

Bi235 Old Testament 2

Lesson Bi235-2 Entering Canaan

It's always a big change when one leader dies and another leader takes over. This is especially true when the leader has held the position for a long time. In today's lesson you will learn that the leadership of the Israelite tribes has passed from Moses to Joshua. After Israel's failure to enter Canaan over 30 years earlier, the tribes are now ready to receive God's gift of the Promised Land. God was fulfilling his promise of land.

Moses was the only leader the Israelite people had ever known. God had prepared this change, however, by instructing Moses to choose his successor. Joshua had been Moses's personal assistant, a military commander, and one of the spies who had visited the land of Canaan years earlier. Moses taught him to be a leader who trusted God.

How important it is to choose leaders wisely! And how important to seek God's guidance when choosing a leader! Notice that Joshua had had many years of assisting Moses as he led Israel through difficult times. Joshua had become a trusted and experienced assistant before receiving Moses's blessing—and God's blessing—as the next leader of Israel.

Joshua was also one of the few adults who had survived the 40 years of wilderness wandering. When the tribes had refused to follow God's guidance to enter Canaan, God was angry with that generation. He vowed that none of those over 20 years old at the time, would enter Canaan. This was the worst example of unbelief and rebellion since they had escaped from Egypt.

The result of this judgment from God was that all the adult Israelites died in the wilderness. Their children and grandchildren grew up to be the next generation of Israelites, ready to follow Joshua into Canaan. What a big price the older Israelites paid for their lack of trust in God!

At that time, the land of Canaan was home to a number of tribal peoples who worshipped other gods. There were large, fortified cities and green farmlands. The twelve spies, including Joshua and Caleb, had described Canaan as a "land flowing with milk and honey." Milk suggests cattle, goats, and sheep, and plentiful pastures. Honey suggests flowers. The Israelites had struggled with lack of food and water in dry, desert regions. Canaan must have seemed too good to be true—a generous gift from a loving God. Moses told the people, "Yahweh your God has given you this land to take possession of it." So it was God's gift. But in the next sentence Moses said, "But all your able-bodied men, armed for battle, must cross over [the Jordan River] ahead of the other Israelites" (Deut 3:18). They had to fight for the land, although it was a gift.

For hundreds of years, since the days of Abraham, the Israelites had not had a land of their own. Of course, if they were to survive as a nation, they had to have a homeland. Until the time of Joshua, God's promise of land had been only a hope. Now, it was finally becoming a reality! This land would soon be theirs, but only after they fought for it, with great effort and with God's help. So the land was both a gift and a task, a gift and a challenge, a gift and hard work.

Here is an important biblical principle: God's plan requires the energy and faith of men and women working together. One person plants, another supplies water, another harvests, but God gives the increase. God is working, and we must work, too.

Joshua was afraid, but God told him not to be terrified or discouraged. God assured him, “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them” (Josh 1:5-6). Several times God says, “Be strong and courageous,” but he tells Joshua to be careful to obey the laws given to the Israelites. “Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it” (v. 8). Joshua’s success and Israelite success depended on faithfulness to the revealed words of God. Today the same is true for us: the price of spiritual success is obedience to the revealed words of God.

So Joshua ordered the people, “Get your provisions ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan. ... When you see the ark of the covenant ... and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it” (Josh 1:11, 3:3). “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow Yahweh will do amazing things among you” (Josh 3:5). The Israelites followed Joshua’s commands.

The next day he told them, “As soon as the priests ... set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap” (Josh 3:13). Even though the river was at flood stage, it happened just as Joshua had said. The priests stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan as all the people passed over. This was a sign to all that God was with them. The miracle showed God’s power to support Israel during the conquest of the land. It also showed God’s approval of Joshua.

When everyone had crossed over on dry ground, God directed Joshua to choose one man from each of the twelve tribes. Each man was to take up a stone from the riverbed, take it to the right bank, and build a memorial of stones as a reminder of what God had done. When the priests came up out of the Jordan, the waters returned to their place and ran at flood stage as before. “That day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they stood in awe of him all the days of his life, just as they had stood in awe of Moses” (Josh 4:14).

The people camped near Jericho on the narrow plain west of the river. Joshua then commanded all the young men to be circumcised, which was a covenant-sign given long ago to Abraham. The men had grown to adulthood during the wilderness years without being circumcised. This act was a symbol of spiritual cleansing to prepare for a life of holy living.

Only now were the people ready to begin the conquest of the land west of the Jordan. One more miracle took place. Joshua saw a man with a drawn sword in front of him. The soldier said he was commander of the army of Yahweh. Joshua bowed to the ground before him, for he knew this was no mere human being. “Take off your sandals,” said the commander, “for the place where you are standing is holy.” Remember that Moses had heard a voice from the burning bush telling him the same thing. The commander was the Angel of the Lord. He assured Joshua that God was with him.

This story is **important** because it shows us that God keeps his promises. Israel was now finding a homeland. The people soon learned that gaining a homeland was a lot of work. The work was possible, however, because of God’s help and because Joshua was a good leader.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that God judges people for their unbelief. Yet, he also blesses people who trust him and obey his commands. He encourages his people with miracles and personal guidance.

To **review** this lesson, answer these questions:

1. How did God prepare a new leader for the Israelites? [Pause]
A. If you said, “God told Moses to choose Joshua, and Moses taught him to be a leader who trusted God,” you are correct.
2. Why did so many Israelites die during the years in the Sinai desert? [Pause]
A. If you answered, “Because they didn’t believe God could help them conquer Canaan,” you answered correctly.
3. If Canaan was God’s gift to Israel, why did the conquest of Canaan require years of fighting and hard work? [Pause]
A. If you said, “God’s plan requires the energy and faith of men and women working together,” you are right.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to the story at least three times. As you hear the story each time, imagine how it happened. See the events in your own mind. Then tell the story in your own words as you remember it. Then listen to the story again and re-tell it until you feel sure you are repeating the words and actions correctly. You should spend at least 45 minutes in learning the story. You may need to have someone check that you are telling the story correctly.

Ask a friend who has never heard this story to listen to it. God assured Joshua that he would never leave him. Likewise, Jesus assured his disciples, saying, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20). We can be certain that Jesus will be with us, his brothers and sisters, forever.