LESSON 33

Israel rejects God's plan

NUMBERS 13:1–14:45

CENTRAL TRUTH

God judges those who reject Him.

KEY VERSE

"And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?" **(Num 14:11).**

Supporting Truths

1. God promised to bring Israel to a land flowing with milk and honey.
2. God promised to defeat Israel's enemies.
3. God is slow to anger.
4. God punishes sin.
5. God is merciful in His judgment.

Objectives

1. Describe how Israel should have responded to the spies' report.
2. Describe how God would have defeated the Canaanites had Israel been faithful.
3. List all the times that Israel rebelled and God demonstrated His long-suffering by not wiping them out.
4. Explain how God punished Israel's sin.
5. Describe how God demonstrated His mercy by letting the nation live in the wilderness for 40 years.

Lesson Summary

God promised Israel that He would give them a land flowing with milk and honey. However, the nation, following the evil report of the ten spies (Num 13:32–33), rejected God and His promise (14:1–4). The LORD responded by judging the people, demonstrating both His mercy (14:20) and the severe consequences of sin (14:21–23). He swore in His wrath that the first generation of Israelites out of Egypt would not enter into His promised rest (Ps 95:10–11).

Spotlight on the Gospel

God promised to give Israel a pleasant land, but the people did not believe in God's word (Ps 106:24). They despised the Promised Land, hardening their hearts in rebellion against the LORD. God judged the people for their unbelief, causing them to wander in the wilderness for 40 years while that entire rebellious generation died off. We must learn from their example and, like Joshua and Caleb, respond to God's promises with belief and obedience (Num 14:6–9). God will judge all those who reject Him (Heb 10:26–31).

LAST WEEK

Israel rejects God's provisions
Numbers 11:1–12:16

THIS WEEK

Israel rejects God's plan
Numbers 13:1–14:45

NEXT WEEK

Israel rejects God's prophet and priest
Numbers 16:1–17:11

Lesson Commentary

God judges those who reject Him.

As Israel traveled toward the Promised Land, they were marked by discord, rebellion, and dissatisfaction. They forgot God's mighty works and put Him to the test (Ps 106:13–14). So in response, God punished them by sending a disease among them (106:15). They should have learned from their punishment, but they did not. The people continued in their rebellion against the LORD, rejecting His promise to give them the Promised Land.

THINK ABOUT IT
The faithfulness of God is the only sure foundation to a living and lasting faith.

Ten spies gave an evil report about the Promised Land (13:1–33)

The LORD commanded the Israelites to send spies to spy out the land of Canaan (13:1). Deuteronomy 1:20–22 indicates that the people desired to spy out the land because they were afraid. Yet God was gracious and allowed the Israelites to send spies into the land. The spies were sent to evaluate the land and the strength of those living in the land (Num 13:17–20). But more importantly they were sent so that they might be witnesses who could give testimony to how great the land was that God was going to give to the people.

God had promised Israel a land flowing with milk and honey (Exod 3:8, 17; 13:5; 33:3; Lev 20:24), and the spies were to give testimony that God's promise about the land was true. They were to testify that God was leading them to a land that was exceptionally productive. Their testimony to God's faithfulness in regard to the abundant produce of the land would be proof that God would be faithful in regard to driving out the people of the land. Through the testimony of the spies, Israel should have realized that God is faithful and that they could trust Him to fight for them. The LORD would be faithful to drive out the Canaanites just like He promised He would do (Exod 23:28–31; 33:2; 34:11).

The spies affirmed that the land did indeed flow with milk and honey (Num 13:27), but they were afraid of the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. Giant humans lived in the land (Deut 1:28–33; Josh 14:12–15; 15:13–19; cf. 1 Sam 17). Their fear demonstrated their rejection of God. They were afraid because they did not believe that God would be faithful to drive out the Canaanites. Therefore Caleb stood up and urged the people to trust God (Num 13:30). He understood that since God's word was true concerning the nature of land, surely God's word was true concerning their victory in taking the land. Caleb believed that God's angel would go before them and drive out the Canaanites (Exod 33:2). But Israel desired to go back to Egypt (Acts 7:39) and back to their false gods (Ps 78:58). Ten of the spies rejected the LORD by spreading an evil report (13:32–33 ; cf. Exod 23:1), and the people followed them in their rebellion.

THINK ABOUT IT
Faith apart from God is worthless! Your faith is only as strong as the object to which it is directed.

