

Aim of lesson

For the young people to understand how the people turned away from their faith, and as a result died in the wilderness.

Bible background

Numbers 11-17

Outline of lesson

How long a journey?

Ask the class how long they think it would have taken the people to travel across the desert from Egypt to the land which God had promised them. They may find it helpful to look at a map to remind them of the distance. Numbers 10:11 gives us the last date recorded before we read that they have arrived at the border of the land and this verse suggests that it took them something over two years. Deuteronomy 1:2, rather poignantly after 40 years' wandering, tells us that it is eleven days' journey from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea.

Do they realise that the people didn't enter straight into the land? In this lesson we are going to look at how why God was angry with them and did not allow them into the land at that time.

Spying the land

Read chapter 13:1-3 and then use v 4-16 to complete the first section of the workbook; use the spaces in the picture to write the names of each of the spies. Ask the class what Moses asked the spies to find out. They can use the space in the speech bubble to record their answers.

Emphasise that at this point in time, all the spies seemed alike. They were all fit, healthy, enthusiastic and keen. However, only two of the spies were going to enter into the land to live.

Complete the rest of the workbook – recording what the spies reported to Moses.

Note that the report that the spies brought back became more and more melodramatic, the more they talked – firstly in verse 27 they report that it is a good land; in verse 28 they add that the people are strong and the cities fortified – descendants of Anak there; in verse 32 they say “it is a land which devours its inhabitants” “All the people are of a great height” (i.e. not just the Anakites) “and we seemed like grasshoppers!”

Make sure that the children understand that Joshua and Caleb did not deny that the cities were well fortified or that the people were giants. The difference was that they said – “Let us go up! God has given us the land.” i.e. they were trusting in God. In this test of faith they were passing the test. The others failed. They did not trust God to fight for them and so God was angry with them. Read verses 28-35 to hear the punishment from God. Those who were a responsible age were not allowed to enter the promised land. Joshua and Caleb however did enter the land – much later.

Korah's rebellion

The second part of this lesson considers an incident in which Moses and Aaron's leadership was challenged but confirmed to be what God wanted. Those who rebelled were not left unpunished!

Read Numbers 16:1-3 to introduce the characters Korah, Dathan, Abiram and On. Korah seems to have been the leader. We can find out from Exodus 6:21 that Korah's father, Izhar, was a relative of Moses'. You may like to discuss why Korah felt the need to challenge Moses.

You will probably feel that chapter 16 is too long to read all the way through so outline the rest of the story for the class, picking out any key verses. Note that the fourth man, On, is not mentioned again in this chapter and we can conclude from this that he didn't continue in rebellion.

They can then fill in the details on the crossword.

Crossword answers

Across	Down
5 – ABIRAM	1 – PRIESTHOOD
6 – ALTAR	2 – KORAH
9 – DATHAN	3 – SWALLOWED
11 – TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY	4 – FIRE AND INCENSE
12 – CENSER	7 – TENTS
	8 – IZHAR
	10 – FIRE

Use Numbers 17 to explain what happened after the incident with Korah, Dathan and Abiram. God wanted it to be clear in the minds of the people they should not rebel against those God had chosen to lead them.

Digging deeper

The end of the journey

This section deals with the end of Moses' life and some important lessons for us. God set before Israel the choice of two ways: one brought blessings and led to life; the other brought trouble and disaster, and led ultimately to death.

Relevance to our lives

We need to have the faith that God will keep his promises to us. Discuss with the class what this means. They should understand that we cannot expect God to fight every battle for us but that he will provide a way for us to enter our “promised land” i.e. the kingdom. We must have the humility to accept the instructions God has given us and not to challenge them.

Prayer

Dear Lord, please give us the faith and the humility to face the problems in our lives in a way that is pleasing to you. Amen

Other suggestions for activities

The class may like to look at Psalm 78, which is God’s commentary on the wilderness journey. It is a remarkable catalogue of the faithlessness of the Israelites, compared with the love and faithfulness of God, who despite everything still cares for his people and provides for them.