2020 Orientation Lecture
Exodus and Possession of the Land
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For the most part we’re people who live in the present with a view of trying to keep up for the future. There was a “Frank and Ernest” cartoon in the newspaper where one makes a statement to the other: “I think we’re past the Age of Information and entered the Age of Too Much Information.” We all know that there’s more information available to us with today’s technology than we can possibly assimilate, so we try to find our niche and get comfortable there.

The study we have before us this year is one of grace in the Old Testament books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges and Ruth – 186 chapters. Anyone who’s tried to read the Bible cover to cover usually gets bogged down in these particular books because it appears repetitious; we have trouble relating to or pronouncing the names and places; the detailed instructions seem irrelevant to how we worship today; and there is so much death and destruction. The God of the Old Testament seems very different from the loving Father who provided the perfect sacrificial lamb in His Son, Jesus, to atone for our sins and bring us into fellowship with Him.

But our Christian heritage begins with these books. To understand who we are, we need the foundation of knowing who God is; what He wants for His people and from His people; and to recognize that God has always been the God of grace.

Most of you are familiar with the first book of the Bible, Genesis, and how God created the earth, chose the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and how the Israelites came to be in the land of Egypt because of famine and were reunited with their brother Joseph.

Here is where our study begins in Exodus. The “few in number” were fruitful and multiplied greatly until their numbers became a threat to the reigning Pharaoh and he enslaved them. First we witness the display of God’s power as Moses is called and empowered to lead and deliver the
Israelites; then ten plagues convince Pharaoh to let the people go; and the barrier of the Red Sea is miraculously parted to make way for the exodus and then closed to prevent the Egyptians from taking them back. Miracle upon miracle! Is it any wonder that God constantly reminded them to remember this deliverance?! For them to forget that display of God’s power and teach their children about it would be like us forgetting the power and significance of the resurrection of Jesus. It was of monumental significance to their heritage and to their future!

Hopefully, you can think of applications to your own life from just that brief beginning review. Think of the discouragement you feel when trapped in tough circumstances; the hope when someone comes alongside to help; the courage it takes to step out into the unknown; the joy of knowing God is going before you to prepare the way.

Usually when we think of the crossing of the Red Sea, we get a mental picture of Charlton Heston in Cecil B. DeMille’s epic picture, the Ten Commandments. Magnificent drama . . . but for Moses the drama was just starting as the demands of leadership set in. Imagine leading three and a half million people across the desert – grumbling people at that. Their camp would be almost eleven miles square, they’d need the equivalent of 160 railroad box cars of food and over 1,000 tank cars of water just to meet the minimum daily needs, and at a walking pace of about 2.5 miles an hour, it would take the parade nearly 50 hours to march past the same spot. But God supplied the nation’s need not for just one day, but every day for 40 years until they reached the Promised Land.

But I’m getting ahead of myself. Here was a group of people who only knew slavery in an idolatrous nation that needed not only the leadership of Moses, but instruction in how to worship the one true God; how to be holy; how to govern themselves; how to take hold of God’s promise to conquer the land.

We’ll have three topical lessons after the lesson on the Ten Commandments that will teach us about the Tabernacle, the Priesthood and the Sacrifices/Offerings/Feasts & Festivals. This is where some of the repetition will get condensed. Several chapters detailed “how” things were
to be done, and several chapters detailed “they followed instructions exactly.” The point is . . . God was exact. There was no doubt, no “do it your own way”, no pick and choose whatever feels good to you. God is a Holy God who is to be worshipped by a holy people. They were chosen by grace and meant to be an example to the nations around them.

We’re going to discover how all of these important aspects of becoming a holy people of God point to the Lord Jesus Christ. We’ll see Christ in the Tabernacle, Christ in the Priesthood, and Christ in the Sacrifices. All of this will greatly enrich our understanding of the New Testament and appreciate that God has drawn us as Gentiles to the Lord Jesus.

That will bring us to the book of Leviticus. Choosing the tribe of Levi as the priestly tribe was again another illustration of God’s grace. The Levitical priesthood was responsible for both verbal communication of doctrine and its illustration by means of the Levitical offerings.

Broadly speaking the book of Leviticus shows the way to God (access) in chapters 1-17, and the walk with God (lifestyle) in chapters 18-27. Perhaps good news for you is that we’ve condensed it into one lesson. It’s our only three-page lesson, but it will be well worth it. Again, it will focus on how Jesus encountered the instructions of Leviticus and how He came “not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it.”

The book of Numbers is about people who knew better but didn’t live better. True to its name, we get a lot of numbers and names, but more importantly we’ll get to the root of Israel’s problem and maybe expose our own . . . rebellion. Someone once said, “Trouble reveals the real you.” There was trouble ahead and challenges to see if Israel was going to depend on God.