The nation of Israel rejected God (14:1–10a)

Israel had no faith in the LORD's promise (Ps 106:24). Instead, they trusted in the ten spies' exaggerated report. As a result, they became afraid, believing that they were like insects among men (Num 13:32–33).

The Israelites' fear resulted in sadness. The spies were practically saying, "You will die if you go to Canaan." Therefore the people cried and wept (14:1). The Israelites' sadness resulted in grumbling. First, they began to grumble against Moses and Aaron, saying that they should appoint a new leader to bring them back to Egypt (14:2–4). To reject God's leader is ultimately a rejection of God Himself (1 Sam 8:7). Second, they grumbled against the LORD, accusing Him of bringing them out of Egypt only to abandon them to die in Canaan (14:3). Such an accusation was an assault on both God's character and God's actions.

Moses and Aaron immediately humbled themselves and ***interceded*** for the people (14:5), praying to God on their behalf. Joseph and Caleb also humbled themselves and urged the people not to rebel. They believed that if they were faithful to the LORD and He delighted in them, that He Himself would fight their battles (Exod 23:28–31; cf. Exod 14:14, 25; Ps 35:1).

THINK ABOUT IT
True faith trusts in God no matter how tough it may seem.

They understood that if the LORD was with them that no one could possibly stand against them (Ps 118:5–7). Therefore they urged the people not to rebel against the LORD nor fear the people of the land (Num 14:9).

The Israelites' rebellion against God was seen in their rejection of Joshua and Caleb. They desired to kill those who were faithful to the LORD (14:10a). Their rebellion was now complete. They had completely rejected God and His chosen leaders.

The LORD judged the nation of Israel (14:10b–45)

The LORD intervened to stop the murder of Israel's leaders (14:10b). He questioned Moses concerning the people, giving Moses the opportunity to intercede for the people (14:11). Yet the LORD also threatened to destroy the people, demonstrating the seriousness of their sin (14:12; cf. Exod 32:10). Moses' intercession for the people was grounded in the glory of God (14:13–16), the character of God (14:17–19a), and the past actions of God (14:19b). Moses' prayer is an example of how we ought to remember God's glory and character when we pray.

First, Moses interceded for the people by appealing to God's glory (14:13–16). Moses emphasized God's action in saving Israel: You are in the midst of Israel, You are seen face to face; You go before them. If God annihilated the Israelites after all that He had done to redeem them (14:14), then the Egyptians and other nations would think that God makes mistakes (14:16). God had saved Israel for His own glory (Ps 106:8), and God's glory would have been diminished before the nations if He destroyed Israel in the wilderness.

Second, Moses interceded for the people by appealing to God's character (14:17–19). After the incident with the golden calf, the LORD described Himself as a gracious, compassionate, loving, and long suffering God who is slow to anger, forgiving, but also just (Exod 34:6–7). Based on this, Moses appealed to God's great love, long-suffering, and forgiving character.

Third, Moses prayed that God would forgive the rebellious Israelites just as He had done in the past. They had rebelled at Rephidim (Exod 17:1–7), with the golden calf (32:1–35), by grumbling (Num 11:1–3), by complaining (11:4–35), and by rejecting the LORD's leader (12:1–16). In each rebellion God demonstrated His merciful judgment, displaying His loving character. God's character is unchanging. Moses emphasized that the LORD is loving and forgives yet does not leave the guilty unpunished (Num 14:18; Exod 34:6–7).

THINK ABOUT IT
The deadly results of sin should serve as a strong deterrent against sin (1 Cor 10:6-12).

The LORD responded by judging the people and demonstrating the full array of His character. He forgave the people (14:20), disciplined the people (14:21–23; 26-29; 30–35), blessed the faithful (14:24–25), and killed the spies who began the rebellion (14:36–38). The LORD forgave the people but there were still consequences for their sin. They would not see the land because they rejected God and His promise (Ps 106:24). The entire generation of rebellious Israelites would die in the wilderness (14:29). God swore in His wrath that they would not enter His promised rest because they had rebelled and rejected Him (95:10–11).

Despite the LORD's merciful judgment, Israel continued in their rebellion. The people were sorry over God's judgment and their sin (14:39), even recognizing that they had sinned (14:40), but they did not truly repent. They refused to obey the LORD and went into battle without the LORD's presence among them and were easily defeated by the Amalekites and Canaanites (14:42–45). We must not follow the example of the rebellious Israelites who rejected the LORD and His promise. Rather, we must be like Joshua and Caleb who believed in God's word and obeyed His commandments (14:6–9).

