

FAITH LESSONS On the Promised Land

Crossroads of the World (1/5)

Describe the difference between East and West interpretations.

Why did God choose Israel (the land west of the Jordan) as the land where the plan of salvation would unfold? How is God's intent for believers today similar to God's choice of the land of Israel?

- Bordered by two prominent empires (Egypt and Mesopotamia)
- At the interchange of two major/primary roads (coastal road N&S, and the road to Jericho (E&W))
- I'll (God) put my people where everybody can see them!
- FL: God wants you and me to live where everybody will see us ... and become a flavoring influence – when people see us, they see God and acknowledge how wonderful He must be. (We are to step—and remain—outside of our comfort zone)

In what ways does God want His people to influence the world?

The “standing stones” that the Israelites erected are testimonies to God's actions in their lives. What specific events did the children of Israel mark with standing stones?

How is your life like a standing stone? How does it tell others what God has done for you? Who has been a standing stone before you? How?

- (1Pet 2:3-5) *“If so be ye have tasted that the Lord [is] gracious. To whom coming, [as unto] a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, [and] precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”*
- This spiritual house is His kingdom. And we are to live like a standing stone for all to see us
- (Mt 5:16) *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”*
- FL: We are called to be standing stones.
- FL: God's word is as relevant for us as it was for the Israelites of old.

Describe “sitting in the gate” (Gen 19 – Lot).

The city gate was important in biblical times because it protected a city against invasion. It was also the place where the judges and rulers of the city sat. Give some biblical examples of judges who sat in the gate.

How might a Christian “sit in the gate” in our culture?

FAITH LESSONS On the Promised Land

Wet Feet (2/5)

Many ancient (and contemporary) societies see major rivers as a life source and, consequently, something to be revered/worshipped. In the Bible, the Jordan River represents a barrier to be crossed, both literally and figuratively.

- Jordan is some 90 miles long, running north to south along the eastern edge of Israel.
- Jordan is mentioned some 180 times in the OT and 18 times in the NT

Even Jesus came to the Jordan (baptism) that He, too, might move forward with what he had to do.

What barriers are preventing you from working toward God's purpose in your life? What barriers has God helped you overcome?

Jordan was at flood stage (Joshua 3) during the harvest season when the Israelite priests were to cross over into the Promised Land after wandering in the desert (to the east of the Jordan) some 40 years.

- Baal was the god of water (aka, fertility).
- Crossing the Jordan was, therefore, a significant feat ... how dare anyone tempt Baal?
- As the priests stepped into the raging Jordan, the waters upstream stopped flowing and, consequently, the nation of Israel crossed over into Jericho on dry land.
- God is stronger than nature (Jordan at flood stage) and mortal gods (Baal).
- FL: All of us face a moment when we must decide if God is Lord over everything in our life.
- FL: What stands between you and your calling I (God) will take care of ... BUT ... nothing will happen until you put your foot into the water!
- FL: God acts when people are willing to make a total commitment ...

The Jordan River parted for God's people only after they made the first move and stepped out in faith. In what ways has the Christian community today failed to step out in faith on important issues? Are YOU willing to take that first step!!?

Can you think of a particular situation where your step of faith brought about a specific response from God? Was there ever a time in your life when God might have limited His power because of your lack of commitment?

If we, as Christians, take seriously the responsibility to be a positive influence on our culture, what specific actions can we take to live out that responsibility?

FAITH LESSONS

On the Promised Land

In the Dead Sea scrolls, we find reference to the spirit of God hovering over the poor, oppressed, and underprivileged

- Remarkable similarities with Gen 1:2 (*“And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness [was] upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”*)
- Out of chaos, the spirit draws life and creation

What was the meaning of Jesus’ baptism? How did He bring the “new creation”?

- Mt 3: 16-17 (*“And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*)
- With Jesus’ watery burial and resurrection a new creation is introduced to mankind
- This creation is a new heaven and earth (sound familiar?)
- See Is 65:17-19 (*“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever [in that] which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.”*)
- Or consider Is 66:22 (*“For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain.”*)
- Then, look at 2Pe 3:10-13 (*“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. [Seeing] then [that] all these things shall be dissolved, what manner [of persons] ought ye to be in [all] holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”*)
- Finally, compare to Rev 21:1-5a (*“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God [is] with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, [and be] their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more*

FAITH LESSONS

On the Promised Land

pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.”)

- FL: We are agent (priests) of the new order ... the new creation!

Consider a current situation in which you might bring Jesus' love to someone you know. Spend some time in prayer asking God to help you represent His Son's caring for that person. How is that the “bringing of a new creation?”

