

LESSON 15: ENTERING THE PROMISED LAND

Instruction for Faith Educators

For Basic Level / Age 7	:	Cover points 1 to 20
For Intermediate Level / Age 10	:	Cover points 1 to 21
For Advanced Level / Age 13	:	Cover points 1 to 22

Revision from previous lesson:

In the previous lessons, we learned about how the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness under the guidance and providence of God for 40 years. We also learned that it was in the desert, on Mount Sinai, that God gave them the Ten Commandments as a sign of His covenant with them as His people. Now that we have understood what the Ten Commandments are, we shall continue in this lesson with the account of how they eventually returned to the Promised Land (Canaan), which was the land that God had originally given to their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Current lesson:

1. Remember that the first generation of Israelites who had been liberated from Egypt failed to enter the Promised Land because of their own refusal to cooperate with God and preferred to believe in the exaggerated reports of the ten faithless spies and disbelieved two of them who had faith in God (Joshua and Caleb). Since then, the Israelites had been through a long and tedious journey around the wilderness because God would not allow that generation to enter into the Promised Land because they refused to obey Him.
2. At the same time, Moses himself was also not going to enter into the Promised Land. The reason that God would not allow him to enter the Promised Land was because he had disobeyed God by throwing tantrums against God in front of the Israelites (Numbers 20).

When the Israelites were at Kadesh, Moses' sister Miriam had died and was buried there. At the same time, because the Israelites had no water supply there, they complained against Moses and put the blame on him. Clearly, Moses was having a bad time, especially since the Israelites never seemed to trust in God despite having seen so many miracles taking place before their own eyes. God instructed Moses and Aaron to call the people together in front of a rock, and to call forth water from the rock so that the people would have water for themselves and their animals to drink. But instead of doing exactly as God had instructed (by using his words), Moses, in a fit of anger, spoke rashly to the people and used his staff to strike the rock twice before water came gushing out. What would have been a miracle brought about through the speaking of words had now become the natural act of man. (Yes, there were large porous rocks in the desert in which water accumulated, and people would get water from them by striking those rocks. But more than just providing water, God wanted to show the people a miracle again through Moses, so that they would put their faith in Him again and stop grumbling. Moses spoiled God's plan by disobeying His instructions. Worse than that, he showed disregard for God's authority and instructions right in front of the Israelites.)

As a result of Moses' misbehaviour and failure to honour God before the people of Israel, God told Moses and Aaron (his brother), "Because you did not believe that I could assert my holiness before the Israelites' eyes, you will not lead this assembly into the country which I am giving them" (Numbers 20:12). Moses went up to Mount Nebo (at the threshold of the Promised Land) just before he died, and there, God showed him a panoramic view of the Promised Land that the Israelites would enter into. Until today, nobody knows where he was buried because his grave has never been found (Deuteronomy 34:1-7).

3. Joshua Son of Nun (Moses' helper) was the one commissioned by God to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. God Himself had prepared Joshua for this task for many years, and he had been under Moses' discipleship for forty years.

Joshua was trained to depend on God in battle (Exodus 17:8-16). When leading the Israelites in battle against the Amalekites, Moses had to lift his hands up to God in prayer with the help of Aaron and Hur.

Joshua was trained to be intimate with God (Exodus 24:9-18). When Moses went up to Mount Sinai, he took Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel along with him (and Joshua was one of the seventy elders) to be in God's presence. After that, Moses took Joshua further up the mountain and spent another six days with God. After six days, Moses himself moved on and left Joshua alone there for another forty days.

Joshua was trained to pray and listen to God (Exodus 33:7-11). Whenever Moses went to the Tent to speak with the Lord "as a man talks to his friend," Joshua would accompany him. And very often, after Moses left the Tent, Joshua would remain within it to speak with the Lord.

Joshua was trained to enable others to serve (Numbers 11:24-29). Moses brought the seventy elders to the Tent so that the Spirit of God could empower them; and when that happened, they all began to prophesy. But Eldad and Medad did not come along to the Tent, as they stayed back outside at the camp. Surprisingly, God's Spirit also came upon them and they too started prophesying. Although Joshua became fearful that Moses' ministry might be undermined by these men, Moses taught him to allow God to use whomever He chose.

Joshua was trained to have faith in God even in seemingly impossible situations (Numbers 13:1 to 14:45). At the border of Canaan, the land that God had promised to the Israelites, Moses sent out twelve spies to check out the land. Forty days later, ten of the twelve spies (except for Joshua and Caleb) reported that the Israelites were too weak to take the land from its current inhabitants. But Joshua (together with Caleb) insisted that God had already given the land into the hands of His people. This demonstrated that Joshua had great faith in God's promises even if the immediate situation did not seem possible.

