



Israel Rejects God's Prophet and Priest

Numbers 16



LESSON GOAL

Students will respect and obey the leadership that God has established.

BIBLE TRUTHS

- Korah, Dathan, and Abiram did not trust God's choice of Moses as leader.
- God's punishment showed the seriousness of rebelling against God.
- God was angry because the people complained against Moses.

KEY VERSE

"And He spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, 'Tomorrow morning the LORD will show who is His and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to Him. That one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him'" (Numbers 16:5).

APPLICATION

- Thank God for leaders He has put in your life.
- Do not blame leaders for hard times in your life.
- Learn from the Lord's discipline.

NEXT WEEK

God Offers Israel Healing from Sin
Read Numbers 21.

Symbol Key



Craft



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Activity



Q & A



Work Sheet



2 Grade Level

Teacher Planning Sheet

PREPARE

Objectives/Truths to cover this week

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Personal Application

As a result of my study in this passage, God wants me to

- _____
- _____
- _____

Three ways students need to apply this passage are

- _____
- _____
- _____

Materials Needed

POINT

Choose from various ideas to point students to the coming Bible lesson.

- _____
- _____

PROCLAIM

Choose from various ideas to proclaim the Bible lesson.

Presentation Ideas

- _____
- _____

Praise/Music Ideas

- _____
- _____
- _____

PRACTICE

Choose ideas to help review and apply today's lesson.

- _____
- _____

PREPARE WITH THE TRUTH

"Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul... You shall teach them to your children" (Deuteronomy 11:18–19).

Please take time to prepare your mind and heart to accurately handle the truths of God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Read through the Bible background and study the truths contained in this lesson. Crucial background information is included here to aid you in understanding the Scripture.

Bible Background

The book of Numbers begins with the counting of the 600,000 Israelite soldiers—a testimony of how God had blessed the people. But before long, that number of soldiers became a testimony against Israel. After Israel refused to enter the Promised Land in Numbers 14, they learned that those 600,000 would not see the Promised Land but would die in the desert, along with all Israelites above the age of 20. But that sentence was not enough to humble Israel. They rushed into the Promised Land without God's blessing, only to be routed by the Amalekites and Canaanites. The first of the 600,000 had begun to fall.

Israel found themselves in a situation that confronted their sin natures. They were being led by Moses and Aaron, men whom they had wanted to stone, and being fed manna, food that they were tired of eating. They could not enter the Promised Land and had nowhere else to go. God had effortlessly suppressed any rebellion and countered every complaint. This time of hardship, disappointment, failure, and punishment should have resulted in Israel's submission and dependence on God. But it didn't. Israel was about to rebel against God yet again, this time by rejecting Moses, His prophet, and Aaron, His priest.

Rebellion against Moses and Aaron Begins (Num. 16:1–3, 8–14)

The rebellion that begins in Numbers 16 is different from Israel's previous rebellions. It did not arise from the people being dissatisfied with their food or being afraid to enter into the Promised Land. Instead, this rebellion was organized and premeditated, the outgrowth of smoldering resentment. This rebellion had leaders and was a planned attempt to take leadership from God's appointees, Moses and Aaron.

The text does not say exactly how far into the 40 years of the wilderness wandering this rebellion took place. The rebellion was led by four men: Korah (from the tribe of Levi, the same tribe Moses and Aaron were from) and Dathan, Abiram, and On (all from the tribe of Reuben, the tribe that would have had leadership of Israel if not for Reuben's sin of sleeping with Jacob's concubine Bilhah [Gen. 35:22; 49:4]). They were accompanied by 250 various leaders, representatives of the congregation and men of renown (Num. 16:2). The men came to Moses and Aaron for no reason but to attack their leadership.

The insurrectionists said that Moses and Aaron took too much authority for themselves. They argued that if God lived among the people (which He did) and if the people were holy unto the Lord (as they were commanded to be), then Moses and Aaron should not have the privilege of leading the people. They asked, "Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?" (Num. 16:3).

As Moses had done before and would do again, he fell on his face, probably interceding for the people (Num. 14:5; 16:4, 22). Moses rebuked Korah and the other Levites who were with him. God already had separated the Levites from the rest

Additional Reference Materials

*The MacArthur Study
Bible* by John MacArthur

of the Israelites “to do the work of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them” (16:9). But Korah and certain Levites were not content with the blessing of serving God in God’s way; they wanted the priesthood also (16:10). Korah was not motivated by a desire to serve God, which he already had the privilege of doing, but was motivated by self-promotion.