Lesson Outline

God judges those who reject Him.

AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE

1. **Ten spies gave a bad report about the Promised Land (13:1–33).**
2. **The nation of Israel rejected God's plan and His promises (14:1–10a).**
3. **As a result, Israel had to wait forty years to enter the Promised Land (14:10b–45).**

AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE

1. **Ten spies gave an evil report about the Promised Land (13:1–33).**
   - God commanded that Israel send out 12 spies to confirm His promise (13:1–24).
   - The spies confirmed the land was good (13:25–27).
   - 10 of the 12 spies rejected God by not believing God's promise to drive out the Canaanites and by giving an evil report of the land to the people (13:28–29, 31–33).
   - Caleb affirmed his faith in God (13:30).

2. **The nation of Israel rejected God (14:1–10a).**
   - The nation wept, grumbled, talked about returning to Egypt, and discussed appointing a new leader to replace Moses (14:1–4).
   - While Moses and Aaron prayed for the people, Caleb and Joshua pleaded with the people to be faithful to God and the covenant (14:5–9).
   - The people decided to kill Moses, Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua (14:10a).

3. **The LORD judged the nation of Israel (14:10b–45).**
   - God allowed Moses to pray for the people (14:10b–12).
   - Moses prayed for the people based on the LORD's glory, character, and past forgiveness (14:13–19).
   - The LORD forgave the people, but He also judged the people (14:20–45).

Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.

Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

1. **What did God command Moses to do?**
   God told Moses to send spies into the Promised Land.
2. **What did the spies report when they came back from their 40 day journey?**
   The spies said that the land was very good but that the people were huge.
3. **Did God allow the Israelites to kill Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb?**
   No. God stopped them.
4. **How did God punish the Israelites?**
   They would have to wander in the wilderness for 40 years.

Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

1. **What did God command Moses to do?**
   God told Moses to choose a man from each tribe of Israel to spy out the land of Canaan.
2. **What kind of report did the spies bring back?**
   They reported that the land was rich and good. However, the men thought that the people who lived in the land were too strong to be conquered.
3. **Was this the right attitude for the men to have?**
   No. The men showed a lack of faith when they failed to believe that God would give them the land He had promised.
4. **What was the response of the Israelites to the negative report?**
   They were afraid. They wept. They questioned why God had brought them out of Egypt. They desired a new leader to take them back to Egypt. They rejected God.
5. **How did Moses and Aaron react when they saw the sinful response of the Israelites?**
   They fell on their faces before the people, preparing to pray to God on their behalf.
6. **What stopped the Israelites from stoning the four men?**
   The Lord stopped them. He appeared in the tabernacle before the Israelites.
7. **Did the Lord forgive Israel?**
   The Lord forgave Israel, but He still punished their sin. The entire rebellious generation would have to wander in the wilderness for 40 years before the younger generation could enter the Promised Land.
8. **Did the people repent and accept the punishment God gave them?**
   No. They tried to conquer the land even though the Lord was not with them and they were defeated (Num 14:44–45).

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5

INTRODUCE

REFUSING GOOD

In our lesson today, the Israelites refused to enter the good land that God had given them. Provide a child with something good (a dollar bill, candy, a Bible, etc.) and tell them to give it to you. When it comes time to receive the good thing, refuse to take it from the child. Tell the class that we will learn how the Israelites refused to enter the good land that God had given them.

SEEING AS GOD SEES

Bring two pairs of play eyeglasses into class. Select one child to put on "man's" glasses. Before you put the glasses on the child, have the child close his eyes. Have a teacher stand on a chair and pretend to be a giant, mean Canaanite. Put the glasses on the child, and then have the child open his eyes. Have the child close his eyes again and give him "God's" glasses. While his eyes are closed, have the Canaanite sit on the floor. Have the child open his eyes and look now. Tell them that in today's lesson we'll find out whether the Israelites chose to see the Canaanites as man sees them or God sees them.

ILLUSTRATE

GOING ON A TRIP

Pretend to be some of the 12 spies preparing to go into the Promised Land. As you fill a backpack with supplies (water, food, map, notebook and pencil, etc.), talk about what you might expect to see, hear, smell, and taste in the land.

MEGA GRAPES

Blow up purple balloons and string them over a broom handle like a cluster of grapes. Have two teachers carry the balloons, talking about what happened to them as they spied out the land.

