

Course Study Guide

OT217

***Numbers-Joshua: The
Tragedy of Fear and
the Glory of Faith***

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Updated 2014



Our Daily Bread
Christian University

Lesson 1 Study Guide

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Numbers: Life in a Parenthesis

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Objectives

Numbers is a biography of disobedience. Israel's failure of faith blocked their entrance to God's Promised Land. Their refusal to follow God resulted in the only other alternative – a life of meaningless wandering and turmoil.

When you complete this lesson, "Numbers: Life in a Parenthesis," you should be able to:

- Describe how God prepared Israel to take the Promised Land and live in it.
- Explain why the generation of Israel who left Egypt died in the desert instead of living in the lands.
- Discover principles that cultivate your faith and encourage your obedience.
- Deepen your commitment to follow God wherever He leads.

Scripture Reading

Read Numbers.

Transcript

Course Title: Numbers-Joshua: The Tragedy of Fear and the Glory of Faith

Lesson One: Numbers: Life in a Parenthesis

I. Preparation for Conquest of the Promised Land (1:1-10:36)

The book of Numbers is the story of Israel in the wilderness. Why were they there? The answer is that they started out there because Numbers tells the story starting out from Mt. Sinai after the Israelites had completed the process of receiving the Law, had built all the things they needed to worship God, had been organized as a people. They were ready to enter into the Promised Land.

A. Soldier Census and Camp Organization (1:1-2:34)

Indeed in Numbers 1, we see them leaving Mt. Sinai, organized and counted according to military units; that is, men who draw the sword for battle. But you know, at the end of the book there is another census in Numbers 26 that indicates they had to be counted again for battle because in between a whole new generation had grown up, and the reason for there being a whole new generation was sin, disobedience, lack of faith.

The story begins at Sinai; the Israelites leave and head for the Promised Land. They are going basically to the north. And we find that in the process of traveling they also are learning more about God's covenant. This is an important thing to appreciate about the book of Numbers, a book in which there is a mixture of historical activity, travels and events, and even battles, and reception of law.

As the people come into new circumstances, God explains laws that will help them live within His will in those new circumstances. As they encounter problems that they had difficulty figuring out because they could not extrapolate of the principles and paradigms of the Law at Sinai—God mercifully explained those laws to them through Moses. The book of Numbers is a combination of history and law, on and off through the various chapters.

B. Organization and Laws Related to the Levites (3:1-4:49)

Early on in the third and fourth chapters of the book, we get laws related to the Levites. It is helpful to appreciate the fact that God chose one of the tribes of Israel to be His special ministers. The whole nation was His people and His priests in one sense; but in particular, the tribe of Levi constituted the clergy. It was they who were specially entrusted with keeping His covenant laws, and teaching the people the content of those laws, and seeing to it that the nation remained pure. Of course, from the tribe of Levi came the priests; in particular, all those descended from Aaron constituted the priests.

C. Elimination of Defilement (5:1-6:27)

We have in chapters 5 and 6 some laws relating to the elimination of defilement—again, the kind of thing that is related to the purity of the people and along the lines of some of what was introduced in the book of Leviticus. Also in chapters 5 and 6 there is some teaching to the Israelites about property, the importance of respect for it, about adultery, and about the taking of vows. Vows are not something that the New Testament spends much time on, but in the Old Testament, especially for certain categories of people, vows were very important. They represented a commitment to serving God in a particular way, and so regulations for how vows are to be taken properly are provided in those early chapters.

D. Laws and Events Related to Worship and the Tabernacle (7:1-9:23)

With chapters 7-9, there are quite a number of laws and events that relate to worship at the tabernacle. The tabernacle had just been built as the Israelites were at Mt. Sinai and now it was their responsibility to learn to use it, for the priests to learn how to take it down and put it back up again day after day as they traveled in the wilderness, so that it could be used properly for worship. The tabernacle was a portable tent shrine and it represented God's presence in the midst of the people, especially as the ark that held the Ten Commandments was in the midst of the tabernacle. Through it God represented himself among the people and His glory was manifested there. So laws concerning the tabernacle and worship thereat and its transportation are provided for us in chapters 7-9.

E. Departure from Mt. Sinai (10:1-36)

With chapter 10, we actually have the story of the departure from Mt. Sinai. The Israelites are on the road. Now they will be on the road unfortunately for thirty-nine years. They don't know that yet; as far as they know they are going to head straight for the Promised Land and enter into the land of Canaan and begin their conquest of that land under God's good grace. It could have been that way, but unfortunately, as the book goes on to describe, the people sinned against God.

II. Wilderness Years (11:1-25:18)

If we think of chapters 1-10 as a kind of first third of the book, an opening section—Part One let's say—we can think then of chapters 11-25 as a kind of middle section. We will call chapters 11-25 Part Two of the book of Numbers. This is the section of the book where we read about those long years of wandering in the wilderness. What happened? Why were the Israelites stuck in the huge Sinai Peninsula going around from place to place and not making it into the Promised Land? What happened were two kinds of things that indicated lack of faith: one was regular and constant grumbling; a second was the Israelites chickened out from entering the Promised Land.

A. God Judges Complainers (11:1-12:16)

We read in chapters 11 and 12 how the people complained about their food. They didn't like the food that they were getting. They didn't like the fact that God provided for them, daily, the same good nutritious stuff called "manna." They began to complain about it. Imagine giving people everything they actually need, but wanting more. It is not hard to imagine at all is it, because that is what we do. It is natural with human nature.

But in those same chapters, there is also an interesting account of how Aaron and Miriam complain about Moses. Now Aaron is Moses' older brother and Miriam is his older sister. They were with him, they helped him, they supported him through all these events—the trials in Egypt, and the Exodus from Egypt, and the year spent at Mt. Sinai, and so on. But people can get tired of what they are used to. They can become dissatisfied with circumstances that don't move as quickly as they would want them to, and they can single out somebody and begin to complain about some aspect of his leadership or character, or in this case his family.

We read that Moses had married a Cushite woman. The Cushites in the Old Testament were from the area of Africa that is called the Sudan. In other words, Moses had married a black woman, a woman who was not exactly of his race. It may well be that Aaron and Miriam were not usually racist in their thinking, but in this instance they adopted a racist posture and complained about that woman. God took care of the situation. It was an affront to Moses' leadership and it was an attack on a black woman. And God turned Miriam white, white with leprosy. Shocked and corrected, they appealed to God for mercy and He did indeed heal them and there was no more talk of criticism of Moses' Cushite wife.

But it was characteristic of what was going on among the people. They left Egypt, were glad to get out, wanted to be headed for the Promised Land; but as they encountered difficulties, as they encountered just the time involved, as they encountered trials of traveling, they began to grumble.

B. Kadesh Barnea (13:1-15:41)

A second big event that occurred during that same block of material in the book of Numbers is the fact that the Israelites chickened out from entering into the Promised Land. Numbers 13 tells the story of sending scouts in to look over the land of Canaan. Each tribe sent a representative scout or spy. They traveled around the land, they looked it over, they saw the cities, they saw the countryside, they saw the agricultural areas, and they came back and gave a report to Moses and the people that described the wonderful land, a land where God would indeed bless them, where they could be happy and at home. But they also described the inhabitants of that land as giants.

We have no reason to think that anything but a very small number of them were tall like Goliath. Goliath was a part of a very small ethnic group that could grow to his very substantial stature. But they were not all basketball players; most of them were normal height. Yet the

scouts were afraid—this from people who had been delivered by God from Egypt miraculously, this from people who had been through the Ten Plagues, from people who have seen God defeat the Amelikes before them back in the book of Exodus as they were approaching Mt. Sinai, from people who have been fed miraculously and provided for every step of their journey, from people who crossed the Red Sea on dry land. Now, they were afraid to fight.