Because God Himself had raised Joshua to be a responsible and godly leader under the tutelage of Moses, Joshua was commissioned to take over Moses' role once Moses died (Numbers 27:12-23; Deuteronomy 34:9).

Deuteronomy 31:7-8: “Moses then summoned Joshua and, in the presence of all Israel, said to him, ‘Be strong, stand firm; you will be the one to go with this people into the country which Yahweh has sworn to their ancestors that he would give them; you are to be the one who puts them into possession of it. Yahweh himself will lead you; he will be with you; he will not fail you or desert you. Have no fear, do not be alarmed.’”

4. After the Israelites had mourned the death of Moses for thirty days, Joshua was charged by God to conquer the land of Canaan which God had promised to the Israelites (Joshua 1:2). God assured Joshua that He would be with him in the same way that He had been with Moses, and commanded repeatedly that Joshua should “be strong and stand firm” (Joshua 1:6-7, 9). Joshua began this task by reminding the Israelites that they had a commitment to God. Then he secretly sent two men into Jericho to spy with the help of a prostitute named Rahab who hid them on the roof of her house when the king of Jericho was looking for them. Several days later, the two men went back to Joshua, reporting that the Lord had indeed given the land to the Israelites, as the inhabitants of Canaan were all frightened of them, knowing that God had been helping them (Joshua 2:24).
5. The men crossed the waters of the Jordan River, where the waters miraculously opened to allow them to pass through as the Levites carrying the Ark of the Covenant stand in the middle of the river bed. As it was with the event of the crossing of the Red Sea, the people crossed the Jordan River on totally dry ground. In remembrance of this miracle, they built twelve stone columns. The Church Fathers, such as St Gregory of Nazianzus and St Augustine of Hippo, interpret the turning back of the waters of the Jordan River as pointing to the effects of baptism. They taught that in baptism, man returns to his original state prior to his fall.
6. Upon crossing the River Jordan, they celebrated the Passover and the men were all circumcised at Gilgal (Joshua 5:2). This event was very significant. The practice of circumcision, which began with Abraham, stopped when the Israelites escaped Egypt, since, according to St Jerome (4th century), it would have been difficult or dangerous to carry out such a procedure safely when they were in the wilderness.
7. They conquered Jericho after surrounding it for seven days, driving out everyone within the city except the prostitute Rahab and her family, who hid the two spies on the rooftop of her house (Joshua 6:17-25). They conquered Jericho by circling around the walls of the city silently once every day for the first six days, with the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant, and on the seventh day marching around the walls for seven times. After circling the walls seven times on the seventh day, the priests blew their ram’s horns, and the Israelites raised a great shout, and the walls crumbled.
8. Joshua assembled the Israelites at Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal near the city of Shechem and read to them from the book of the law of Moses. He built an altar where sacrifices were offered; he wrote down the law of Moses on the stones, then read the words of God’s law to the people. The covenant between Israel and the Lord was renewed. (Joshua 8:30-35)
9. From Jericho, Joshua and the Israelites moved into other parts of Canaan, capturing other cities in battle or making agreements with the people who already lived in the land. They eventually conquered almost the whole of Canaan (although not the entire territory). It took

many years for the Israelites to complete their conquest under God's instructions and Joshua's leadership. In total, they defeated 33 kings.

10. Although this conquest may sound like all the inhabitants of Canaan were killed by the Israelites, the writers of the Old Testament were merely using extreme battle language (i.e. an exaggeration) in order to highlight the success of their conquest. This is why phrases such as "nothing was left alive", "left no survivor", or "totally destroyed" are used. But in actual fact, it was not a massacre, since the people were mostly being "driven out" (Exodus 23:27-30) or being forced to dispossess their territories while still being allowed to continue living there (Deuteronomy 9:1). The Israelites also made offers of peace with the cities that they were about to conquer, but apparently no city was willing to accept their offer except for the Hivites in Gibeon (Joshua 11:19).
11. It must be clarified also that the inhabitants of Canaan were not innocent people. They were people who had been judged by God as wicked (Deuteronomy 9:5) because of their worship of demonic idols, their sinful sexual acts, and also their sacrifice of children to their Canaanite gods. The mandate given by God to the Israelites was basically to cleanse the land of such evil practices and defeat the spiritual darkness that had enslaved the people of Canaan.
12. Because of the evil in the land of Canaan, God gave the Israelites a specific instruction about their seven big enemies (the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites) that were to be expelled from the Promised Land: they were not to intermingle with them or adopt their cultural and religious values and practices, and their idols were to be destroyed (Deuteronomy 7:1-3, 5, 25).
13. Upon the conquest of the different territories of Canaan, by which time Joshua was quite old, he apportioned these lands to the various tribes of Israel based on the size and the requests of each tribe (Joshua 13-21). Most of the land was distributed through casting lots at Shiloh. Such land distribution was very important because it would help the tribes to survive economically through agriculture work. They also built towns on their allotted lands. Since these lands were given to them by God, the lands were not to be given or sold to anyone else.

