Crossing the Red Sea

Scripture Reference: Exodus 13:17-15:21

Suggested Theme: God is powerful, and He can change the laws of nature to protect His people.

Memory Verse: “He gives a command to the earth, and it quickly obeys him.” Psalm 147:15, ICB

Story Overview:

God’s people were finally on their way to their own land, Canaan! A pillar of cloud led the way by day, and a pillar of fire guided them at night. As the Israelites arrived at the edge of the Red Sea, Pharaoh and his army caught up with them. Pharaoh had changed his mind yet again! The Lord protected His frightened people. The pillar of the cloud moved between the Israelites and the Egyptian army. Moses then stretched his hand across the sea, and the Lord caused a great wind to part the water and hold it back while the estimated two million Israelites passed through. When the Egyptians followed them, the Lord caused the water to flood and kill all of them.

Background Study:

Because Pharaoh wouldn’t let Israel go, the firstborn sons in every Egyptian family were killed. God “passed over” His people, and none of them died. The Egyptians then urged the Israelites to leave quickly. They were so anxious to see them leave that they gave them gold, silver, and clothing to take with them. Moses took the bones of Joseph with them as they left. Joseph had made the Israelites swear to do this four hundred years before (Genesis 47:29-30; Exodus 13:19). The Israelites had been in Egypt for 430 years.

When the Hebrew people left Egypt, God did not leave them to find their own way to Canaan. He led them in the most strategic path and provided a tall, vertical pillar of cloud to lead them by day and a pillar of fire to guide them at night. An angel of God moved in and out of these pillars as needed.

Pharaoh and the Egyptian people had begged God’s people to leave Egypt, but now, as they watched a large labour force leaving the country, they changed their minds (Exodus 12:31-33 versus Exodus 14:5). Pharaoh rallied all of his chariots and chased after them.

In what will become a common thread in the years to come, the people begin to doubt Moses and God.

> “But Moses answered, ‘Don’t be afraid! Stand still and see the Lord save you today. You will never see these Egyptians again after today. You will only need to remain calm. The Lord will fight for you.’” Exodus 14:13-14, ICB

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We don’t know exactly where the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, which the Hebrew text calls the Sea of Reeds. Wherever the crossing took place, it involved an amount of water significant enough that the Israelites were frightened by it, and the entire Egyptian army could drown in it.

Based on the fact that there were 600,000 fighting men (Exodus 12:37-38), the entire number of Israelites who left Egypt could be estimated at nearly two million people. They would also have had millions of animals. The crossing would have taken several hours, even if the path had been a half-mile wide! Had the Egyptians known what was happening, they might have attacked, but the angel moved to the back of the group along with the pillar of cloud and blocked the view. The cloud gave light on the one side for the Israelites to cross, yet darkness on the other for the Egyptians.

The Egyptians followed them into the sea. Just before dawn, after the Israelites were safely on the other side of the sea, the Lord caused wheels to come off the Egyptians’ chariots and confusion to spread through the army. Before they drowned, the Egyptians knew God was protecting His people. By that time, it was too late.

> “When the people of Israel saw the great power that the Lord had used against the Egyptians, they feared the Lord. And they trusted the Lord and his servant Moses.” Exodus 14:31, ICB

God’s power saved His people! In Exodus 15:1-21 we read of Moses and the people celebrating in song to the Lord. Moses’ sister, Miriam, took up a tambourine and led the women in dancing.

Way to Introduce the Story:

Use books from the Public Library to show pictures of Egyptian armies. You will find chariots in many of them. Just have fun discussing life in Egypt in general. Talk about how it would have been a lot different living in Egypt as a slave instead of royalty. Discuss what the Israelites might have missed and what they might not have missed from Egypt as they left.

The Story:

God’s people, the Israelites, had been slaves in Egypt for 430 years! Now, they were finally free to leave and make a home on their very own land.

God had chosen Moses as their leader, so they packed everything they owed and followed him out of Egypt. Over a million Israelites set off. Moses always knew which direction to go because God put a big, tall pillar of cloud in front of them to point the way. At night, they followed a big, tall pillar of fire. They never got lost because God always showed them the correct way to go.

Eventually, the pillar stopped by the water called the Red Sea. The Israelites camped by water and waited for what God wanted them to do next.

Meanwhile, back in Egypt, the Pharaoh and his officials began thinking about how all of the Israelites had left. Through the Ten Plagues, God had proven that He was more powerful than the King of Egypt and all Egyptian gods. At that time, Pharaoh and the people had told the Israelites to leave Egypt, but now they were having second thoughts. If all the slaves left Egypt, they thought, then who would do all the work?

So, the Pharaoh decided to chase after the Israelites and make them come back. He sent all of his horses and chariots and all of his horsemen and troops. He must have thought, “NO ONE would be able to stop this army!” When God’s people saw the Egyptian army approaching in the distance, they became very afraid. There was nowhere to go to get away. The army was behind them, and the Red Sea was in front of them. They were trapped!