You can understand some of it from a human point of view. Here are people who have never fought before. They were never part of any army; they were not good at what they did. They had a little bit of practice and a couple of encounters in the wilderness. But to think of themselves as fighting now as conquerors, rather than just defending themselves as they traveled along in the wilderness, that was hard for many people. Only two of the scouts, Joshua and Caleb, said, “Let’s go, we can take it. God will be with us.”

Ten of them said, “We haven’t got a chance. We were as grasshoppers in their sight.” That lack of faith meant that God turns them back and lets them wander in the wilderness until the new generation grows up. In other words what God does is to say, “Since you do not have the faith after all I have done for you to be my soldiers and enter into this Promised Land, then I will let you die out in the wilderness. I will let you wander around for year after year until most of you are dead and a whole new generation is grown up. I will let your children enter the Promised Land, but I will not let you.”

C. Rebellion and God’s Reaffirmation of the Priesthood (16:1-19:22)

So that is actually what happened. We see the Israelites traveling around the wilderness. As they travel, year after year, they begin to grumble as well. One of the big events takes place in chapters 16-19, where there is a rebellion led by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. They begin to talk about how wonderful Egypt was—all the vegetables they ate, the fresh vegetables, and all the nice times they had there, all the countryside that they enjoyed, and so on. “We come out here in this wilderness and we are just going to die.” They begin blaming Moses for that and they launch a rebellion and launched a rebellion against him with the idea that they would assume leadership and actually lead the people back to Egypt. How soon we forget! God handles that rebellion very efficiently. He causes the earth to open and swallow them up—an earthquake-like fissure opens up in the ground, and they and those with them are simply swallowed up by the earth.

D. Defeat of Enemies East of the Jordan (20:1-25:18)

This does not mean, however, it is a good time in every way. The Israelites are inclined to all sorts of things that are far from what they should be. When we come to chapter 20, for example, we find the Israelites near the end of their journey. They are in Moab, which is a country that is just to the east of the Promised Land—right across the Jordan River. Basically all they will have to do is cross through part of Moab and then ford the Jordan and enter into Canaan and begin the conquest. From one point of view it looks like it is fine; they are ready to go, and things will go well. But some complications ensue.

The king of Moab is a character named Balak. He knows that his own forces will be quite inadequate to attack and prevent the Israelites from moving through his territory. Moab at this time was newly settled and probably had just a very small number of citizenry capable of coming out and forming a volunteer defense force. Balak gets the idea that if he cannot defeat the Israelites militarily maybe he can defeat them spiritually. In particular, he has a couple of things in mind. The first option is to hire a prophet. There is a well-known prophet to the east named Balaam. This prophet Balaam is one who has a reputation as being able to prophesy in the name of various gods and goddesses.

Balak sends messengers to hire Balaam to come and to prophesy in the name of Yahweh—the Hebrew for “Lord,” the God of the Israelites. His theory is that if he can get this prophet (these prophets are supposed to be in good with the gods) to curse the nation of Israel maybe that will turn them back and prevent them from going through his territory, perhaps taking some of it in the process of their conquest. When Balaam agrees to go, he says to Balak, “Now remember, I can only prophesy what this god Yahweh tells me to prophesy.” It may have been something of a kind of an idle boast in the first instance, but God does in fact speak through Balaam.

Visualize this scene in chapters 22, 23, and 24: Balak has a whole group of government officials up on a high hill. They are standing there with Balaam the prophet, and looking forward to seeing how Balaam will curse the Israelites. And Balaam opens up his mouth and says things like this, “Balak brought me from Aram, the king of Moab from the eastern mountains. ‘Come,’ he said, ‘Curse Jacob for me; come, denounce Israel.’ How can I curse those whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce those whom the Lord has not denounced? From the rocky peaks I see them, from the heights I view them. I see a people who live apart and do not consider themselves one of the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob or number the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous. May my end be like theirs!”

And Balak, of course, said to Balaam, “What have you done to me? I brought you to curse my enemies, but you have done nothing but bless them!” Try after try Balak gave Balaam one more chance, but Balaam kept prophesying as God put the words in his mouth. In spite of the fact that God’s people had been so disobedient, in spite of the fact those Israelites had flaws and faults and grumbled a lot, in spite of their limitations, in spite of their weaknesses, God notified even the pagans that He was going to bless His people, make them mighty, and fulfill His promises concerning them to Abraham.

A very bad thing happens right after the Balaam incident. The Israelites are at a location called Baal of Peor, part of Moab, and they get into one of the most severe, sad religious practices of the day—that is, ritual prostitution. Chapter 25 of Numbers tells of one instance of the corruption of the people: how they engaged in the sexual practices that accompanied worship in the corrupt Moabite way of doing things, as people worshiped Baal and his girlfriend in the mythology of that day, Asherah. Part of what they did was have sex with prostitutes. The Israelites get into this as well. A plague ensues, and God stops that plague only when the Israelites take firm action and even kill the perpetrators. But it is a sad time and it is an indication of how God’s people tend, easily enough, to turn away from Him.

III. New Census and Preparation for Conquest (26:1-36:13)

The third part of the book, chapters 26-36, involves the new census and the preparation for the conquest. A lot of time has passed; there is actually the passage of approximately thirty-eight years of time within the space of just a few verses.

A. Instructions and Preparations for Entering the Promised Land (26:1-30:16)

The second census is taken in chapter 26. The people are ready now. The count is of those who have basically been born and grown up in the wilderness. It is time to get ready for the entering into the Promised Land. This brings questions with it, for example a group of women who are all the daughters of one Israelite named Zelophehad. They come to Moses and say, “We are almost ready to enter into the Promised Land, the troops are being counted, everybody is organized, the invasion is being put into motion, but our father died without leaving any sons.” The usual cultural expectation is that it is the sons who inherit the land and then they make sure that the women also get their fair share. The boys look out for the girls, the men look out for the women; that is how it works within the family. “But we have no brothers. What are we going to do?”

Moses brings their concern to God. And God gives them the answer that if there are no men in the family to inherit land of course the women must inherit. He instructed Moses that they must marry within their tribe so that the land must stay where maximum access to the family can be provided. After clearing up that and other kinds of questions, then the Israelites do prepare to enter the Promised Land.

B. Defeat of Midianites and Allocation of Land (31:1-35:34)

They are still on the east side of the Jordan River, so the chapters from 31-35 in this book talk about some battles that they fight on the east side of the Jordan where they are starting the process of entering the Promised Land. The Promised Land does go east of the Jordan, and so they must take care of that minor portion of the territory that they want to control first. All the tribes get together and they attack first the Midianites, then they attack other groups as well, and they begin to settle in the eastern regions of the Jordan River, across the Jordan from the main part of the Promised Land.

Moreover they receive information about a variety of laws, about offerings, about vows, about festivals, and even more information about how inheritance laws will work. You can see that there is a combination here beginning to take the land and wanting properly to possess it—God wanting them to possess it in an equitable way, to have access for everybody to that land. In modern times, most of the revolutions that have been fought have been fought over land, people who do not have access to ownership of land fighting for that right.

C. Fulfillment of Inheritance (36:1-13)

God wanted His people to distribute their land properly and fairly, and have everybody get equal access to the land. So concerns in the book of Numbers, as they will also be reflected in the book of Deuteronomy, tend toward this direction. There is that expectation that it is just not a matter of getting there and capturing the territory, but it is a matter of being a righteous people who occupy the land fairly, and to distribute it among themselves fairly according to God's design so that everybody is treated equally, everybody is a brother and a sister, everybody is receiving the land and caring about his neighbor as himself in the way that God designed. The book of Numbers comes to a close with the conquest starting and with the land, in a small way, being possessed, and with God's nation, for all their faults, finally entering into Canaan.