Moses next sent for Dathan and Abiram of the tribe of Reuben (Num. 16:12). They refused to come, but the message they sent in response (16:13–14) shows the deceitfulness of their hearts. They actually accused Moses of bringing Israel out of a land flowing with milk and honey to die in the wilderness. They blindly thought of Egypt as a land flowing with milk and honey! They also blamed Moses for not bringing them to the Promised Land. Finally, they said that Moses was putting out the eyes of the men, an idiom similar to “pulling the wool over their eyes.” These men clearly resented Moses’ leadership and were accusing him of being a false prophet, devoted to the people’s harm.

The First Two Tests to Prove Leadership (Num. 16:4–7, 15–40)

Of course, Moses was innocent of such ridiculous charges (Num. 16:15); the people alone were responsible for their wilderness wandering. Although Moses denied abusing his role as prophet, he desired that God demonstrate his and Aaron’s right to lead. God demonstrated that leadership with two tests.

In Numbers 16:4–7 and 16–17, Moses presented the test for who should be a priest. Moses told Korah and each of the 250 leaders to take censers, put fire on them, and burn incense before the Lord. Aaron would do likewise. The Lord would choose whom He desired to come near Him and serve in the tabernacle (Num. 16:5). Foolishly, the 250 men ignored what had happened to Nadab and Abihu when they brought strange fire before the Lord (Lev. 10:1–2). On the next day, Korah and the men brought incense before the tabernacle.

During this first test, the glory of the Lord appeared (Num. 16:19) and God told Moses and Aaron to separate themselves from the people so that He could destroy not only the 250 but also all the Israelites. Moses and Aaron once again fell on their faces and pleaded for God to destroy only the men leading the congregation (16:22). In response, God mercifully protected the congregation by warning them to move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (16:24). Moses and Aaron (and probably Korah) went to the tents where Dathan and Abiram stood outside with their wives and children (16:27).

The first test was not yet completed but was interrupted by Moses and Aaron’s leaving for the tents of the rebels. Moses began his address to the Israelites by saying, “By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will. If...the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up...and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the LORD” (16:28–30). The Lord determined that Moses’ leadership would be authenticated by something “new” happening; natural death would not as emphatically prove Korah, Dathan, and Abiram’s guilt.

When Moses finished speaking, the ground split and swallowed alive Dathan, Abiram, Korah, their families, and all they owned (Num. 16:31–33). Sadly, the children of the men were swept up in the destruction caused by their fathers’ sins (as had happened again and again since the flood). The Israelites fled in fear (16:34). As soon as the first test ended with God attesting to His choice of Moses as prophet, the second test ended with fire coming out from the Lord and consuming the 250 rebels who were burning incense (16:35). God also attested to His choice of Aaron as priest.

Rebellion against Moses and Aaron Continues (Num. 16:41–50)

The fear of seeing the ground open and swallow Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and seeing the fire consume the 250 rebels should have been enough to shock Israel out of their rebellion. But the next day, they complained that Moses and Aaron had killed “the people of the Lord,” ludicrously referring to the rebels (Num. 16:41). When the congregation gathered before the tabernacle, the glory of the Lord appeared yet again (16:42). Again, the Lord told Moses to get away from the people, and again, Moses and Aaron fell on their faces, presumably to intercede for the people. This time, God did not turn from His wrath, but a plague started to spread among the people. Moses commanded Aaron to take fire from the altar and burn incense so that the people would not die. (Similarly, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest brought incense into the Holy of Holies so that he himself would not die [Lev. 16:13].) Aaron stood with the incense between those who had already died from the plague and those who were yet untouched. God heeded Aaron’s intercession and turned from His wrath, but only after 14,700 people had died.

The Third Test to Prove Leadership (Num. 17:1–11)

The Lord knew that even after the thousands had died and Aaron had successfully interceded for the people, the people would again complain about God’s leadership. God told Moses to take 12 rods or staffs, one from each of the 12 tribes. After the name of each leader was carved on a rod, the rods were to be placed in the Holy of Holies before the ark of the covenant. God would demonstrate whom He wanted to serve as priest by causing the rod of that tribe to blossom. Moses and the people did as God commanded. The next day, Moses went into the tabernacle and saw that Aaron’s rod not only “had sprouted and put forth buds” but also “had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds” (Num. 17:8). As each man received his rod back, it was clear that God had chosen Aaron as priest.

The staff of Aaron was to be “a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die” (Num. 17:10). Aaron’s staff would warn the rebellious people against complaining in the future and suffering more of God’s wrath.

Conclusion (Num. 17:12–13)

After so much rebellion, the Israelites spoke to Moses and said, “Surely we die, we perish, we all perish! Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the LORD must die. Shall we all utterly die?” (Num. 17:12–13). Sadly, the people overreacted, swinging from rebellion to an unnatural fear of God. God intended that the people submit to His choice of who should stand before Him, and instead, the people were afraid that God would strike them all dead. Fearing God is good if it leads to repentance. But the fear that Israel displayed may have been no more than a temporary panic after seeing such fearful displays of God’s power.

