

Aim of lesson

To understand how God travelled with his people.

Bible background

Numbers 1 – 9; Leviticus 16; Hebrews 10:11-23.

Outline of lesson

God prepares his people for their journey

In this lesson we are looking mainly at the first section of the book of Numbers. Israel is in the Desert of Sinai and it is 13 months after the exodus from Egypt. The Israelites have spent the previous year receiving the law and building the tabernacle. In Numbers 1 the LORD tells Moses to list all the men in Israel age 20 or over who are able to serve in the army. Chapter 2 then organises them around the tabernacle in preparation for their journey through the wilderness. Get the class to look at Numbers 2 and fill in on the grid where each tribe would be. Ask the class why the Levites were not included. What was their role to be? Also point out that the tabernacle was in the very middle of them all – what is the significance of this?

Note: At the top of the camp should be Naphtali, Asher and Dan; on the right hand side should be Judah, Issachar and Zebulun; at the bottom should be Gad, Simeon and Reuben, and on the left hand side should be Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin.

Note that the ordinary people would have been a long way away from the tabernacle, and the purpose of the Priests and the levites was not just to help the people in offering their sacrifices, but to guard the tabernacle so that nobody else could enter it (Numbers 18:2-5).

God guides his people

Ask the class to read Numbers 9 v 15 – 23. Answer the questions about how the people knew when to move in the wilderness. God guides them all through their journey. Look at verse 23: the Israelites obeyed the Lord’s command. We often talk about how disobedient they were, but here we have them trusting in God completely.

The Day of Atonement

In Hebrew this is called Yom Kippur. It was one of the most important and solemn days of the year because this was the day that the Israelites were cleansed from their sins once a year.

The workbook can be used to develop the order of the ritual of the Day of Atonement. The class can put the 14 squares in the correct order, either by numbering them, or by cutting up a photocopy of the page and re-arranging the squares on a blank sheet of paper.

The class could either read Leviticus 16 themselves or they could look specifically at the following references in order to establish the sequence of the squares.

1. Leviticus 16:4	5. Lev 16: 7-8	9. Lev 16: 23
2. Lev 16:11	6. Lev 16: 5, 9, 15-16	10. Lev 16: 24
3. Lev 16: 12, 13	7. Lev 16: 16,18	11. Lev 16: 3, 5, 24
4. Lev 16:14	8. Lev 16: 26	12. Lev 16: 27,28

The correct order of the squares is as follows:

1. The high priest removes his regular clothes and washes himself, and goes into the Holy Place to put on his special garments for the Day of Atonement.
2. He sacrifices a bull for himself and the other priests.
3. He goes into the Most Holy Place with some of the bull’s blood. He puts incense on the burning coals which made smoke and hide the ark from view.
4. He sprinkles some of the bull’s blood on and in front of the cover of the ark.
5. He goes outside the tabernacle and cast lots for two goats to see which was to be sacrificed and which was to be the scapegoat.
6. At the altar of burnt offering the high priest kills the goat for the sin offering for the people, and goes into the Most Holy Place again, this time to sprinkle the goat’s blood on the atonement cover.
7. He returns to the Holy Place and sprinkles the blood there and then outside on the altar of burnt offering
8. He lays both hands on the second goat to symbolise the transfer of Israel’s sin and sends it out into the desert.
9. The High Priest enters the Holy Place to take off his special clothes
10. He washes and puts on his regular priestly clothes.
11. He goes to the great altar and offers a ram for himself and another ram for the people.
12. The sacrifices for the sin offerings are removed and taken to a place outside the camp where they are burnt.

Ask the class to answer the final questions about the Day of Atonement in the workbook.

Digging deeper

Jesus our High Priest

Take the children to Hebrews 10:11-23, and show how the Day of Atonement looked forward to the Lord Jesus. We are not dependent on a human High Priest, but the Lord Jesus has, through his death, opened the way for us to come into the presence of God.

Relevance to our lives

God had very strict instructions for the children of Israel in the Wilderness about how they had to set up camp, where they had to go and how they can get forgiveness for their sins. In what ways does he guide us today through our lives? Think about this in the coming week and look for times when you feel God is guiding you.

The details of the Day of Atonement are very complicated. This was how the Israelites were cleansed from their sins. This complicated ceremony had to be performed every year. It is through Jesus' sacrifice that we obtain forgiveness for our sins. His death on the cross means that we can be cleansed by baptism into his name.

Prayer

The class could write a prayer together asking for God to guide them on their journey of life, just as he did for the children of Israel. They could look at Psalm 90 to see what Moses said in his psalm.

Other suggestions for activities

- It might help the class fix the details of the day of Atonement in their minds if they tried to act it out. Someone would have to be the High Priest, a few would be the children of Israel and one of them could lead the scapegoat out into the wilderness. You may need a few props so that it would make more sense.
- The class could imagine that they are one of the children of Israel, now settled in the Promised Land and an old man or woman. The class could then write down what they would tell their grandchildren about how God guided them to the Promised Land.