Discussion Questions

How does the book of Numbers serve as a warning to believers today?

Israel failed to enter the Promised Land as planned because of their mistakes. How do you respond when life doesn't go as you planned?

In this lesson we learned that the Israelites complained a lot during their time in the wilderness—they weren't satisfied with God's provision. What can you learn from this that could help you process life's difficulties more effectively?

Further Study

Suggested reading for this lesson:

Stedman, Ray C. *Adventuring Through the Bible: A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible*.

Discovery House Publishers: 1997.

Read Chapter 8: “From Failure to Victory” (Numbers)

Glossary

Canaan — Biblically, the name both of the people and the land is derived from a forefather named Canaan (Ge 10:15-18). Canaan, as first used by the Phoenicians, denoted only the maritime plain on which Sidon was built. But in the time of Moses and Joshua, it denoted the whole country to the west of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea.

Cushite Woman — Moses' wife is thus referred to by Miriam and Aaron (Nu 12:1). As a Cushite, she would be a descendant of Cush, the eldest son of Ham, and grandson of Noah (Ge 10:6). The habitat of this tribe was Ethiopia, Nubia, or Sudan.

Defile — (Defilement) Among the Old Testament Jews there were five kinds of potential defilement: (1) Physical (SS 5:3); (2) Sexual, either moral or ceremonial (Lev 18:20; 15:24; 1Sa 21:5); (3) Ethical (Isa 59:3; Eze 37:23); (4) Ceremonial, which meant to render oneself ceremonially unclean so as to be disqualified from religious service or worship (Lev 11:24; 15:19; 22:6); (5) Religious, which was concerned with the heart attitude toward the Lord (Nu 35:33; Jer 3:1; Mal 1:7, 12).

Kadesh Barnea — (Hebrew “holy ‘city’ of Barnea”) - An oasis region made by the presence of four springs. This multiple spring area was the largest in the Negeb-Sinai district and was located approximately 50 miles southwest of Beersheba and about 50 miles from the Mediterranean coast.

Midian — (Midianites) The name of the land and the people who comprised it; the name came from a forefather named Midian (Ge 25:1f). The boundaries of the land, although indefinite, were generally east and southeast of Canaan (Ge 25:6). The Midianites were semi-nomadic in early Bible times.

Moab — (Moabites) The name of the land and the people who comprised it came from Moab, the eldest son of Lot (Ge 19:37). The land was east of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. The core of Moab was located between the Wadi Arnon and the Wadi Zered.

Tabernacle — (Hebrew “mishkdan”) - The movable, sacred tent-temple which Moses had erected for the service of God, according to the pattern that the Lord gave to him on Mt. Sinai (Ex 25:9; Heb 8:5).

Quiz

1. A key quality of how God wanted the Israelites to settle the Promised Land was:
 - A. Dominance
 - B. Development
 - C. Destruction
 - D. Fairness
2. Aaron and Miriam were upset with Moses because he had married:
 - A. An Egyptian woman
 - B. An Ammonite woman
 - C. A Midianite woman
 - D. A Cushite woman
3. Numbers includes regulations about defilement. Among the Old Testament Jews, defilement could be:
 - A. Sexual
 - B. Ceremonial
 - C. Ethical
 - D. All of the above
4. The book of Numbers is the story of Israel:
 - A. Departing Egypt
 - B. In the wilderness
 - C. At Mt. Sinai
 - D. Entering the Promised Land
5. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness after leaving Mt. Sinai for approximately:
 - A. 45 years
 - B. 39 years
 - C. 35 years
 - D. 32 years
6. This diviner was hired by the king of Moab to curse the Israelites:
 - A. Baalim
 - B. Balak
 - C. Balaam
 - D. Zelophehad
7. This event begins Numbers and is repeated again later in chapter 26:
 - A. The men who could go to battle are counted.
 - B. The people rebel against Moses' leadership.
 - C. Spies are sent to the Promised Land.
 - D. Moses receives the Ten Commandments.

8. What happened as a result of Miriam's attitude?
 - A. She contracted leprosy.
 - B. The earth opened up and swallowed her.
 - C. She wasn't allowed to enter the Promised Land.
 - D. Moses was no longer Israel's leader.
9. What happened every time Balaam delivered an oracle concerning Israel?
 - A. He spoke terrible curses against Israel.
 - B. He could only bless Israel.
 - C. He spoke a mixture of curses and blessings.
 - D. He couldn't speak at all.
10. What situation resulted in God prohibiting Israel from entering the Promised Land until a new generation came into being?
 - A. The rebellion led by Korah, Dathan, and Aibram
 - B. The people's constant complaining
 - C. The acceptance of the report of the majority of the twelve scouts or spies
 - D. The people's worship of the golden calf

Answers: 1. D 2. D 3. D 4. B 5. B 6. C 7. A 8. A 9. B 10. C

Lesson 2 Study Guide

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***Numbers-Joshua: The
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The Bible & Two Crucial Disciplines
for Studying It

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Objectives

In this lesson you will explore the premise that the Bible is God's self-revelation. To help you understand its contents, this lesson introduces the disciplines of biblical geography and archaeology.

When you complete this lesson, "The Bible & Two Crucial Disciplines for Studying It," you should be able to:

- Discuss the Bible as God's self-revelation.
- Define and explain the roles of "covenant" and "authority" as they relate to Scripture.
- Discuss key geographical terms and locations used in the biblical text.
- Explain the role of archaeology in biblical studies and name nine archaeological periods.
- Develop greater skill and accuracy in your study of the Old Testament.

Scripture Reading

Read Deuteronomy.

Transcript

Course Title: Numbers-Joshua: The Tragedy of Fear and the Glory of Faith

Lesson Two: The Bible & Two Crucial Disciplines for Studying It

I. Introduction to Old Testament Background

In this unit, you will probe the premise that the biblical record is God's self-revelation, which is founded on a twofold principle of covenant and authority. The Bible is very clear about the fact that God's self-revelation took place in real time and in real places. And indeed, the land where the descendants of Abraham were instructed to settle played a significant role in the subsequent history of Israel. You will learn more about the discipline of archaeology, the importance of pottery to relative chronology, and about the archaeological periods associated with the Levant, more generally called the Holy Land.

II. God's Word

Scripture is God's self-revelation to the reader. It is God's invitation to hear "His" story. It is where God makes Himself known. The Bible claims to be not only a revelation from God, but also an infallible record of that revelation. It documents the person and acts of God, Creator of the universe. At the core of that self-revelation is the concept of covenant. Even the English designation of Old Testament and New Testament indicates that covenant was a core concept of these collection of books (testament = covenant).

A. Covenant

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew *berit* ("covenant") was a legally binding obligation, and thus could be commanded (Jdg 2:20; Ps 119:9). Hebrew terms related to "covenant" express pledge and commitment, which actually create the covenant. This is the concept by which the Israelites gave definitive expression to the binding of themselves to their God, Yahweh. The covenant tradition of Israel was rooted in the conviction of Yahweh's intervention to rescue a group of Hebrew slaves out of Egypt and in the covenant-making on Mt. Sinai, in which Yahweh revealed the basis of Torah, which was to form the moral foundation of Israel's life. This covenant was a legally binding obligation, especially as it related to God and to human redemption.

B. Authority

We know this covenant was valid because it was backed up by the authority of the self-revealing one, the Creator of the universe. God has authority both in the sense that He has absolute possibility or freedom of action, being under neither necessity nor restraint, and also in the sense that He is the only ultimate source of all other authorization and power (cf. Lk

12:5; Ac 1:7; Jude 25). In relation to the universe, the authority of God is indeed that of Creator as well as Ruler. It is worked out in both nature and history. Thus God controls the natural and historical forces that fulfill His purposes (Rev 6:8; 9:3,10,19).