Since leaving Sinai, Israel had repeatedly complained and rebelled. There was seemingly no end to the punishment they would endure before they submitted to the authority of God’s Word and those who taught it. But when they did show fear, it was not a fear informed by God’s love and mercy. Israel was blind and would not submit to God. Unless God has grace on the lost, they likewise will continue in blindness and reject the Lord’s punishment. When the saint is disciplined by God, he must not foolishly resist the Lord’s chastisement (Heb. 12:5–11) but must learn the lesson that God intends.

POINT TO THE TRUTH

"Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth"
(Psalm 78:1).

This section includes questions to review last week's lesson and ideas to prepare students for this week's lesson. Choose from the following ideas to point to the truths of this lesson.



Review Questions

Use these questions to review and reinforce key truths.

What did God command Moses to do in Numbers 13–14?

God told Moses to send spies into the Promised Land. This was the land that God had promised to give to the Israelites.

What were the spies supposed to do?

The spies were to bring back a report of the land. They were to find out what the land and the people were like.

How many spies did Moses send?

Twelve—one from each of the tribes of Israel.

What did the spies report when they came back from their 40-day journey?

Ten of the spies said that the land was very good but that the people were too big and strong. They did not believe that God would help them take the land. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, came back with a good report. They told the Israelites that they should trust God to give them the land.

Did the people of Israel decide to trust the Lord?

No. They did not believe that God would help them. They wanted to get a new leader, and they wanted to kill Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb.

Did God allow the Israelites to kill Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb?

No. God showed His glory in the tabernacle before the people could stone Moses and the others.

How did God punish the Israelites?

They would have to wander in the wilderness for 40 years because they were not willing to take the land that God had given them.



Rebellion

What is rebellion? It is more than just disobeying or refusing to obey. Rebellion includes rejecting the authority of the one in leadership. Have you ever rebelled against anyone? In today's lesson, we will hear what happens when a group of men rebel against the leadership of Moses.



Table Leaders

Provide an activity for your table group, such as putting together a puzzle, assembling a LEGO model, or designing a group mural. Designate one student as the

leader. All the other students at the table must take directions from this student. Watch to see how they do. Some will be good leaders, and some will not do well at all. This could prove frustrating to the others in the group. God gives some of us leadership abilities, and others are better at following. God wants us all to follow the directions of the leaders whom He has placed in authority over us (president, teachers, parents, etc.). God put Moses and Aaron in charge of the Israelites. We will hear this morning that some others resented having to be under their authority.



Following in God's Footsteps

Materials: white cardstock, pencils, "I Will Follow God" craft page, crayons, markers, scissors, glue

Directions: As the students enter the classroom, use the cardstock and pencils to trace around their feet. Be sure to identify each set of footprints. At craft time, give the students their footprints to color, cut out, and glue onto the "I Will Follow God" craft sheet.



Follow the Leader

Line up the students and tell them to copy everything the line leader does (marching, bunny hopping, slow walking, etc.). Tell them how important it is to follow Jesus' lead and try to copy His life with our own.



Submitting to Leaders

A leader is a person who guides and directs others, either by going before them to show the way, or by giving commands or instructions. A leader needs to be wise and have authority. Why do we need leaders? What happens without leaders? How should we respond to leaders when they give instructions or correction? In today's lesson, we will hear about Moses and Aaron, the two leaders whom God appointed over Israel to guide them to the Promised Land and give God's laws. We will hear what happened when Israel rebelled against the leaders and even God's authority.

PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

"Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done" (Psalm 78:4).

This section includes the Bible lesson, lesson questions, and praise and worship ideas. Song suggestions are included that you can use to proclaim your worship to God. Use the lesson questions to check the students' understanding. This section also includes various presentation ideas to use during the teaching time. Read the Bible passage several times before you read these pages. All teaching should be done directly from the Bible.

Bible Lesson

We have heard many stories of how Israel complained about the food that God gave them to eat, about not having water to drink, and about being afraid to enter the Promised Land. Today we will hear about the Israelites complaining about something else. They complained about Moses and Aaron being God's chosen leaders for them.

Two hundred and fifty Israelite men, led by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, decided that they would go against Moses and Aaron. They did not want Moses and Aaron to be their leaders and had complaints against them. Korah thought he should have a chance to be a priest like Aaron and did not want to do the duties assigned to him at the tabernacle. Dathan and Abiram complained that Moses and Aaron were not doing a good job as leaders because they had not led Israel into the Promised Land. When Moses heard these complaints, he was very angry. He said to Korah and his followers that the next morning, they would ask God who He wanted to be leaders.