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The people complained to their leader, Moses. They said, “Why did you lead us out of Egypt into the desert to die? We would have been better off to have stayed in Egypt!”

But Moses said, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see how God will save you today. The Egyptians can never win because God will fight for you.”

Amazing things began to happen right before their eyes. The people thought that they were trapped because of the water. But they were about to see that God is so powerful that he can do anything!

An angel of God had been travelling in front of the Israelites, and he moved back behind them along with the pillar of the cloud. The cloud blocked the Egyptians’ view, and they could only see night and darkness.

But the cloud provided light for God’s people so they could see everything. They could see the Red Sea in front of them and wished they could cross the sea to safety.

At God’s command, Moses stretched out his big staff (stick) over the water, and it began to change.

A strong wind blew the water up into two walls so that there were walls of water on each side and dry land down the middle. God had provided a way to cross the sea to the other side!

When the Egyptians saw the dry land, they followed the Israelites. Do you think they caught up with them? No, they did not. Strange things began happening to them. The wheels of their chariots began falling off, and it became very difficult to drive. By the time the Egyptians realised God was fighting against them, it was too late.

Now that the Israelites were all safely on the other side, God told Moses to stretch his staff over the water again. Soon all of the Egyptian army was drowned in the water.

The people were so happy that God had saved them from their enemies. Moses wrote a song about what happened, and everyone sang it. And Moses’ sister, Miriam, sang another part of the song. Then she got a tambourine and began to dance. Soon, all of the women were dancing with joy for all God had done that day. If you were one of the people there would you join in the celebration?

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child’s spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- After the tenth plague, did the Egyptians want the Israelites to leave Egypt? (Yes)
- How did the Israelites know which direction to go when they left Egypt? (They were led by a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night)
- How did the Israelites get across to the other side of the Red Sea? (God told Moses to hold his staff (shepherd's rod) over the sea. Then, God caused a strong wind to hold back the water so they could cross.
- Did the Egyptians change their minds about letting the Israelites go? What did they do? (Yes, they decided to chase them on chariots all the way to the sea)
- What happened when the Egyptian army tried to cross the sea? (They became confused; the wheels fell off their chariots, and the water came down on them and drowned them)
- How did God show His people love as they escaped Egypt? (He parted the sea for them to walk through. He protected them from the Egyptians who were chasing them.)
- What do you think the people learned about God the day they crossed the sea and left the Egyptians? What does it mean to 'fear God'? (Fearing God is not just 'being afraid' of God. Fearing God means respecting God and understanding how powerful, mighty, and Holy He is.
- What did you learn about God from this story?

Reflection:

- What is something you wonder about in this story?
- When the Israelites saw God part the sea, what do you think their faces looked like? How did they feel? (The children can show an expression of shock or awe on their faces)
- What do you think the Israelites saw as they walked through the sea? What would it smell like? How would the walk feel? What would it sound like?
- If you were an Israelite and you knew the Egyptians were chasing you, would you be afraid, or would you have trusted God to protect you and your people?
- God was so powerful that He could part the sea for people to walk through! Is there anything you can think of that God isn't powerful enough to do?
- How do you think the Israelites felt after they had crossed the sea and saw that the Egyptians who had been chasing them had now been destroyed? If you were an Israelite in this story, what would you want to do or say then?
- What are some different ways we can praise or worship God? How do you like to praise God?
- God used His power to protect His people, whom He loved. Is there something you need God's help with in your life? Let's pray for God's help with that situation. (Pray together about the things the children bring up)

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a lifelong friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

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Song Suggestions:

- My God is So Big Song
- God is Listening When We Pray (Song) English/Cebuano
- Joy Songs
- My God is So Big!
- He's Got the Whole World in His Hands
- Our God is an Awesome God Song
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Show a map and the possible site of the crossing.
- Encourage the children to celebrate God's power over Pharaoh through song and dance just like the people of Israel did (Exodus 15:20-21). Perhaps sing using some of the words of Exodus 15. Lead the children in thinking about what a celebration dance might have looked like, and then let them dance. Another idea is to call out various reasons to celebrate and let the children perform "dance moves" that depict this (God sent the 10 plagues-each plague could have a move, preparing for the Passover, leaving Egypt at night, etc.) Refer to the ideas at Let's Dance!
- Use play-dough to make a model of today's story.
- Discuss the memory verse. Write the words of the verse on cards, one word per card. Have the children place them in order to help them learn the verse.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable "God's Story" printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- Have children draw two large "clouds" or pillars on a piece of paper. Glue cotton wool on one and paper strips (red, orange, yellow) on the other.
- For something different, cut a fish shape out of paper and use it as a puppet. Let the fish puppet tell the story from his point of view.

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page Leaving Egypt & puzzle worksheets (Calvary Curriculum)
- Colouring page with text (Ministry Spark)
- Colouring page The Red Sea (Christian Answers)
- Colouring page of Moses at the parted sea (Bible-Printables)
- Printable: The journey of Moses and the Hebrews out of Egypt (Bible-Printables)

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