Authority is what makes the books of the Old and New Testaments different from all other literary works. In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul refers to the Old Testament as being “God-breathed,” or inspired. These Scriptures, having divine authorization, carry the authority of God Himself. Similarly, being God’s Word, they have the freedom of God, not innately or inherently, but by virtue of their divine authorship or authorization. The ultimate stress, however, lies not on Scripture but on the God who rules the universe. “To the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen” (Jude 25).

III. Physical Geography

The study of geography is an essential part of biblical exegesis. It is not generally recognized that the Bible is the only book of the religions of the world that puts any emphasis on geography. But in the biblical record almost every event is anchored to a specific location. From Abana to Zuzim, there are about 2,000 place names in the Bible, including regions and countries, cities and villages, mountains and valleys, seas and rivers.

The area known as the Near and Middle East, or Western Asia, originally consisted of separate cultural entities, which gradually merged to assume a common identity under the aegis of the Persian Empire. This vast complex of territories was bounded by the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, the Caucasus Mountains, and the Central Asian steppes or deserts, and, to the south, by the seas of the Indian Ocean. Its coherence was related to the fact that it was made up of three concentric zones: the Syrian-Arabian Desert, the plains of the Fertile Crescent, and the highlands of Anatolia, Armenia, and Iran.

A. Fertile Crescent and Egypt

The Syrian-Arabian Desert was an enormous void that no caravan could cross without camels. Nomads had traveled back and forth along its fringes from time immortal in search of pasturage for their herds. The nomadic tribes were a continual threat to the sedentary residents of the zone made fertile by rain and irrigation. The Tigris and the Euphrates, the two great rivers coming down from the Armenian Mountains, amply watered the territory called Mesopotamia on the eastern horn of the Fertile Crescent. This area also contained desert regions, its north differing greatly from its south. It reached from the Persian Gulf northwest through Mesopotamia, then west to north of Syria, then southwest through Syria and Palestine to the Nile River valley and delta in Egypt.

The Nile carried the water of Lake Victoria for 3,000 miles over the desert sands to the Mediterranean. The final 750 miles of the Nile bisected the area known as Egypt in antiquity. Annual flooding replenished the fertility of the soil, which would otherwise have been depleted

by the early inhabitants. Ancient Egypt was divided into an Upper Kingdom (along the narrow strip of river valley in the south) and a Lower Kingdom (essentially the delta area in the north).

The countries of the Levant lay on the western horn of the Crescent. Part of the prosperity of this region was due to its seacoast and its situation at the focal point of the trading routes from Asia and Africa. Unfortunately, for the most part the Mediterranean coast was largely outside the Jewish sphere of influence. The coastal area north of Mount Carmel was controlled by Phoenicia and its two principal cities: Tyre and Sidon. The area south of Carmel was usually controlled by Philistia, which in the end gave its name to the area, i.e., Palestine.

B. Land of Palestine

The land of Palestine is easily divided into four basic longitudinal, or north-south, geographical regions: (1) the coastal plain, (2) the central hill country, (3) the Jordan rift, and the (4) Transjordan plateau.

1. The coastal plain extends northward from Sinai along the Mediterranean coast to the border of modern Lebanon. It narrows progressively from a twenty-mile width near Gaza on the Philistine plain to twelve miles near Joppa on the border of the Plain of Sharon, to less than two miles along the Plain of Dor, south of Haifa. Mount Carmel, a northwesterly extension of the central highland, interrupts the coastal plain where it meets the Mediterranean Sea at the modern city of Haifa. North of Mount Carmel, the Plain of Acco, some five to seven miles in width, ends abruptly at the white limestone cliffs of Rosh Hanikra, the ancient "Ladder of Tyre." Beyond this point, narrow plains occur irregularly along the coast between the mountains that extend to the sea. This was the area that the Phoenicians occupied in antiquity.

2. The hills of Galilee comprise one of four main regions into which the central highlands can be divided. The Galilean Mountains consist of alternating ridges and valleys running east-west. Then comes the Jezreel plain, enclosed by mountains, but with gates to the coast, the Sea of Galilee, and the Transjordan. South of it stretches the central range from the north to south. It dips to the Beersheba depression, which runs east-west. The land then rises into the mountain wilderness of the Negev and Sinai.

3. The Afro-Syrian rift is a north-south fault that runs from Asia Minor to Africa, which reaches its deepest point in the land of Israel. This cleft in the earth's surface begins in the plain between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Mountains to the north and extends southward through Palestine, the Gulf of Eilat (Aqaba), and on into Lake Nyasa in Africa, a distance of 3,000 miles. The rift valley in Palestine averages ten miles in width and varies in altitude from about 300 feet above sea level in the north to 1,290 feet below sea level on the surface of the Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth apart from the ocean depths. The rift valley can be divided into five areas: the Huleh Valley, the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea, and the Arabah.

4. The Transjordanian hills that rise sharply from the eastern floor of the rift valley are broken into regions by wadis, which penetrate into the valley from the east. These wadis are stream beds that are usually dry, but which may flood during the rainy season. In the north, the Yarmuk River enters the valley slightly south of the Sea of Galilee. It provides a natural boundary between the present states of Syria and Jordan, while in biblical times Bashan, to the north, was separated from Gilead, to the south. No natural boundary separated the region of Moab from that of the Gilead, but the northern boundary was generally eastward from the north end of the Dead Sea. The Wadi el-Hasa, the biblical brook Zered, which enters the Dead Sea at its southeastern corner, provided a natural boundary between Moab and Edom to the south. The mountains of Edom rise in places to a height in excess of 5,000 feet.

IV. Archaeology

Much of what is known about past civilizations has been discovered through archaeology. Archaeology is the scientific study of the material remains of past human life and activities. The simplest method of archaeology is surface exploration, but the usual site for excavation in the lands of the Bible is a “tell.” The Arabic word tell, commonly meaning “hill,” has been taken over by archaeologists to designate a hill that has been formed from the debris of human occupation, built up in successive layers over the centuries through a sequence of habitation, destruction, and reconstruction. There are thousands of tells of this nature in the Middle East.

A. Biblical Archaeology

The archaeology of the Bible cannot be confined to the land of Palestine. The biblical story began at the eastern end of a long rectangle where the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers join to run into the Persian Gulf, and where Ur, the Sumerian seaport, lay at the culminating point of the great trade routes over desert, mountain, and sea. When the last apostle laid down his writing instrument near the end of the first century of the Christian era, the church had been established in Rome, then ruler of all the territory where the story of the Bible had taken shape and form. Rome, the great city of seven hills located on the Tiber River, was near the western end of the same long rectangle of lands. In other words, this rectangle central to biblical archaeology went from Ur in the southeast corner, to the Caspian Sea in the northeast corner, and Rome in the northwest corner, to Carthage in the southwest corner.

Biblical archaeology, therefore, is a specialized field within the larger field of general archaeology, related to those lands that played significant roles in the unfolding of the Hebrew story and the subsequent founding of the Christian church. Within these lands, lie the remains of seven great empires: Egyptian, Hittite, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman (or those significant parts of them that had a place and a part in the biblical account). In addition, countless kingdoms, principalities, and city-states, and numberless people who came and went, left memorials of their culture meaningful for the study of the Bible in that same area.

B. History of Biblical Archaeology

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact beginning of biblical archaeology. The great American scholar, William F. Albright, traces a genuine scientific interest in the archaeological remains of Palestine back to travelers of the sixteenth century. In the middle years of the seventeenth century, the Roman Pietro della Valle produced an account of travels in Palestine that contains true archaeological descriptions. Other travelers also wrote down their observations, but for the most part they sensed the romantic impact of the remains of long-vanished civilizations, but missed their scientific and historical significance.

Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798 may be seen as the beginning of scientific archaeology. The French conqueror was rightly convinced that Egypt was the strategic key to the Mediterranean. He took the unprecedented step of attaching a scholarly deputation to his military staff. Napoleon's concern for the protection and copying of the bilingual inscription found on the Rosetta stone is on record and is entirely to his credit. Another highlight took place in 1830, when the pictorial script of Egypt was successfully deciphered.

Paul E. Botta, a physician and the French consular agent in Mosul, began excavations on the mound of ancient Nineveh in 1842, but, failing to find anything of monumental size, turned to the site of Khorsabad, ten miles north. Here he discovered almost immediately huge sculptures from the ruins of the palace of Sargon II. In 1845, Austen Henry Layard began excavations at Nineveh. His discovery, almost immediately, of the palace of Ashurnasirpal II brought into the British Museum treasures superior to those discovered by Botta. The race of the archaeological treasure hunters was on.

George F. Grotefend was the first to decipher Persian cuneiform in 1815, and Henry Rawlinson soon followed by deciphering the Old Persian text on the Darius' Behistun Inscription by 1846. Between 1846 and 1855, Rawlinson, Edward Hincks, and Jules Oppert succeeded in unraveling the mysteries of the Akkadian script. Apart from the advances in understanding ancient languages, little progress was being made in the mid-nineteenth century toward scientific excavation.

The missing tool—a means of scientific dating—required for the accurate interpretation of archaeological finds was finally discovered and introduced into Palestinian archaeology by W. M. Flinders Petrie. Petrie became convinced that if enough attention were given to unpainted pottery it could be just as effective an instrument for dating as the painted and much rarer pottery used by classical archaeologists.

Following World War I, in the fifteen years from 1920 to 1935, archaeological excavation in Palestine proceeded on an unprecedented scale. Perhaps the most noteworthy of the technical advances was the firm establishment of the chronology of Palestinian pottery. This was due in large part to the work of William F. Albright from 1926 to 1932 during his excavations at Tell Beit Mirsim (possibly biblical Debir). Since the close of World War II, refinements and improvements in excavation techniques have continued to be made. Of primary importance

was the work of Kathleen Kenyon at Jericho, from 1952 through 1958. Another notable trend of post-World War II archaeology was the application of physical science techniques to the analysis of archaeological data. The carbon-14 method of dating organic material was but one of a group of highly specialized techniques that included such procedures as neutron activation, thermoluminescence dating, and resistivity surveying.

C. Dating of Finds

Chronology is a subject of great importance to biblical archaeology. Relative chronology is to be carefully distinguished from absolute chronology. Most archaeological data provide us at best with relative chronology: Level II was later than Level III and earlier than Level I. Accordingly, the types of material found in those levels can be arranged typologically and sequentially.

As mentioned above, one of the most important items in establishing a chronological sequence is pottery, painted and unpainted. Pottery is the most profuse artifact recovered by archaeologists in the lands of the Bible. These are classified by their characteristics and are helpful in developing a chronology of the site. There are several features that make pottery the ideal material for relative chronology: (1) Styles changed rather frequently. (2) It was relatively inexpensive, and subsequently quite plentiful in the ancient Near East. (3) It was fragile and once broken practically useless. (4) Sherds of pottery are almost indestructible. In addition, pottery does not dissolve in water and is not consumed by fire. As a result of these factors, pottery is the most plentiful and the most reliable means of building a relative chronology available to the modern archaeologist.

D. Archaeological Periods

Biblical archaeology lies within the Holocene Epoch of geological study and the anthropological cultural levels of the New Stone Age and later. Time frames are delineated primarily on the basis of significant technological changes. There is broad general agreement among scholars on the sequence of cultural development and on the suggested dates. For the biblical world, these are as follows:

1. Aceramic (Pre-pottery) Neolithic Age / circa 9000-6000 B.C.
2. Neolithic-with-Pottery Age / circa 6000-5000 B.C.
3. Chalcolithic Age (introduction of copper tools) / circa 5000-3200 B.C.
4. Early Bronze Age (copper tools predominated) / circa 3200-2000 B.C.
5. Middle Bronze / circa 2000-1600 B.C.
6. Late Bronze Age / circa 1600-1200 B.C.

7. Iron Age (introduction of iron tools) / circa 1200-300 B.C.
8. Hellenistic Period / circa 300-63 B.C.
9. Roman / 63 B.C.-A.D. 323

Of course, the Aceramic Neolithic Age did not end concurrently throughout the biblical world. The discovery of how to make plastic clay, fashion it, fire it, and so fabricate pottery was probably localized to one place (or more), from which the craft spread into other areas. Likewise, the discovery of metallurgical competencies spread, probably more slowly because of the more limited sources of copper ore and the higher skill level needed to make copper tools as compared to the manufacturing of pottery.

E. Significant Archaeological Finds

There are several major archaeological finds that have shed a great deal of light onto the early patriarchal period. These include the Nuzi (Tell Yorghan Tepe) archive, which is the most important personal library uncovered in the ancient Near East. Nuzi was a city near modern Kirkuk, Iraq. It dates from the time of the Hurrian Empire of Mitanni from 1500 to 1350 B.C. It features a large number of family documents such as marriage contracts, adoption agreements, and land transfers. The Amarna (Tell el-Amarna) archive preserves almost 400 documents of correspondence that passed between the pharaohs of Egypt and the nations of the Near East in the fourteenth century B.C. These letters record the social and political situation in the land of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age.

Ugarit (Tell Ras Shamra) was a bustling seaport and city-state in northern Syria in the Late Bronze Age. The myths and legends of Ugarit permit us to glimpse the conceptions of the supernatural that infused Canaanite life and thought and to observe their cultic rites and practices, especially those associated with Baal. Another significant archaeological discovery was Ashurbanipal's library at Nineveh, a capital of Assyria. This archive introduced the modern world to ancient classics such as the *Gilgamesh Epic*, with its startling parallel to the biblical flood, and *Enuma Elish*, which discloses some of the Babylonian creation theology. In addition, archaeology has given historical credence to many people mentioned in the Bible, such as the prophet Balaam (Nu 22-24). Texts found at Deir 'Allah (on the east side of the Jordan River) attest to his existence.

Discussion Questions

What stance should a believer take when archaeological data appear to be in conflict with the biblical record?

What cautions should one exercise in developing parallels between the Old Testament and the ancient Near East?

How does an understanding of Old Testament geography contribute to your understanding of the Old Testament?

Further Study

Suggested reading for this lesson:

Stedman, Ray C. *Adventuring Through the Bible: A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible*.

Discovery House Publishers: 1997.

Read Chapter 9: “The Law That Brings Deliverance” (Deuteronomy)

Glossary

Enuma Elish — The creation struggle between cosmic order and chaos was to the ancient Mesopotamians a fateful drama that was renewed at the turn of each new year. The epic that deals with these events was therefore the most significant expression of the religious literature of Mesopotamia. The work, consisting of seven tablets, was known in Akkadian as “Enuma elish,” or “When on high,” after its opening words.

Gilgamesh — The Epic of. This story was composed c. 2000 B.C. and was recorded on eleven tablets to which a twelfth, describing the afterlife, was later added. It is but one of a cycle of earlier epics surrounding this king of Uruk. Basically the story is of the king’s rebellion against the idea of death and his quest for eternal life, following the loss of his friend Enkidu.

Hammurabi — Sixth king of the First Babylonian Dynasty, Hammurabi is considered an outstanding statesman, military planner, and lawgiver.

Hurrian Empire — The Hurrians were a non-Semitic people who entered Mesopotamia from the Armenian Mountains to the northeast, the area in which the Urartians, a related people, were located.