So in the morning, the 250 complaining men, Moses, and Aaron stood in front of the tent of meeting with metal containers filled with incense and fire as an offering to God. The glory of the Lord appeared over the tabernacle. Remember that the tabernacle was the place where God lived among the people. The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying that He wanted to destroy these complaining men for disobeying God and complaining against His chosen leaders. God did not accept the incense offering from these complaining men.

God then told everyone to move away from the tent homes of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. He made the ground open up where the homes of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were. Their households and everything they owned fell into the earth. Then the ground closed over them. God also destroyed the rest of the complaining men with fire. All the Israelites were scared to see these things happen. Complaining against God is very serious, and these complaining men were punished.

The next day, the Israelites again grumbled against Moses and Aaron, complaining that they had killed Korah and his followers. They did not learn from what happened to Korah and his followers when they complained against the Lord. The glory of the Lord appeared over the tabernacle, and the Lord wanted to destroy all the Israelites. God sent a plague among the Israelites that caused them to become sick and die. Moses and Aaron wanted to seek God's mercy, so Aaron ran among the people and made an incense offering for them to ask God for forgiveness. The plague stopped where Aaron was standing, with people dead from the plague on one side and the living people on the other. God was forgiving and accepted Aaron's offering for the people. God did not allow the plague to kill all the Israelites; instead, only 14,700 people died.

To make sure that the Israelites knew for certain that God had chosen Aaron to be His priest, the Lord told Moses to take 12 wooden rods, one from each of the 12 tribes, with the leader of the tribe's name on it. The rods were put inside the tabernacle. The Lord said, "The rod of the man whom I choose will blossom; thus I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel, which they make against you" (Num. 17:5). The next day, Moses entered the tabernacle and saw that Aaron's staff not only had sprouted but also had budded, blossomed, and produced almonds. Can you imagine a wooden rod producing almonds? It was a miracle! It was clear to the Israelites whom God had chosen to be His priest.



Lesson Questions

Who led 250 men to complain against Moses and Aaron?
Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

Why did they complain?
They did not want Moses and Aaron to be their leaders.

Was this the right attitude for them to have?
No. God had placed Moses and Aaron as leaders over the Israelites. By complaining against Moses and Aaron, they were really complaining against God.

How did God punish Korah, Dathan, and Abiram for their sin?
He caused the earth to swallow Korah, Dathan, Abiram, their families, and all their possessions.

How did God punish the other 250 men?
He sent fire to destroy them.

Did this stop the Israelites from complaining?
No. They complained that Moses and Aaron were responsible for the deaths of the men. God was displeased with their complaints and sent a plague to destroy the people.

How was the plague stopped?
Moses and Aaron asked God to have mercy on the Israelites. Aaron took a censer with incense and ran among the people, separating the living from the dead. Then he made atonement for the people. God forgave the people and stopped the plague. A total of 14,700 people had been killed.

How did God show the Israelites that Aaron was His chosen priest?
He told Moses to take 12 wooden rods, one from each of the tribes of Israel, and write each leader's name on a rod. Moses then put the rods in the tabernacle. The rod of the man whom God had chosen would sprout the next morning.

Whose rod had sprouted the next morning?
Aaron's rods not only had sprouted the next morning, it had also produced almonds. God had clearly chosen Aaron as high priest.

Presentation Ideas



A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards

Use appropriate A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards with the lessons.



Betty Lukens Flannelgraph

Use appropriate flannelgraph pieces with the lesson.



Keep in Step

Materials: a large covered basket or box filled with a variety of shoes

Directions: Pull out the different pairs of shoes, and ask the students whether they think they are the shoes of a leader. Ask the students whom God sent to be their leaders (parents, grandparents, teachers, pastor, etc.). Explain that in today's lesson, the students will learn more about God's chosen leaders for Israel.



Earthquake Table

Before reading Numbers 16:15–40, push two tables together and set "tents" (half-sheets of cardstock folded down the center) all over the tables. Be sure to put some tents on the line between the two tables. As you read the passage, have two helpers shake the tables and then spread them apart so that some of the tents fall into the crack. Then have them push the tables back together.

Praise and Worship

Awesome God

Great Is Thy Faithfulness

Humble Thyself in the Sight of the Lord

Mighty Is Our God

My God Is So Great

Seek Ye First



God's Chosen Leader

God chose Moses to lead Israel.

(Point up; then march in place.)

What did they do? Complain, rebel.

(Hold hands palms up, move hands in talking motion, and shake fist at ceiling and look up.)

Some of the Israelites planned a scheme,

(Rub hands together.)

For men, not God, to choose who leads.

(Point to self; then point up and shake head back and forth.)

God punished them with fire and plague,

(Wiggle fingers while moving hands up and down.)

Made the earth swallow men who disobeyed,

(Dramatically clamp hands and arms together, like a big bite.)