FAITH LESSONS

On the Promised Land

First Fruits (3/5)

What do we know about Jericho? Describe its significance in geographic terms. It is a crossroads that connects the Via Maris with the King's Highway (Jordan).

What are some Bible stories that take place in/near the town of Jericho?

- **Rahab** assisted the Israelites (Joshua 2). At the end of the Israelites' Wilderness Journey, just prior to their crossing of The Jordan River into the Promised Land, while they were yet encamped at Shittim in The Jordan Valley opposite Jericho, Joshua sent out two scouts to gather information about the strength of the opposing forces in the land. Rahab was a resident of Jericho who prevented their capture after they were discovered:

¹And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there. ²And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, there came men in hither to night of the children of Israel to search out the country. ³And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country.

⁴And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were: ⁵And it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them. ⁶But she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order upon the roof. ⁷And the men pursued after them the way to Jordan unto the fords: and as soon as they which pursued after them were gone out, they shut the gate.

- Why did she save them? Describe Rahab's FAITH.

⁸And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof; ⁹And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. ¹⁰For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. ¹¹And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man,

FAITH LESSONS

On the Promised Land

because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.

- Of note, Jesus' genealogy includes the names of four women. Did you know that Rahab is one of them? Indeed, Rahab is mentioned in Matthew (ch 1) as one of the ancestors of Jesus. In the King James version of this genealogy, her name is spelled *Rachab*. She married Salmon of the tribe of Judah and was the mother of Boaz.
- FL: The struggle we find ourselves in (to confront alternatives of God's way) is really God's battle.

Jericho is the first fruits of the land. What is the first fruits concept? The livestock and wealth of Jericho is dedicated to the Lord. God says don't rebuild it! Later, Yahweh will allow Israel to keep the plundered goods and cattle (Joshua 8:2).

Everything in Joshua is being done according to God's plan.

- FL: God tells us, Give me yourself; I'll give you the rest—put yourself in My hands. I want you to show me you know who's giving it to you.

We are a holy people. What does it mean to be "holy?" And what are we to do with the gifts, skills, etc. that God has given us?

FAITH LESSONS On the Promised Land

Confronting Evil (4/5)

How does Bet Shemesh translate (in English)? House of the sun.

God speaks often of the Philistines. Why is the story of the Philistines important? Who originally inherited the land the philistines now possess? The tribe of Dan. Why does that tribe not live there (during the time of the Judges)?

- FL: When God gives us a role to carry out, our failure to do so creates problems.

[trick question] Since the Philistines were so unsophisticated, why did Israel not simply take the land back? That's right. The philistines were very sophisticated and highly cultured; it was the Israelites who lacked sophistication. Does that surprise you?

Baal – Baalzebub – lord of flies – Satan

As a consequence, what does God do (Judges 13)?

¹And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.

What is a Nazarite?

A **nazirite** or **nazarite**, (in Hebrew: נזיר, **nazir**), refers to a Jew who took an ascetic vow described in Numbers 6:

¹And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, ²Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the LORD: ³He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. ⁴All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk. ⁵All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow. ⁶All the days that he separateth himself unto the LORD he shall come at no dead body. ⁷He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die: because the consecration of his God is upon his head. ⁸All the days of his separation he is holy unto the LORD. ⁹And if any man die very suddenly by him, and he hath defiled the head of his

FAITH LESSONS

On the Promised Land

consecration; then he shall shave his head in the day of his cleansing, on the seventh day shall he shave it. ¹⁰And on the eighth day he shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons, to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: ¹¹And the priest shall offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, and make an atonement for him, for that he sinned by the dead, and shall hallow his head that same day. ¹²And he shall consecrate unto the LORD the days of his separation, and shall bring a lamb of the first year for a trespass offering: but the days that were before shall be lost, because his separation was defiled. ¹³And this is the law of the Nazarite, when the days of his separation are fulfilled: he shall be brought unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: ¹⁴And he shall offer his offering unto the LORD, one he lamb of the first year without blemish for a burnt offering, and one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish for a sin offering, and one ram without blemish for peace offerings, ¹⁵And a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mingled with oil, and wafers of unleavened bread anointed with oil, and their meat offering, and their drink offerings. ¹⁶And the priest shall bring them before the LORD, and shall offer his sin offering, and his burnt offering: ¹⁷And he shall offer the ram for a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the LORD, with the basket of unleavened bread: the priest shall offer also his meat offering, and his drink offering. ¹⁸And the Nazarite shall shave the head of his separation at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall take the hair of the head of his separation, and put it in the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offerings. ¹⁹And the priest shall take the sodden shoulder of the ram, and one unleavened cake out of the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and shall put them upon the hands of the Nazarite, after the hair of his separation is shaven: ²⁰And the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before the LORD: this is holy for the priest, with the wave breast and heave shoulder: and after that the Nazarite may drink wine. ²¹This is the law of the Nazarite who hath vowed, and of his offering unto the LORD for his separation, beside that that his hand shall get: according to the vow which he vowed, so he must do after the law of his separation.