Law Codes — The earliest formulations of law were made by the Sumerians. The Sumerian emphasis upon law and order commended itself to various sedentary societies of the ancient Near East, who produced their own legislation.

Quiz

1. All but one of the following archaeological sites have shed a great deal of light onto the early patriarchal period. Which one has not?
 - A. Tell Dor
 - B. Tell Yorghana Tepe
 - C. Tell el-Amarna
 - D. Tell Ras Shamra

2. Authority is what makes the Bible different from all other literary works. God has authority in the sense that:
 - A. He is the only ultimate source of all other authorization and power.
 - B. He is the creator of all that exists.
 - C. He rules the universe.
 - D. All of the above

3. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *berit* (“covenant”):
 - A. Was never considered a legally binding obligation
 - B. Was never used to express ideas related to pledge and commitment
 - C. Was not rooted in the conviction of Yahweh’s intervention in the rescue of a group of Hebrew slaves
 - D. Was a core concept of this collection of books

4. Most of what is known about past civilization has been discovered through:
 - A. Written records
 - B. Archaeology
 - C. Pictographs
 - D. Pottery

5. Scholars generally agree the sequence of cultural development in the biblical world was as follows:
 - A. Neolithic Age, Bronze Age, Roman Period, Iron Age
 - B. Roman Period, Iron Age, Neolithic Age, Bronze Age
 - C. Bronze Age, Iron Age, Neolithic Age, Roman Period
 - D. Neolithic Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman Period

6. The Bible does not claim:
 - A. To be a revelation from God
 - B. To have taken place in a real time and in a real place
 - C. To document the person and acts of God, the Creator of the universe
 - D. Everyone who reads it will decide to believe in God

7. The land of Palestine is easily divided into:
 - A. Four basic latitudinal, or east-west, geographical regions
 - B. Two basic latitudinal, or east-west, geographical regions
 - C. Four basic longitudinal, or north-south, geographical regions
 - D. Two basic longitudinal, or north-south, geographical regions
8. The missing tool (a means of scientific dating) required for the accurate interpretation of archaeological finds was discovered and introduced into Palestinian archaeology by:
 - A. W. F. Albright
 - B. W. M. Flinder Petrie
 - C. Kathleen Kenyon
 - D. Austen Henry Layard
9. The study of geography is an essential part of biblical exegesis. The primary reason for this is that:
 - A. Though not generally recognized as such, the Bible is the only book of the religions of the world that puts emphasis on geography.
 - B. From Abama to Zuzin there are about 20,000 place names in the Bible.
 - C. Very few of the events recorded are anchored in specific locations, so when they are of a geographical nature they become very important.
 - D. All of the above
10. There are several features that make pottery the ideal material for relative chronological dating. Which of the following is **not** one of the reasons?
 - A. Styles changed rather frequently.
 - B. It was fragile.
 - C. It was relatively expensive.
 - D. Sherds are almost indestructible.

Answers: 1. A 2. D 3. D 4. B 5. D 6. D 7. C 8. B 9. A 10. C

Lesson 3 Study Guide

OT217

***Numbers-Joshua: The
Tragedy of Fear and
the Glory of Faith***

Deuteronomy & Joshua:
The Benefits of Obedience

Updated 2014



Our Daily Bread
Christian University

Objectives

In contrast to Numbers, Deuteronomy and Joshua describe and illustrate a life of following God. As you study Deuteronomy, you will discover, in detail, the process and benefits of living life God's way. In Joshua, you will learn how God led obedient Israel to conquer and inhabit the Promised Land against overwhelming opposition – and see a case study of obedience in action.

When you complete this lesson, “Deuteronomy & Joshua: The Benefits of Obedience,” you should be able to:

- Explain how God “personalized” His covenant relationship with Israel’s second generation.
- Describe the specific responsibilities and privileges of being God’s holy people.
- Describe specific instances of God’s intervention to give His people impossible victories.
- Develop greater confidence in God’s power for your own walk to victory.

Scripture Reading

Read Joshua.

Transcript

Course Title: Numbers-Joshua: The Tragedy of Fear and the Glory of Faith

Lesson Three: Deuteronomy & Joshua: The Benefits of Obedience

I. First Sermon: Review of Israel's Recent History (Dt 1:1-4:49)

A. Emphasis on the Covenant

Deuteronomy and Joshua go together in many ways. Deuteronomy brings to an end the books of Moses; it is a restatement of God's covenant for the new generation about to enter the Promised Land, and then Joshua is the story of the conquest of that land, at least the beginnings of it. When we look at Deuteronomy we see that it is not giving the Israelites a whole bunch of new information, but it is stating for them God's law in a way that sort of packages that law around the emphasis on covenant. The book of Deuteronomy is organized especially as a covenant all by itself as a book. The original Sinai covenant starts with the Israelites at Mt. Sinai in the second part of Exodus and continues with the book of Leviticus, and then even has some sort of appendixes in the book of Numbers as the law is being fleshed out in the action and lives of the people as they traversed the wilderness.

B. Renewal of the Covenant

In the case of Deuteronomy, Israel is gathered in one place: the plains of Shittim in Moab, right across the Jordan River from the Promised Land proper, the land of Canaan. As his last great act, Moses delivers to the people an inspired speech of the law. He renews God's covenant with them. We find Moses preaching the law to a new generation of people. What did he emphasize? Well, he emphasizes the fact that God loves His people. God's covenant love for them is important, and in turn they must love God. This, again, is not love in the sense of feeling a certain way toward God; it is how one acts. It is doing acts of love for God and on God's behalf, as one relates to others.

II. Second Sermon: Review of Sinaitic Laws (Dt 5:1-26:19)

A. Love Is Obedience

Another emphasis is God's special choice of Israel as His people. This is a theme of the book of Deuteronomy. Israel is not just any nation. Israel is a nation that God rescued out of Egypt and shaped in the wilderness, protected and cared for, and built into His own people. Their responsibility certainly is to act like it. How do they act like it? They keep His covenant; they obey His law. Obedience is faithfulness. Obedience is proof that they love Him and belong to Him—that they are His people.

B. Choose to Serve God

Another theme that one finds in addition to the theme of love is the theme of choice. God has chosen them as compared to any other nation. Is this because God does not like other nations? Certainly not—that is not the emphasis at all. But rather, to this nation has been entrusted the responsibility of specially serving God, of being the stewards of His Word, of knowing His covenant and what His righteousness consists of, of living as a holy people for Him. This means they are under a burden, and so they are warned. If they do keep His law, their life on the earth will be long. But if they don't, they will rapidly be thrown off from the Promised Land into captivity.

Already in chapter 4 this prediction is made. The whole sweep of Israel's history is outlined in just a few verses of chapter 4, from about verses 21-31. You can see the plan there. They will be long in the land, but eventually they will worship other gods and will dishonor God, breaking His covenant. Then He will give them into the hand of their enemies who will deport them. And then in exile they will finally turn back to Him. In His mercy, He will bring them back, a renewed people—not only into their land physically, but into His protection and into His new covenant spiritually.

C. Unity of God's People

Another theme that Deuteronomy brings before us is the unity of God's people. They cannot just keep some laws, spread out, and get along with some neighbors. They cannot just see themselves as free to do whatever they want, as long as it does not get them in too much trouble in the local scene. No, they are supposed to be a people who function together. One particular way in which they function together is worship.

We find in Deuteronomy a very strong emphasis on corporate worship. This is a very important biblical theme. Everybody has to worship together. Deuteronomy 12 tells us that God plans to take His tabernacle and place it somewhere once they get into the heartland of the Promised Land. There, everybody will gather three times a year. The whole nation will come—the people from the distant edges of the nation, the people near the central sanctuary. It does not matter, they will all gather together three times a year. They will especially worship as a nation. They will come at the time of the Passover in the spring; they will come at the time of Pentecost in the summer; they will also come at the time of Tabernacles in the fall—three great festivals. Worshiping together, they will show their unity as a people.

