

## Goals

After an arduous struggle against the Pharaoh, with God showing His magnificent prowess against the Egyptians, the Israelites finally left the land of bondage. Out in the wilderness, they went through many ups and downs of faith before finally arriving at the banks of the Jordan, with the promised land right before them. In this unit, the students will study about the features of the promised land (Holy Land) and the first wars the Israelites had to fight to secure the land. As with other past experiences, it is through obedience to God's commandments and total reliance on God that victories can be wrought. This should be the take-home message for the students. The beautiful land of Canaan was promised to the Israelites by God. From the terrain and climate, we can see that indeed, the providence of God is marvelous. The leadership of Joshua and his unwavering faith towards God are worthy of emphasis to the students. The battle of Jericho and the battle at Ai are two contrasting examples that illustrate the importance of unquestioning obedience to God's commandments.

## unit 1

### Teacher Devotional

Although the Israelites knew the commandments of God well, history has shown us that knowing is not the same as being able to carry out the task. Hence, we see how the Israelites repeatedly sinned against God, generation after generation. This should be a good warning to today's Christians. Even if we have been through years of religious education in church, there is no guarantee that we will be able to apply our religious knowledge to our daily lives. When real temptations arise, many fall. It is therefore crucial that we set strict boundaries for ourselves as to what we can and cannot do, as Christians who want to adhere to the words of God. Once we give in and say "yes" to sin, we will find ourselves yielding more and more easily thereafter. We need to draw clear lines and say "no" to sin right from the beginning, lest we fall into the same fate as the Israelites who turned away from God time and again.

#### Obedience to God's Commands

*"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." (Josh 1:8)*

## Lesson 1

# Introduction to the Holy Land

### Listed Scriptures

Numbers 13, 14; Deuteronomy 12, 28

### Lesson Aim

- 1) To acquire an overview of the geography and significance of the Holy Land to the Israelite nation
- 2) To understand the purpose and expectations of God in bringing the Israelites into the Holy Land
- 3) To understand God's love and mercy for the Israelites in bringing them into the Holy Land

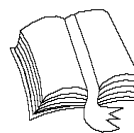
### Memory Verse

"If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, 'a land which flows with milk and honey.'" (Num 14:8)

### Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Numbers 13, 14; Deuteronomy 12, 28

## B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



This quarter, we will cover the history books from Joshua to Esther. We will begin where the Pentateuch left off with Israel on the east bank of the Jordan, cover the partial conquests of the territories of Canaan and the period of the kings, and finally end with the return to rebuild the holy city and its wall after 70 years of exile.

A large part of the history of the Israelites evolved through their journeys and settling in the land of Canaan. It is necessary therefore to have an overarching concept of the geography of the promised land.

The land promised by God to the Israelites – the land flowing with milk and honey (Ex 3:8) – has a few different names in the Bible. It is most commonly known as the land of Canaan. As this is a land promised by God to the Israelites, it is sometimes known as the "land of Israel" (Mt 2:20). After the exile, the majority of those who

returned were those of the tribe of Judah and hence, the land is also called Judea. After the Israelites settled in that land, the northern-most city was Dan and the southern-most city was Beersheba. This explains why this piece of land is sometimes referred to as “from Dan to Beersheba” (1 Kgs 4:25; 2 Sam 3:10). During the time of the Roman Empire, this land was counted as part of the province of Syria, and was sometimes simply referred to as Syria (Lk 2:2).

Here is a list of some of the more well-known cities in Canaan before the time of the Israelite conquest:

**Northern cities:** Dan, Hazor, Acco, Beth-Shan, Jezreel

**Cities in the mid-lands:** Samaria, Shechem, Joppa

**Southern cities:** Jerusalem, Bethel, Hebron, Beersheba

**Cities east of the River:** Golan, Rabbah (in Ammon, present-day Amman), Heshbon

## W A R M U P



Have you ever dreamed of going to a place where things would be very different from where you now live, where you believe that things will be even better than what you are now experiencing? What type of a place is that?

How does God feature in this dream of yours? What do you think your relationship with God will be like over there? How would you keep God’s commandment or live out His teachings in the new place?

## B I B L E S T U D Y



### *Physical Geography of the Promised Land*

#### **A. Coastal Plains**

The coast of Canaan covered the southern half of the eastern border of the Mediterranean Sea. Its length was about 150 miles from north to south, and its

width about 50 miles from east to west. It is a ribbon of fertile land between the desert land and the sea. At the south, there is the Plain of Philistia. This is the biggest plain in the land, and this was the dwelling place of the Philistines. It was allocated to the tribes of Judah and Simeon.

Moving up northward along the coast, there sits the Plain of Sharon. This is a lush plain where flowers grow (Song 2:1). It was allocated to Dan and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

Further up north is the Plain of Acco, which sits north of Mount Carmel. It is close to Lebanon and was originally inhabited by the Phoenicians (Sidons) and Hittites. It was allocated to the tribe of Asher.

There is also the Plain of Jezreel east of Mount Carmel. It was allocated to the tribe of Issachar. Parts of the inheritance of the half-tribe of Manasseh sits on the Plain of Jezreel too.

#### **B. Central Mountains**

In the region of Galilee, there are Mount Tabor and the hill of Moreh. The climate is temperate, with plentiful rainfall, making it ideal for crop cultivation. This was the region allocated to the tribe of Naphtali.

The region of Ephraim/Samaria lies east of the Plain of Sharon. The climate is similar to that of the region of Galilee. Many civilizations existed there long before the Israelites came. The Perizzites and the Hivites dwelled there before the land was allocated to the tribes of Manasseh, Issachar and Ephraim.

The region of Judea lies east of the Plain of Philistia and south of the region of Ephraim. Rainfall is relatively scarce here, and the land is only suitable for nomadic grazing.