And so they'd remember the choice of God,

(Point to temple; then point up.)

Blossoms grew on Aaron's rod.

(Fold hands together; then slowly open outward.)

PRACTICE THE TRUTH

"That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments" (Psalm 78:7).

Choose ideas from this section to review and apply the truths of the Bible lesson.



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Twelve Rods

Materials: "12 Rods" craft sheet (at back of lesson); 12 craft sticks per student; glue; stickers or cutouts of flowers, leaves, and almonds

Directions: Give each student a copy of the "12 Rods" craft sheet and 12 craft sticks to represent 12 rods. Have them glue each craft stick to the page. Then have

them write "Aaron" on one of the sticks and decorate that stick with flowers, leaves, and almonds. God used Aaron's budding rod as a sign that He had chosen him to be Israel's high priest.



Aaron's Budding Rod

Materials: construction paper, tissue paper, tape or glue

Directions: Roll a piece of construction paper into a tube. Use tape or glue to hold it together. Attach small tissue paper buds and almond-shaped pieces of tan construction paper.



Craft: Rod of Aaron

Materials: Craft stick for each student, permanent marker, almonds, artificial blossoms, glue.

Directions: Use the Rod of Aaron from the Stick Test activity as an example for the craft. Direct students to make their own Rod of Aaron by writing "Aaron" on a craft stick and then gluing almonds and artificial blossoms around his name. Encourage students to take home this special rod as a reminder to value the leadership God has put in their lives.



Following in God's Footsteps

Materials: white cardstock, pencils, "I Will Follow God" craft page, crayons, markers, scissors, glue

Directions: Give the students their footprints to color, cut out, and glue onto the "I Will Follow God" craft sheet.



Compassion

In Numbers 16:41–50, the people of Israel again complained against the leaders God had placed over them. But what was Moses and Aaron's response? Did they get angry and desire revenge? No. Moses and Aaron responded with compassion. They desired good for the Israelites, rather than wanting to hurt them in revenge. How does God want us to respond when someone sins against us or attacks us? Romans 12:21 tells us, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Coloring Sheets

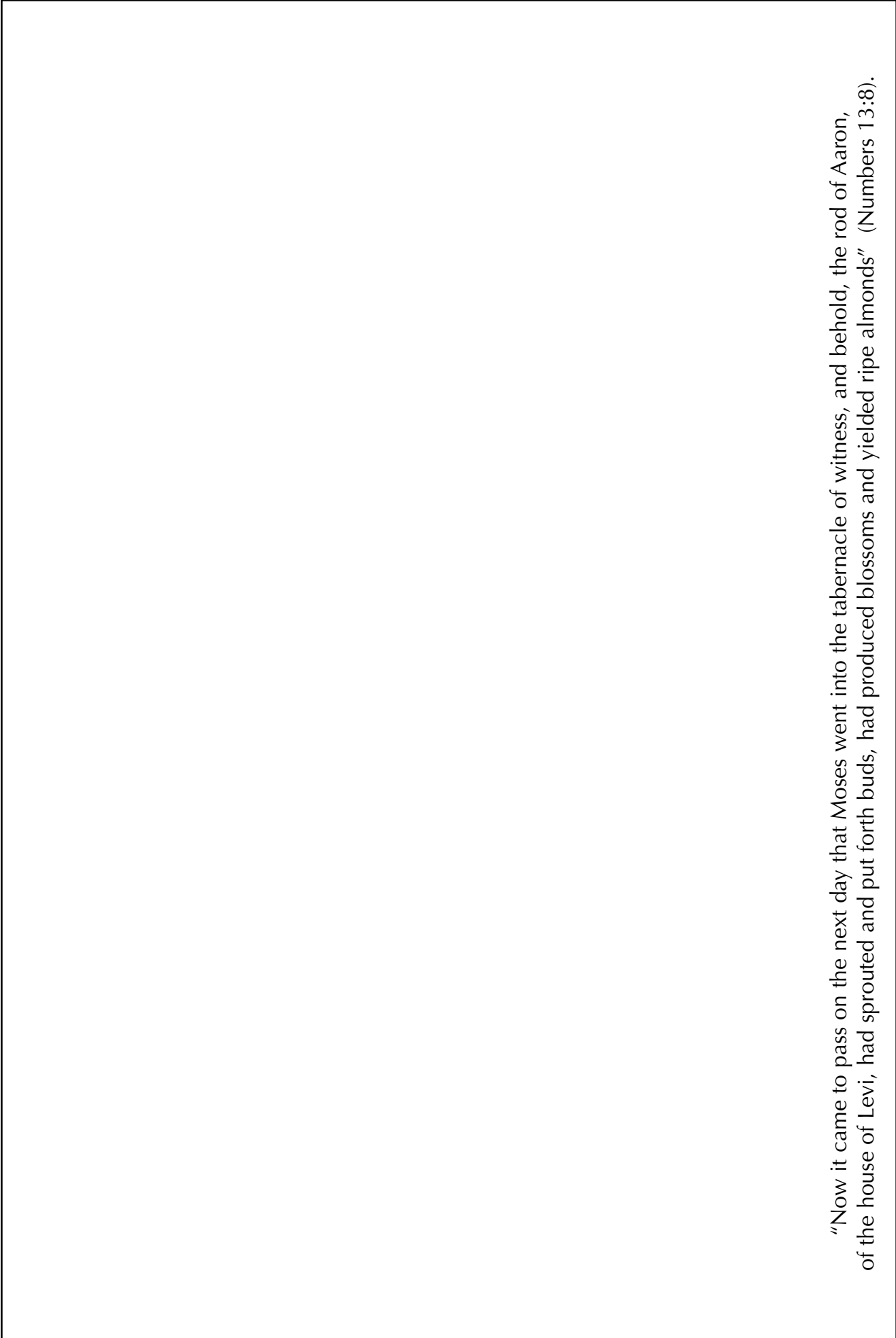
Give each student a copy of the coloring sheets at the back of this lesson. The students can color the pages in class or at home.