The term Nazirite comes from the Hebrew word *nazir* meaning "consecrated" or "separated." This vow (though not sacred but, merely, an example to set apart) required the man or woman to:

- Abstain from wine, wine vinegar, grapes, raisins, and according to some - alcohol and vinegar from alcohol
- Refrain from cutting the hair on one's head
- Avoid corpses and graves, even those of family members, and any structure which contains such

After following these requirements for a designated period of time (which would be specified in the individual's vow, and not to be less than 30 days), the person would immerse in a Mikvah (a specific type of bath designed for the purpose of

FAITH LESSONS

On the Promised Land

ritual washing in Judaism) and make three offerings — a lamb as a "burnt offering" (*olah*), a ewe as a "sin offering" (*hataf*), and a ram as a "peace offering" (*shelamim*) — in addition to a basket of unleavened bread, grain offerings, and drink offerings, which accompanied the peace offering.

Samson. Samson lived when God was punishing the Israelites by giving them "into the hand of the Philistines." An angel from God appears to Manoah, an Israelite from the tribe of Dan, in the city of Zorah, and to his wife, who is sterile. This angel predicts that they will have a son who will begin to deliver the Israelites from the Philistines. In accordance with Nazaritic requirements, she (as well as the child himself) is to abstain from all alcoholic beverages and all unclean meat, and her promised child is not to shave or cut his hair. In due time the son, Samson, is born; he is reared according to these provisions.

When he becomes a young man, Samson leaves the hills of his people to see the cities of the Philistines. While there, Samson falls in love with a Philistine woman from Timnah that, overcoming the objections of his parents who do not know that "it is of the LORD," he decides to marry her. The intended marriage is actually part of God's plan to strike at the Philistines. On the way to ask for the woman's hand in marriage, Samson is attacked by an Asiatic Lion and kills it. He continues on to the Philistine's house, winning her hand in marriage.

Later, Samson goes to Gaza where he stays at a harlot's house to avoid detection by the Philistines. His enemies wait at the gate of the city to ambush him, but he rips the gate up and carries it to "the hill that is in front of Hebron."

He then falls in love with a woman, Delilah (which is a Jewish name), at the Brook of Sorek. The Philistines approach Delilah and induce her (with 1100 silver coins) to try to find the secret of Samson's strength. Samson obviously does not want to tell the secret, so at first he teases her, telling her that he can be bound with fresh bowstrings. She does so while he sleeps, but when he wakes up he snaps the strings. She persists, and he tells her he can be bound with new ropes. She binds him with new ropes while he sleeps, and he snaps them, too. She asks again, and he says he can be bound if his locks are woven together. She weaves them together, but he undoes them when he wakes. Eventually Samson tells Delilah that he will lose his strength with the loss of his hair. Delilah calls for a servant to shave Samson's seven locks. Since that breaks the Nazarite oath, God leaves him, and Samson is captured by the Philistines. [Samson kills lion with bare hands (touches death), drinks wine, and has hi hair cut.]

- FL: Samson's failure was not that his hair was cut; instead, his failure was manifest in his participation with a cultural value system he was supposed to be confronting; he was not willing to remain committed to God's way of life. Christians tend to adopt life style values that we are supposed to be confronting. (Can you think of some examples?)

FAITH LESSONS

On the Promised Land

- FL: When we compromise our value system, we become ineffective as a Christian influence—we lose our power! (Can you think of some examples?)

FAITH LESSONS On the Promised Land

“Iron” of Culture (5/5)

Where did David live? (Bethlehem) He was a sheep herder (very young, perhaps 8-12) God uses people who, through outward appearance, may have little to offer but, inwardly, are of strong FAITH.

Goliath

Goliath (גִּלְיָת, Standard Hebrew **Golyat**, Tiberian Hebrew **Golyāt**, Arabic: جالوت **Jalut**), known also as Goliath of Gath (one of five city states of the Philistines), is a Philistine warrior mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. He is famous for his battle in the 11th century BC with David, the young Israelite boy who had already been chosen by God and anointed by Samuel to become the King of Israel.

The account of David and Goliath is given in the Hebrew Bible (and hence the Christian Old Testament) and in the Qur'an.

