

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

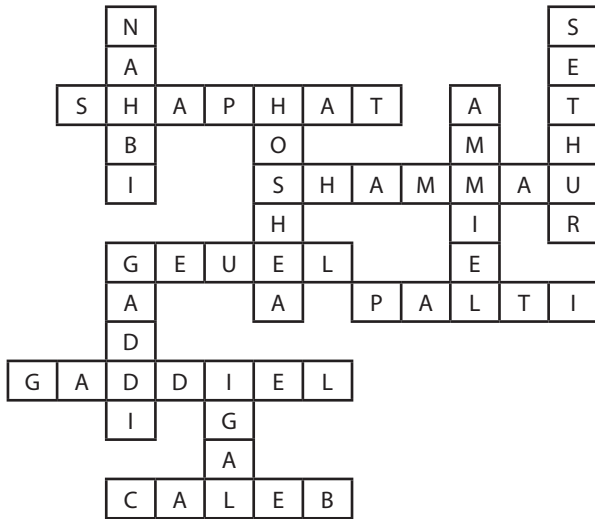
Can you remember some of the wonderful things that God did for Moses and his people on their journey from Egypt to Canaan? What should they have learned from these experiences? Which of them should have prevented the people from being cowards?

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 names are taken from the NIV. 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).