MEMORY VERSE

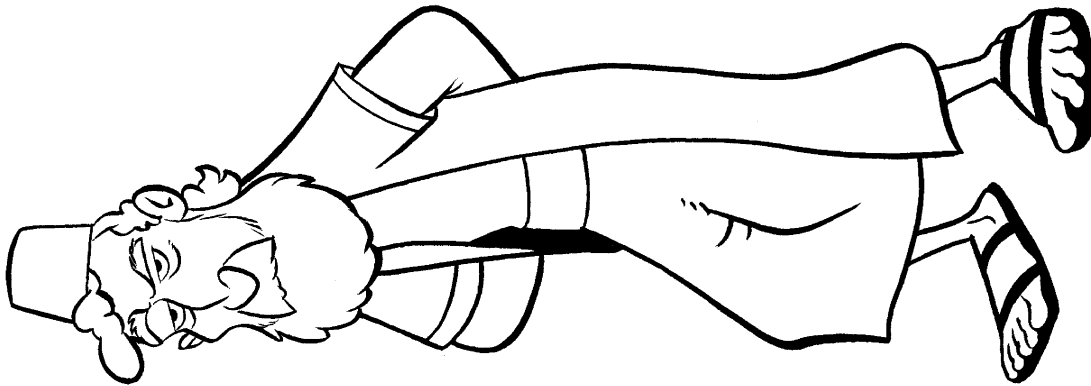
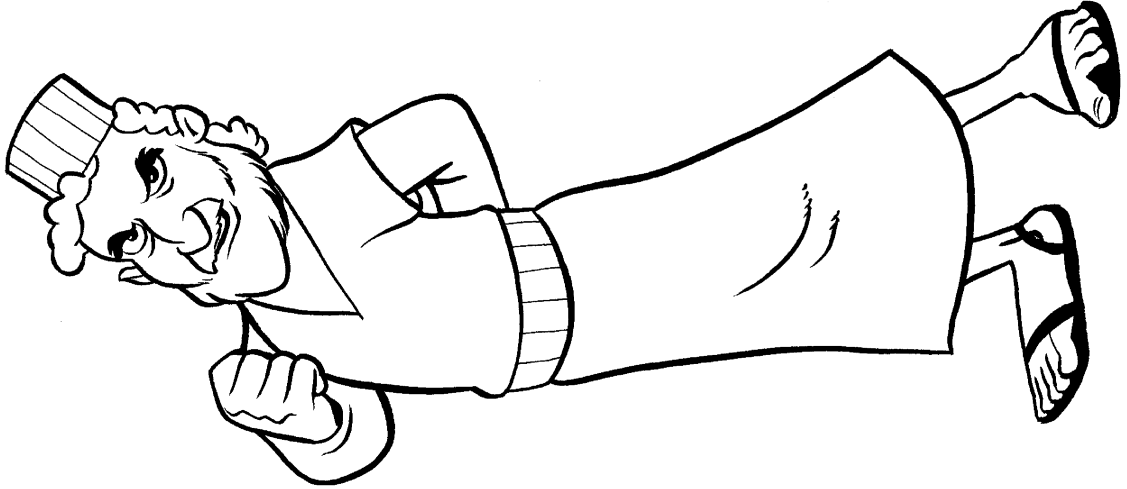
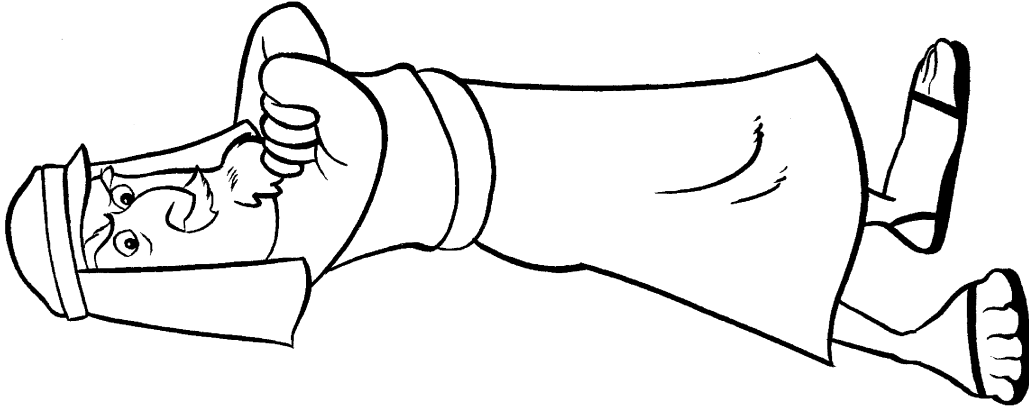
"Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves" (Romans 13:2).