Between the Plain of Philistia and the region of Judea lies the hilly region of Shephelah. It is a very important passageway in the south of the Holy Land. It was allocated to the tribe of Judah.

Lying south of the region of Judea is Negeb, a desert land. This place was scarcely populated. The Amalekites lived there before the land was allocated to Simeon.

## C. The Jordan River

This is the major river in ancient Palestine, linking the two major inland lakes, the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea (also known as Salt Sea). The principal source of the Jordan is the precipitation on Mount Hermon and the three springs near Tel Dan, Banias and Hasbaya. In antiquity, some of the headwaters of the Jordan River flowed through the Huleh Valley, a lake until modern times, which is some 985 ft higher than the Sea of Galilee. This rapid drop in elevation, which continues farther south, probably explains the river's name, which means "to go down" in Hebrew. The river is joined by its main tributary, the Yarmuk, at the south. Another tributary from the east, the Jabbok, joins it further south. The river is narrow and easy to cross though the current is often swift.

Due to the intense heat of the Rift Valley and the availability of moisture from the Jordan along its riverbanks, much of the vegetation there has the characteristics of a tropical jungle. One plant that grows freely there is the papyrus.

## D. East of the River

This was actually not part of the land promised to the Israelites by God. But, the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh asked to have it and it was allocated to them. Some of the more geographically salient places include:

- a. The Highlands of Bashan: Bashan lies east of the Sea of Galilee, and south of Mount Hermon. It consists of mainly tropical forests and grasslands. It is famous for its cattle (Ps 22:12). It is where the present-day Golan Heights is situated.
- b. Gilead: Gilead lies south of Bashan, east of the Jordan. It is famous for its oak trees and herds. The Amorites lived on this land. At one time, the Ammonites occupied the land too. It was later allocated to the tribe of Gad.
- c. Moab: Moab lies east of the Jordan. The climate is warmer and drier than in Gilead. The land is only suitable for nomadic grazing. The Edomites lived here before it was allocated to the tribe of Reuben. Mount Nebo, where Moses ascended and died, is located here (Deut 32:48).

### Teaching Tips

*While it is too ambitious to expect the students to be able to remember all the names and details of the territories in the Holy Land, it is important nevertheless to create as conducive a lesson as possible for the students to be able to remember the impor-*

*tant places. One suggestion is to divide the class into groups of two or three to work together. From interaction with fellow classmates, the potential boredom in studying about geographical details can be taken away.*

*For the Bible Study section, have the students search for and identify the places on the map given as they read about them.*

## C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



1

Have a blank map of the Holy Land for the students to fill in the names of the territories, either individually or in groups.

2

Prepare "sticker cards" with names of the following places and quiz the students on the location of the places (order randomized):

- Plain of Sharon
- Plain of Philistia
- Sea of Galilee
- Salt Sea/Dead Sea
- Region of Judea
- Negeb
- Samaria (Ephraim)
- Bashan
- Gilead
- Moab

## L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



### God's Deliverance

The Israelites experienced constant physical, mental and emotional anguish during their days in Egypt. Not only were they ostracized as a group of the underclass, they were subjected to hard labor, doing impossible tasks such as making bricks without straw (Ex 5). It was under such hard circumstances that the Israelites cried out to God, and God delivered them (Ex 3:7, 8). God wanted to bring them out of bondage into a land flowing with milk and honey. Out of Egypt, into Canaan - the deliverance of God behind the exodus is a great demonstration of God's great love for them.



In a way, we can see that our lives almost parallel the history of the Israelites. Some of us might have led lives without God. After knowing God and His salvation, our lives took a 180 degree turn for the better. Some of us might have been born into Christian families. Still, there were times when we were far from God. Yet, God never forsook us. He remembered our cries when we were in anguish. He delivered us. He is always saving us from our “bondage” and bringing us to better situations, almost like one “flowing with milk and honey.”

Write down some of your personal experiences with God that parallel the deliverance of God for the Israelites. What type of “Egyptian bondage” were you in? What kind of “land flowing with milk and honey” were you delivered into? After writing it down, share your experiences with your classmates. Below are guidelines for you:

#### Personal experiences of God’s deliverance

You can talk about physical deliverance such as being saved from a car accident. You can also talk about emotional and spiritual experiences such as deliverance from anxiety, worry or sadness.

#### Deliverance from “Egyptian bondage”

Egypt is often likened to the secular world that entices Christians with many pleasures of this life. Talk about some of the present-day Egyptian bondage that you see around you. You may also want to talk about those that you are currently struggling with, such as the lure of TV, parties, Internet games and chat rooms.

#### Land flowing with milk and honey

If we walk closely with the Lord Jesus Christ, we can experience “heaven on earth.” Talk about some of your experiences of “heaven on earth” or “land flowing with milk and honey,” where you felt very close to God and could savor the sweetness of the closeness with Him.

*In Genesis 13:14, the Lord God first promised the land of Canaan to Abraham (then called Abram). Many generations later, Abraham’s descendants finally came to the banks of the Jordan, ready to enter the land of Canaan to possess the land. One could almost hear the words of God resounding one more time: “Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are – northward, southward, eastward and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever” (Gen 13:14, 15). Imagine yourself to be one of the Israelites, standing by the River Jordan, ready to enter the land. What does the promise of God about this land mean to you? What are the feelings going through your mind? What would your prayer be to God at this time?*

*In Isaiah 54:2, 3, God says, “Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings ... for you shall expand to the right and to the left, and your descendants will inherit the nations.” This can also be applied to the context of preaching the gospel. Where preaching the gospel is concerned, how do you think this promise of God serves as an encouragement to you? How can you put it into practice?*