The only tribe that did not receive tribal inheritance were the Levites (although they did receive cities), because God was their inheritance as a priestly people whose role it was to accompany the Divine Presence by offering sacrifices to God on behalf of Israel (Deuteronomy 18:1; Joshua 13:14, 33). The other tribes were to provide these sacrifices, and the Levites were allowed to keep some of the food sacrifices for themselves. Thus, the Levites had an important place as the religious leaders of the other tribes; they would be the priests for all Israel.

14. All along, God had been describing this Promised Land that the Israelites were now in as "a country flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8, Numbers 14:8, Deuteronomy 31:20). This indicated that the Israelites were inheriting a land that had fertile soil for cultivation. Their livestock could find pasture there, thus producing "milk" for their owners; bees could find plenty of plants to draw nectar from, hence producing "honey".

Even today, there are many areas of the Holy Land (Israel) that are truly fertile and produce various species of fruits and vegetables. The area towards the north of modern-day Israel is also called the Fertile Crescent (since it is shaped like a crescent).

15. In the cultivation of their lands, they were required to allow their lands to rest on every seventh year, which was the sabbath year (Leviticus 25:1-7). If they lost their lands to anyone else because of debts, leases, or mortgages, the lands would have to eventually be returned to the tribe that God first gave it to. This resetting of Israel's economy would take place on the jubilee year, which was after every seven cycles of seven years, i.e. on the fiftieth year (Leviticus 25:8-17). On the jubilee year, all debts would be cancelled and even slaves would be set free. This law of mercy was meant to maintain a balance of economy and power between the various communities in Israel.
16. Just before Joshua died, he assembled all the leaders of Israel and reminded them to always obey the law that God had given them through Moses, to never get involved in idolatrous religious practices, to not intermarry with the idolatrous inhabitants of the land who were still remaining there, and to love God above all else (Joshua 23: 6-8, 11-13; 24:14-24). The people promised to remain faithful, and Joshua set up a stone as a witness to their promises (Joshua 24:25-27). But this promise was not going to be kept for long. Idol-worship was eventually going to be integrated into their own history as God's people.
17. Upon Joshua's death, the tribes of Israel continued their battle against the Canaanites (Judges 1), but not all the Canaanites were driven out of the land. In addition to that, there were also other tribes living around the Israelites who were unfriendly towards them.
18. Over time, the Israelites had started compromising on the promises they had made to Joshua. Some of them started worshipping the Canaanite idols, Baal and Astarte, as well as idols of other gods from nearby lands. To discipline them, the Lord allowed the surrounding nations to raid Israel's lands and steal their crops and possessions (Judges 2:6-15). When the people cried out for help, God felt sorry for them. God raised leaders for Israel, and they were known as judges.
19. The judges sometimes settled legal cases (Judges 4:4-5), but most of them were more well known as military leaders chosen by God to lead the Israelites in battle against their enemies (Judges 3-16). But these judges had very limited success in leading Israel in the ways of God, since Israel vacillated between submission to God and rebellion against Him. Their inclination towards rebellion was a constant problem.
20. Each of us also has a calling to lead our generation in fighting its own battles against God's enemies. Just as God's enemies during the time of Moses and Joshua were people who worshipped idols, we too are called to fight against many of the idols of our time in the form of immoral ideologies. But whether we are able to take up this responsibility of leading our generation in this battle depends on our willingness to be trained for battle. If we have the same attitude as Joshua, God has specific tasks for which He has set us aside to fulfil for Him in our lifetime.
21. The only way that God can bless our efforts in life is if we do things His way by obeying His commands. Very often, the misfortunes that we suffer in life are results of our

disobedience towards him, thus naturally causing things to go wrong because of our immoral choices or imprudent decisions. It is very important that we are guided by God's laws every step of the way, because these laws are not meant to control us but to ensure that we live in freedom and divine blessings.

22. It is also important that we develop courage in our hearts to do what God commands us to do with our lives. Sometimes, the tasks that God requires of us seems bigger than we are able to manage. But His commands to us are accompanied by the same words of exhortation that were given to Joshua, "Yahweh himself will lead you; he will be with you; he will not fail you or desert you. Have no fear, do not be alarmed" (Deuteronomy 31:8). Being courageous does not mean that we think we are strong enough to fulfil the task in our own strength and abilities. Rather, it means that we are confident in the ability of God to guide, protect, and enable us to do exactly what He has asked of us.



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