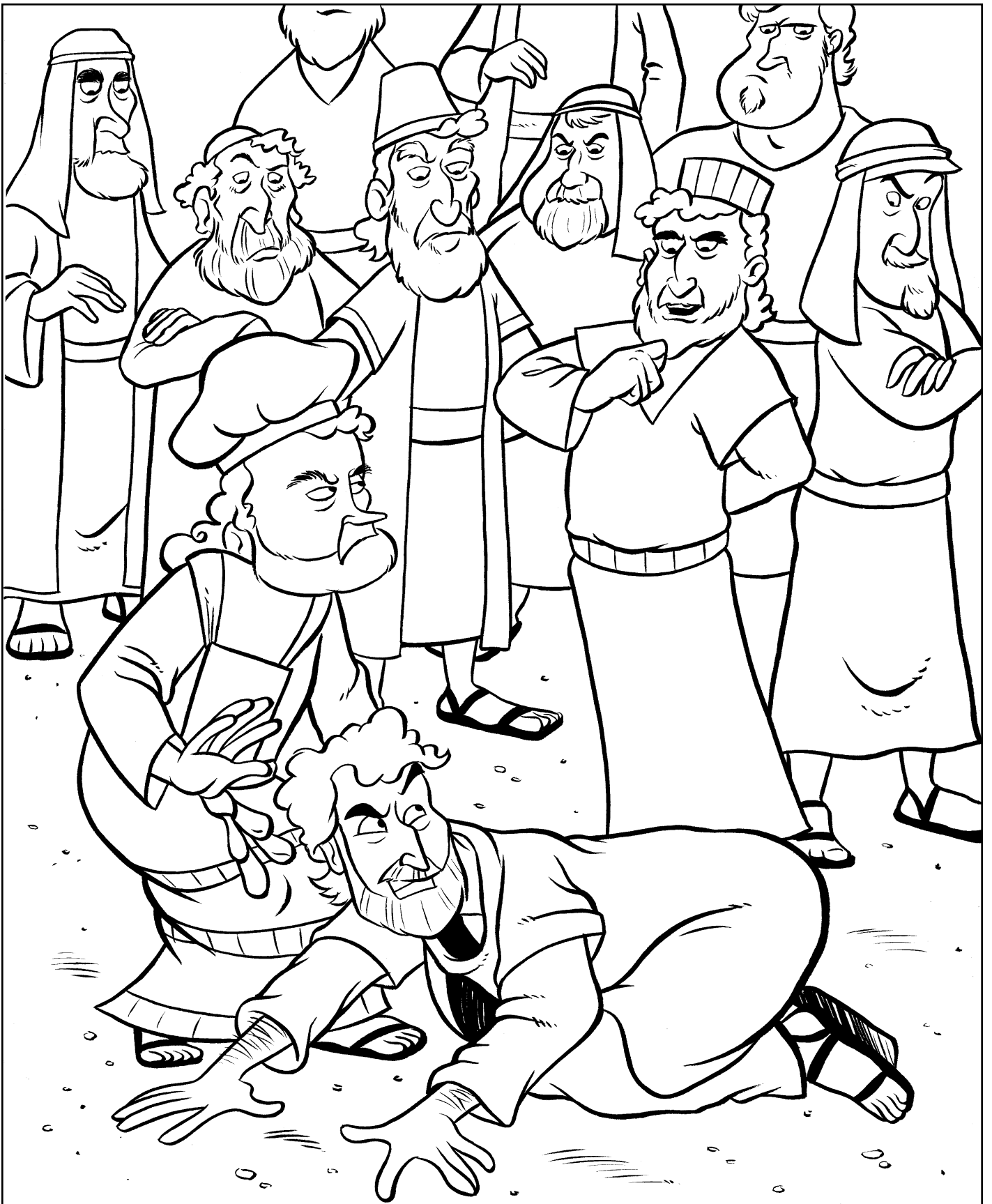
Twelve Rods



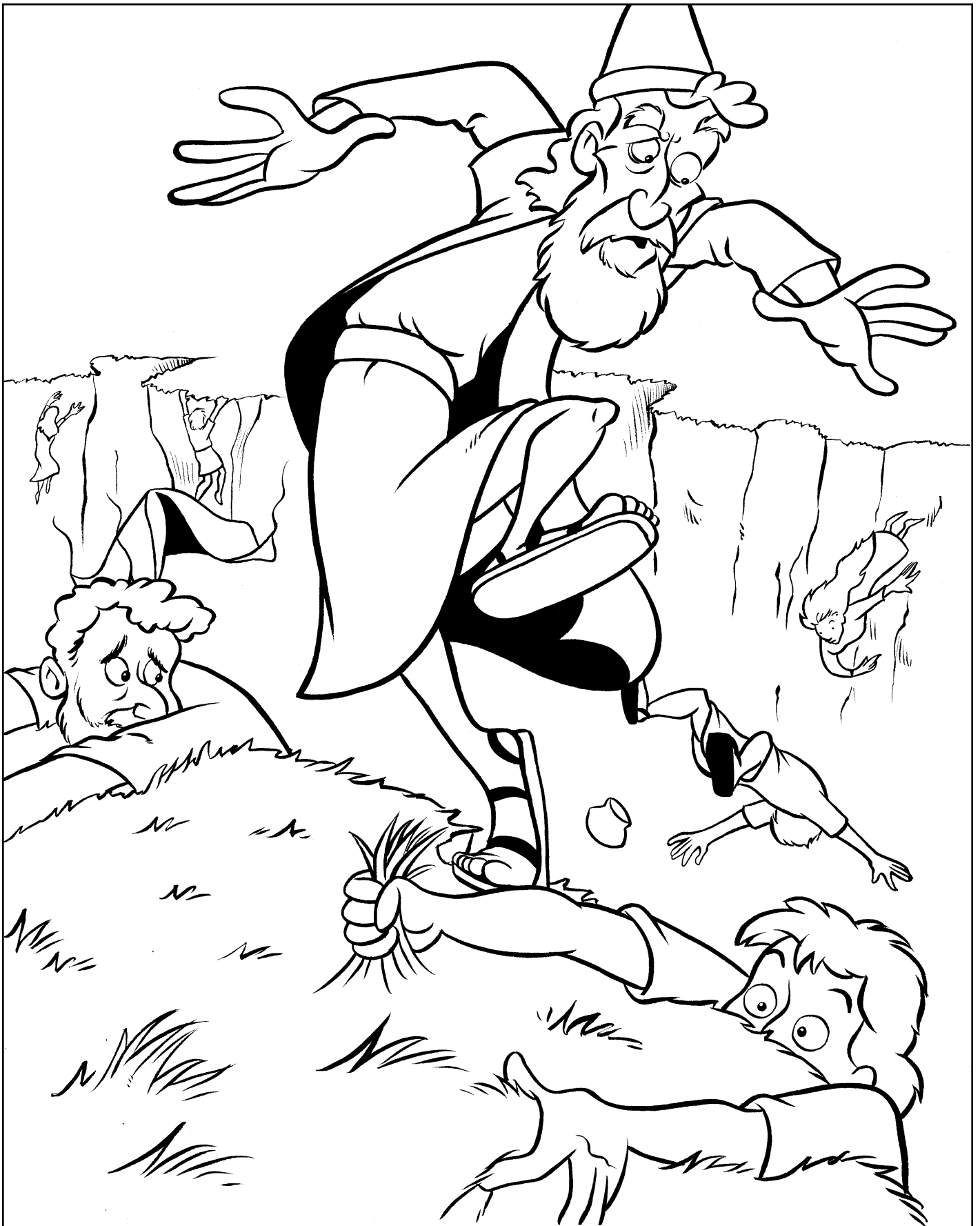
“Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses went into the tabernacle of witness, and behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds” (Numbers 13:8).

I Will Follow God





Korah and other men of Israel rose up against Moses and questioned his God-given authority. When Moses heard this, he fell on his face and said to Korah, "Tomorrow morning the LORD will show who is His and who is holy" (Numbers 16:4-5).



**All those who rebelled against the Lord and His servant Moses
were swallowed by the ground (Numbers 16:28-35).**

