe the scene as the islanders, who had seen the ship run aground, gathered on the beach to help the survivors ashore on that stormy night. Some of the travellers lay exhausted near the fire and some, like Paul, busied themselves by gathering sticks to replenish it as it warmed and comforted their shivering bodies and also served as a beacon to which everyone was drawn. It seemed that everyone was safe, and relieved that their ordeal was over. Consider the distress, then, when a new danger presented itself.

Help the children to imagine the suddenness of the viper's attack, and the shock on the faces of the onlookers as they expected Paul to collapse. It would seem that the islanders were superstitious people, for they thought that the snake must have been sent as a personal punishment. When Paul remained unharmed, their eyes widened and their attitude changed to one of awe. It was evident that God was still protecting Paul from harm.

Because the storms were so severe, there was no hope of setting sail until winter was over. During the three months' stay, Paul was able to preach and heal and use this unexpected opportunity to bring the knowledge of the true God to this pagan island.

On the map, trace the rest of the journey to Rome and point out that the Appian Way along which they travelled is still recognizable today. Paul would have had mixed feelings as he approached the capital of the Roman empire. He was apprehensive about his trial, yet confident that God had brought him safely thus far because he had work for him to do there. How encouraged he must have been to be so warmly welcomed by the Christians.

Try to convey Paul's situation. His imprisonment would appear to have been a form of house arrest. His freedom was curtailed and he was kept in chains, but he was allowed to receive visitors and to communicate with all his friends. As was his usual practice when arriving at a city for the first time, he gave his attention to the Jews who, it appears, had heard nothing of his mission. How patiently and tirelessly he explained to them from their Old Testament scriptures how Jesus was the fulfilment of the law and the prophecies. Some believed, but many could not accept that their Messiah had come. Again, to Paul's great sadness, he had received only a limited response from his fellow Jews and so, in obedience to God's directive, he reached out to the Gentiles and taught all who came to listen.

Paul had not forgotten the many who, during his missionary journeys in Greece and Asia, had believed the gospel. He was constantly concerned about their physical and spiritual welfare and it was at this time that he wrote letters to the Christian communities at Ephesus, Colossae and Philippi and to his friend Philemon. Ask the children to find these books in their Bibles and talk a little about the original letters, which would have been written in Greek on parchment, and delivered by hand. Help them to visualize the joyful reception of these letters and the way in which they would have been read and re-read, copied meticulously, circulated and treasured. They were kept with such great care that we are able to read them today.

### **RELEVANCE TO THE CHILDREN'S LIVES**

In this lesson we have seen plenty of evidence of Paul's active faith and courage (read Paul's words from 2 Corinthians 11:24-27 and 12:10). What did Paul mean when he said: "For when I am weak, then I am strong"? When we are afraid, what should we do?

### **WORKSHEETS**

The solution to the code is 'Boldly he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ'.

### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord God, we are sometimes afraid like the sailors on Paul's ship. Please help us to remember that wherever we are, you are there. Amen.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

"We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him" (Romans 8:28).



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