Isn't that the way we show our unity? Isn't it by worshiping together? Of course, we show our love for one another and our care in many other ways. But certainly, worship is one of the key ways that God's people indicate they belong to Him, all together as a unified people.

D. God's Faithfulness

Another theme is God's faithfulness to His promises. This is very big in Deuteronomy. Moses

tells the people about their responsibility to keep the law. As he describes their stipulations, he also emphasizes for them by way of the prologue, part of the covenant, how faithful God has been. “God delivered you; God cared for you.” Who did God do this for? Who else has ever had anything like this happen? Who worships any other gods that they think can come close to this in terms of beneficence, kindness, and loving faithfulness? The mercy of God, His constant faithfulness, His loyalty—these are great themes of the book of Deuteronomy that Moses stresses for the people.

E. God’s Self-revelation in His Word

There is also the concept of God’s self-revelation in His Word. This is something that we do not often pay much attention to, but God’s Word is where we find out about Him. If you want to know God and you do not have a Bible, you are in trouble. It is hard. You can know some things about God; you can know general things about God, but God has caused His Word to be the place where we are to go to learn. He has put it in black and white. He has written it down for us. Moses makes much in Deuteronomy of this aspect of the Israelite responsibility to know that Word, to teach it to their children, to read it regularly, to live by it, not to let it depart from their minds, but to cause it to be firmly fixed therein.

F. God’s Sovereignty over the World

Another theme is the importance of God’s sovereignty over the world and world events. The Israelites were a pretty small people on the scene. There were big powers like the Egyptians, or the Hittites, or the Babylonian Empire, or the Hurrian Empire, or any of a number of other empires. Israel was pretty small. Remember that when the spies in the book of Numbers looked over even the land of Canaan, which itself was not all that big, they felt outnumbered and outclassed by what they saw. The Israelites needed the encouragement of realizing that God was really in charge of all things, all nations. God would make happen for them what He chose to make happen. They did not need to fear; they did not need to lack confidence.

People in those days often believed in local gods and goddesses. They believed that an individual who worshiped a god was, in a certain sense, localizing that god. And where gods were worshiped, they might have some power; but if you get to some place where a god was not worshiped, that god probably did not have much power in that location. But the Israelites needed to know that the one true God, the God who had rescued them and made them a people, in fact, was sovereign over the entire world.

III. Third Sermon (Dt 27:1-34:12)

A. Curses and Blessings

Yet another theme of the book is God’s grace in abundance toward His people. He gives them more than they deserve; He gives them a lot. It is not just sustenance; it is not just the minimal. Deuteronomy emphasizes that, with its long lists of blessings that God provides for

His people. On the other hand, He demands obedience as proof of faith and love. There are also plenty of curses listed in the book, covenant curses as part of the sanctions of the covenant. And Deuteronomy 28-32 is replete with these—descriptions of all the miseries the people can get themselves into if they do not obey God and keep His law.

B. Succession

Another concern of the book is succession. This, after all, is a new group of people to whom Moses is preaching. Most of them had not been in Egypt. They have been born, instead, in the wilderness and were a new generation ready to enter the Promised Land. They were oriented forward to that experience; they were the successors to those who had lived in Egypt, and they need to have a sense of proper succession—the idea of the generations coming and going, the idea that every new generation must renew the covenant with God. Every new generation must for itself be faithful. A generation could not count upon the benefits that had been passed down to it by a prior faithful generation. It had to make its own commitment of faith and obedience to God.

C. A Successor to Moses

The succession from Moses is also an issue at the very end of the book. What will happen when Moses dies? Well, the answer is that God will be faithful. He will have a successor. In the very last chapter of the book, chapter 34, we read about Moses' death, about the care with which God buried him. He had led the people faithfully. Yet for all the strong and wonderful things he had done, he was actually a very meek and humble person, not that he did not have vigor and force in what he did, but that he put others ahead of himself. In other words, he knew how to love neighbor as self and how to love God with all his heart.

IV. Preparations for Entering the Promised Land (Jos 1:1-5:15)

There is a transition from Deuteronomy to Joshua, and in a way it is embodied, in part, in the transition from Moses to Joshua because, of course, the book of Joshua bears the name of Joshua, who is one of its main characters. I'd like to emphasize for you, since this is the first book of the Bible that is named after a single individual, that Joshua is not actually the hero of the book. Joshua is not the most important figure in the book that bears his name. The hero in the book of Joshua is God. God is the one who makes things happen. God is the one who leads His people. God is the one who protects them. God is the one who gives them victory. Joshua is an important player, but the real emphasis is on God as the supreme leader—God as the sovereign, God as even the warrior, for His people.

V. Conquest of the Land (Jos 6:1-12:24)

A. Central Campaign

When we look at the book of Joshua we observe that the Israelites entered the Promised Land and then after a central campaign went to the south, and after a campaign in the south went

to the north. One of the things you observe in following that process is that quite a number of chapters are given to the campaign which we call the central campaign, the entry campaign. The Israelites crossed the Jordan River in a kind of reenactment of the experience they had had at the Red Sea. They went on dry land across a riverbed. God dams up the waters for them and allowed them to experience again, as a new generation, the same kind of miracle that their fathers had experienced forty years prior.

In addition, He brings them into the Promised Land—part of that land opposite Jericho, a great ancient city with huge walls. Now how were the Israelites to conquer the Promised Land if it had so many cities with high walls? Sure, they could start elaborate siege works, but besieging a city takes years. If they would have to siege every single city, since most of them were defended with very high impenetrable walls that an army of infantrymen could not breach—except after long, slow, patient effort, they would never mop up the Promised Land in their lifetimes.

So, God gives them, in the situation of Jericho, a real encouragement. They actually do not fight for the city at all. They march around the city. They march around one day; they march around another. After six days, they march around on the seventh day, seven times, and then God causes the walls of that city to crumble down flat so the Israelites can just walk in over the rubble, come in and take captive the citizenry, and begin the conquest of the Promised Land.

B. Holy War

It is an incredible kind of war. God did the fighting for them; they did not do it themselves. In this connection, we observe that there are a number of ways in which the Israelites are entering into a battle, a series of battles, a war, or a series of wars, always from a different angle from which we might think soldiers would approach a battle from. That is, they are fighting what scholars call a “holy war.” This holy war is characterized by quite a number of special features. The Israelites actually do not get paid. They are all volunteer soldiers. This is different from what happens in most of the ancient world. In most warfare in the ancient world, people were allowed to take whatever they could gain. As they were successful in battle, they were able to get rich. Whatever they could carry off after they defeated their enemies, they could keep.

But the Israelites could not do that. They were allowed no pay; they were allowed no plunder. They could not take the spoils of war—that was all dedicated to God. They fight with only a volunteer army, no professional soldiers. They fight only for the taking and holding of the Promised Land, not for personal gain in any way. They fight as the Lord’s soldiers, as Yahweh’s soldiers, as God’s army. And accordingly, they cannot just decide when to go into battle. We see this in the book of Joshua. God tells them where to go and where to fight and what to do. It is at His behest that they fight; and furthermore, no particular political leader can tell them when to fight. Only one of God’s prophets can do that. In the case of Joshua, he is both a general and a prophet, so he is one to whom God can speak. But this is a special type of warfare, not the normal sort.

It is especially important to note that it cannot be a warfare that they fight just anywhere or any time. They only fight at God's call, only because they hear God's voice through a prophet, and only for the taking and holding of the Promised Land. Finally, if they go into this kind of war and somebody violates these provisions, violates the provisions that they are not in it for themselves but are fighting as God's army for Him—not for reward of any sort—then the violator becomes the enemy.