This is the account of the battle between David and Goliath given in 1 Samuel 17:

Saul and the Israelites are facing the Philistines at Socoh. Each day Goliath, the champion of the Philistines, comes out between the lines and challenges the Israelites to send out their own champion to decide the outcome in single combat, but Saul and all the Israelites are afraid. David is present, bringing food for his older brothers. He hears Goliath and hears also that Saul has promised to reward any man who will defeat the Philistine champion, and is not afraid. Saul hears of David's words and sends for him, and David offers to fight the Philistine. Saul reluctantly agrees and offers his armour, which David declines in favour of his sling and five stones which he takes from the brook.

David and Goliath confront each other, Goliath with his armour and shield-bearer, David with his staff and sling. "And the Philistine cursed David by his gods", but David replies: "This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down, and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that Yahweh saves not with sword and spear; for the battle is Yahweh's, and he will give you into our hand."

One of the best known characters of Bible History is David, who as a lowly shepherd boy defeated the mighty Philistine warrior Goliath, and then grew up to be King David of Israel - and human ancestor of Jesus Christ.

David was the eighth and youngest son of Jesse, from Bethlehem. He was a strong, healthy lad, apparently with an uncommon characteristic among his people of the time - red hair. He was a Shepherd from an early age,

FAITH LESSONS

On the Promised Land

and developed his courage and fighting skills by defending the flocks from the wild animals, including lions and bears, that preyed upon them. The free time that being a shepherd provided also allowed him to develop two other skills, that of music and poetry. David was a warrior, and a writer of psalms.

The incident with Goliath the Philistine is probably one of the most told "Bible stories" of the Old Testament. When the Israelites were at war with the Philistines, the two armies faced each other from opposite hills with the Valley of Elah between them. Every morning for forty days, the mighty Goliath (he may have stood over 9 feet tall) challenged the Israelites for someone to come out and fight him, but none would go out. One day, David, who was actually then too young for the army, arrived with some deliveries for his older brothers. He heard Goliath and immediately volunteered to fight him.

When David explained to King Saul that he had been fighting fierce animals all his life, he convinced the king that he could defeat the Philistine. Perhaps by then the king was willing to try anything to get out of the embarrassing situation, and even if David were not successful the Israelites could always belittle his lack of success with the excuse that David was "just a kid."

After turning down an offer of the king's own armor, which was too big for him, David went down to the creek and got five suitable stones (for his sling. The rest of the story is famous.

600 shekels = 15#

armor = scales = serpent (vis-à-vis descendent of Eve!)

666 = antichrist = evil side of struggle

What we know from archeology:

Leading change = introduction of IRON into culture

IRON = leading technology

Philistines = masters of IRON

Philistines + IRON = dominant culture

Israelites had no ability to work with IRON; not a single blacksmith in all of Israel

What did David say to Philistine? Today, the Lord will hand you to me that the whole world will know there is a God in Israel.

KEY: The world will know who is God (much like the standing stones of Gezer)

What was David's gift? David did what God gifted him to do as a shepherd—he used his ability to throw stones)

FAITH LESSONS On the Promised Land

- FL: God always wants you to simply use what He's given you to be good at—and to use it for Him. You do not have to be anything other than what He has made you to be ...

What finally gave Israel power to determine the course of culture in the Shephelah was the ability to harness IRON

The IRON of American society has not been shaped; therefore, we cannot have an impact on the culture ...

Where lay our loyalties/allegiances?

The battle we must fight is for the heart and soul of people ... think of the boy Jesus ... He grew up at "Armageddon" ... from little boy to king! In the end, He declared, "It is finished."

Baal worship was largely practiced at this time ... Israelites were strongly attracted to this religion ... a religion that sacrificed their young and dedicated themselves to sexual relations (fertility) ... perverted beauty of gift of human life

Not much has changed over two millennium ... we also pervert similarly through media, TV, movies, etc. ... our children are sacrificed for successful futures ...

Today's culture:

Cheapness of human life (29M abortions most often sought because the child's birth would be inconvenient)

How pure and how clean is my heart?

What sinful patterns should I change in my life?

How can we claim to honor/serve/worship God when our days are filled with the vanities/evils of our culture ... we are strongly attracted to the ways of the world rather than the ways of God.

Jeremiah 7:

People have done evil ... God will turn all of Jerusalem into a ... God finally says, enough. God loves innocence.

What is the unforgivable sin? When the culture accepts sin as the way of life ...

- FL: No matter how evil the thing we face in life, we must never keep our eyes down on the evil to the point we are unable to lift them up to see the glory/victory of God