APPLY

GOOD REPORT, BAD REPORT

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2.

Materials: Craft sheet, purple paper, crayons, scissors, and glue.

Directions: Pre-cut the pictures and titles from the craft sheet. Pre-cut purple ovals that will serve as grapes. Have students color the pictures and glue them to the page as shown below. Glue purple ovals onto the picture as demonstrated below.

Good Report, Bad Report
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2.

TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

Israel rejects God's plan • Numbers 13:1–14:45

AGES 6–8

INTRODUCE

GOD'S COMMANDS ARE GOOD

Sometimes God asks us to do things that seem hard. God commands us to ask for forgiveness if we've hurt someone and to be kind to people who are unkind to us. God's commands don't always feel good, but they are good. In today's lesson, the Israelites are asked to do something very hard. God promised them a special land to live in, and they were commanded to go take it. Let's see if they obey God's Word and trust His good promise.

IN GOD'S TIME

Materials: stopwatch with alarm

Directions: At the beginning of the lesson, tell the children that you are going to test how quickly they can obey. Ask them to stand up, then turn on the stopwatch and ask them to sit down. Tell the children how long they took to obey. Challenge them to try to obey instantly, and then time them sitting down and standing up a few times. Explain to the children that God desires instant obedience. Explain that in today's lesson, they will learn about Israel, who tried to obey God in their own time and their own way, not in God's time and God's way.

ILLUSTRATE

WRONG-WAY BINOCULARS

Give children a turn looking at you through a pair of binoculars from only a few feet away. Explain that if you look through a pair of binoculars from one side, it makes things look bigger. But if you look at things from the other side, they seem very small. In today's lesson, God asked the Israelites to spy out the land. They were afraid because they were looking at things from man's perspective and not God's. The people living in the Promised Land seemed bigger than they really were.

FOOD OF THE LAND

Bring in different edible treats the spies would have brought back from their journey through the Promised Land (figs, dates, grapes, garbanzo beans, olives, pomegranates, and honey). Allow the children to taste the different foods.

APPLY

SPYING OUT THE LAND BINOCULARS

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2.

Materials: Yellow cardstock, orange paper, yarn, foam decorations,crayons, scissors, and glue.

Directions: Instruct the children to fold and cut a sheet of yellow cardstock in half widthwise. Roll each strip and tape together to form two cylinders. Connect the cylinders by gluing one strip of orange paper onto them and place the verse from the craft sheet on this strip of paper as shown below. Punch two holes in the end of each cylinder and tie one piece of yarn through them to create a neck strap for the binoculars. Decorate the binoculars with foam shapes or markers.

Spying Out the Land Binoculars
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2.

AGES 9–11

INTRODUCE

REVIEW PAST PROMISES: ABRAHAM TO MOSES

Ask the children what promises God had given to His people in the past. Review the promises to Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3 and 22:18–19; to Isaac in 26:2–4; to Jacob in 28:13–14; and to Moses in Exodus 3:8–10. You may wish to use these as sword drills. In today's lesson, we will see whether the Israelites believed God's promise.

HOW DO YOU VIEW?

Have a teacher enter the room as if to teach the lesson. This teacher should complain about the number of children in the class, the difficulty in teaching multiple age levels, the lack of supplies, the quality of room furnishings, and the amount of preparation required to teach. The next teacher should enter the room and talk about exactly the same things—children, supplies, furnishings, and preparation—but giving an entirely different and much more positive perspective. When both teachers are finished, discuss with the children how these two people could have completely different outlooks on the very same things. Discuss what made Joshua and Caleb's report different from that of the other spies.

ILLUSTRATE

PROMISED LAND REPORT CARD

Using a piece of poster board, create a giant report card and give grades to different aspects of the land (produce, natural resources, people, cities, etc.). Use this during the lesson when talking about the spies' report.

GOD'S MERCY IN JUDGMENT

God punished the rebellious Israelites by preventing them from entering the Promised Land and causing them to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. However, God was merciful in His judgment. He allowed the Israelites to live and sustained them for 40 years during their wanderings in the wilderness. Read Deuteronomy 8:1–5 as a class, pointing out how God provided for the Israelites

APPLY

RACE TO OBEDIENCE

Coordinate a brief "obedience race," such as walking across the room while balancing a golf ball on a spoon. Divide the children in teams, and see who races to obedience the fastest. Each time the golf ball falls to the ground that child must stop, go back to the beginning, and start over.