C. Ai

This leads to the story that takes place in chapter 7 of Joshua, right after the terrific success they had at Jericho—a wonderful miraculous delivery of a city into their hands. They then proceed to a little town called Ai. Ai in Hebrew means “ruin.” We expect that this is not much of a place. And yet, after they start to attack the little “ruin,” they are driven back, a number of them are killed, and we find Joshua on his face on the ground, saying, “Lord, what have you done? Have you brought us over the Jordan to kill us?”—because Joshua, of course, cannot figure out what is going on. It is supposed to be a holy war. It is supposed to be a special kind of process in which God does the fighting for His people, so that they always win; and here they have lost a battle against an inferior force, against a little ruined town. The answer is that some of the Israelites had been taking plunder during the attack on Jericho.

One of them is singled out as an example. In fact this story, sadly, is presumably intended by the writer of Joshua—whoever it was, we do not know—to be an indication of the kinds of things in general that the Israelites did that would keep them from a completely successful campaign in the Promised Land. Though Joshua did lead the troops at God's behest through the central part of the country (and then headed further south and mopped up territories in the south and then went on to defeat a coalition of Canaanite kings in the north), the fact is that the Israelite conquest was only partial.

D. Incomplete Taking of the Land

The book of Joshua and the following book of Judges give lists of places that they did not capture and mention large numbers of groups who stayed with them right in the Promised Land, though they were not native Israelites. In other words, the lack of faithfulness as sampled in chapter 7 was widespread enough that in spite of all the warnings, the Israelites really did not do as thorough a job of the conquest as God had wanted them to do.

VI. Allocation of Territories (Jos 13:1-24:33)

A. Assignment of Land

However, God is faithful even when His people are not. After the campaigns winds up, then there is the assignment of the land. This starts with chapter 13, and it is a very long section of the book, and it goes until the end of chapter 21. It is not very exciting reading: lots and lots of lists of towns and cities, long descriptions of borders of tribal territories. But it is

very important information. Here after all that time, after centuries of time, since God had originally promised this land to the descendants of Abraham, the descendants of Abraham were being handed that land. They may have imperfectly occupied it, and they may have made some serious flaws in their conquest as they were not as faithful to God as they should have been, but He is giving them the land.

B. Intertribal Rivalry

As the lot falls to this tribe or that family or clan, the land is distributed. And after that wonderful, though somewhat tedious, description of a fulfillment of a great promise, then we read about the fact the people themselves were falling into disunity. Chapter 22 describes intertribal rivals, tribes almost going to war against one another. Fortunately, that does end in proper negotiation under the covenant and a restoration of unity, but it does bode ill for the future. If these tribes, after all the good that has been done for them, cannot stay together, live together, or work together, maybe there is in their future a dissolution—and we will see that when we come to 1 and 2 Kings.

C. Joshua's Final Message

In chapter 23, there is a wonderful story of Joshua's appeal to the people to remain faithful. It is great reading. He had to make it, because that generation needed to renew the covenant, too. Just as the first generation of Israelites had made their covenant at Sinai, the second generation under Moses, toward the end of Joshua's life, there was yet another generation. They needed to be faithful, and so he brings before them again God's covenant, and urges them to keep the law, to be obedient, to put away their idols and to stay with the Lord, who alone could bless them and protect them.

The final chapter of the book is an account of the renewal of that covenant, along with Joshua's death. Joshua stresses for the people that they have got to serve the Lord. "Serve" can mean "worship"; it can mean "work for"; it can mean "be obedient to"; it can mean "belong to"; it covers a lot of territory. Joshua says, "I have done it. My family has done it. Will you do it too? Will you serve the Lord?" And the people say they will, so he swears them to it—to serve Him fully, to really obey Him. So Joshua dies, having led that generation, having been faithful to God. At the end of the book of Judges, we will see what happens to transition from there. And in the end of Joshua, we will see what happens as it transitions into the book of Judges. Once Joshua is gone, things will not be as good.

Discussion Questions

What did covenant-keeping and covenant renewal mean in the contexts of the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua? How can the church today foster and encourage covenant-keeping and covenant renewal?

Corporate worship was an important part of life for the Israelites because God made it known that this was important to Him. Is corporate worship important to Christians today? Why should corporate worship be important to today's Christians?

Moses is one of the most prominent characters in the first five books of the Bible. What qualities did Moses exhibit that made him a righteous man? Provide specific examples from the Bible where he demonstrates these qualities.

Further Study

Suggested reading for this lesson:

Stedman, Ray C. *Adventuring Through the Bible: A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible*.

Discovery House Publishers: 1997.

Read Chapter 11: “Guidebook to Victory” (Joshua)

Glossary

Ai — (Hebrew “ruin”) One of the cities of the Canaanites. It was the second Canaanite city taken by Israel (Jos 7:2-5; 8:1-29). It was rebuilt and inhabited by the Benjamites (Ezr 2:28) and was located east of Bethel. The exact location is unknown.

Herem — The basic meaning of this Hebrew term is the exclusion of an object from the use or abuse of people, and its irrevocable surrender to God. It is related to an Arabic root meaning “to prohibit, especially to ordinary use.” The word “harem,” meaning the special quarters for Muslim wives, comes from it.

Jericho — The city was located about five miles west of the Jordan River. It was an important city as the fortress that guarded the entrance to all the land of Canaan.

Shittim — A place on the eastern side of the Jordan River and north of the Dead Sea, probably a portion of the plain of Moab. It was the last camping place of the Israelite tribes before they crossed the Jordan River (Nu 25:1).

Quiz

1. As his last great act, Moses:
 - A. Delivers an inspired speech
 - B. Renews God's covenant with the people
 - C. Preaches the law to a new generation
 - D. All of the above
2. Concerning the book of Joshua, we learned:
 - A. This is the first book of the Bible named after a single person.
 - B. Joshua is an important figure in the book.
 - C. God is the hero in the book.
 - D. All of the above
3. In the book of Joshua, God is portrayed most strongly as Israel's:
 - A. Healer
 - B. Warrior
 - C. Comforter
 - D. Advocate
4. The book of Deuteronomy can best be characterized by the word:
 - A. Conquest
 - B. Covenant
 - C. Outreach
 - D. Holiness
5. The book of Deuteronomy instructs the Israelites to gather as a nation for corporate worship at the feast of:
 - A. Tabernacles
 - B. The New Moon
 - C. Purim
 - D. All of the above
6. The conquest of Canaan was executed in a series of military campaigns that included:
 - A. A northern thrust
 - B. An eastern-western combined thrust
 - C. A western thrust
 - D. All of the above
7. The final chapter of the book of Joshua is an account of:
 - A. The assignment of the land
 - B. The renewal of the covenant
 - C. The installation of Israel's first king as a result of Joshua's death
 - D. Intertribal rivalry, nearly to the point of civil war

8. The message of the book of Deuteronomy is directed toward the Israelites:
 - A. As they are leaving Egypt
 - B. As they are camped at Mt. Sinai
 - C. As they are about to enter the Promised Land
 - D. Just after they enter the Promised Land
9. The third and final message or sermon of Deuteronomy focuses on:
 - A. Law and grace
 - B. Faith and works
 - C. Blessings and curses
 - D. Heaven and hell
10. What made the military conquest of Canaan unique?
 - A. The Israelites couldn't benefit from the spoils of war.
 - B. The soldiers were volunteers, not professional soldiers.
 - C. Political leaders couldn't tell the Israelites when and where to fight.
 - D. All of the above

Answers: 1. D 2. D 3. B 4. B 5. A 6. A 7. B 8. C 9. C 10. D