Leaving Mt. Sinai and traveling to the edge of the Promised Land, spies were sent out and brought back a report about grapes, great cities, and giants. Toynbee once said, “It’s doubtful if the majority has ever been right.” That was certainly the case here. The positive voices of Joshua and Caleb were drowned out by the negative voices of the other ten spies. The penalty for disobedience and not believing God by proceeding to enter the land was
to wander in the desert for 40 years until the disbelieving generation died off. Those proved to be fateful years for Moses.

We’ll be introduced to Balaam – remember he had a talking donkey? What about women inheriting a portion in the land? Why did some tribes settle east of the Jordan? Why didn’t Moses get to enter the Promised Land? We’ll find out.

Deuteronomy means, “second law.” The wandering generation was dead; the new generation was headed toward fulfilling the original mission – possession of the land. They needed to be refreshed and reminded of the importance of following God’s every instruction. Basically Deuteronomy says:

Stop! Remember the faithfulness of God in the past. (1-4)
Look! Remember the holiness of God today. (5-26)
Listen! Remember the warnings of God for the future. (27-34)

The death of Moses and the commission of Joshua end the book. A. W. Tozer in the Divine Conquest (pp. 20-21) writes: “We cannot think rightly of God until we begin to think of Him as always being there, and there first. Joshua had this to learn. He had been so long the servant of God’s servant Moses, and had with such assurance received God’s words at this mouth, that Moses and the God of Moses had become blended in his thinking, so blended that he could hardly separate the two thoughts; by association they always appeared together in Joshua’s mind. Now Moses is dead, and lest the young Joshua be struck down with despair, God spoke to him with assurance. “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you.” Moses was dead, but the God of Moses still lived. Nothing had changed; nothing had been lost. Nothing of God dies when a man of God dies.”

Joshua is a book of new beginnings. I’m sure you’ve had points in your life when you mark them in your memory as a “fresh start,” or a “new beginning” either because of changes in your circumstances or the inevitable transitions that come with life. Whatever it is, we face up to the reality of our situation, move on – knowing that God has a plan for our life – stand tall and try not to be afraid. The grace of God is a constant companion.
Forty years may have passed, but the land before Joshua and the Israelites still had those giants to be conquered. Again God divided the water – this time the river Jordan – as the march began. Jericho was the first stop on this journey of faith and failure, deception and destruction, disobedience and dividing, conquest and commitment.

Certainly one of the lessons we can apply to ourselves from the book of Joshua is the fact that the enemies of God were determined to stay in the land. They did not go easily or without a fight. Some persisted so tenaciously it became easier to coexist with them than stay with the struggle.

At what point do you give up? Does victory give way to the tentacles of compromise? Do you really believe God will empower you to accomplish everything He’s promised you?

The chapters that detail the boundaries of land division again seem like too much information for us, but if your ancestral name was Zebulun or Issachar in that day, you’d want to know exactly what was yours. Details are important to God, so are people. Names, places, dates authenticate God’s involvement in history.

Probably the most memorable verse from the book of Joshua is about commitment. Joshua 24:15 “But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

That was inspiring and we’re told that Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the Lord had done for Israel.

So what about life after death . . . the death of Joshua that is. Living in the land day in and day out was a lot different from the thrust of taking possession of the land. Here’s what old Dr. J. Vernon McGee used to call “where the rubber meets the road.”
If you lose a spiritual leader are you equipped to stand alone? How do you remain faithful when those around you are not? What happens when a godly nation lowers its values to become “more accepting?”

The book of Judges tells us – they did not do well. Seven cycles of failure, 300 years of recycled misery as the people were under enemy subjection, cried out to God for deliverance, and once delivered fell to sin again.

We’ll study in Judges about Deborah (and the victory brought about by a woman); Gideon (he put out a fleece to test God); Jephthah (he made a vow with dire consequences); and Samson (who was he-man, a human, a hero). But the sad commentary on the whole book is summed up in the last line, “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.” God had ceased to be their king.

After facing the failures of a nation without focus on God, we’ll end our study with the refreshing story of Ruth. Her story inspires us not only because it's one of loyalty and respect, but also because it’s a love story of a kinsman-redeemer – the very picture of Christ and of grace.

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 Paul writes, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” There’s a lot of information in this year’s study that may seem at times like more than we really need to know because most of us are Gentiles, this land of promise is not our inheritance, and for us personally the resurrection of Jesus is more important than the miracles of the exodus. And maybe some of you are thinking, “it will be a miracle if I get through all this.”

But as we work through each lesson of the study this year, the lessons of their journey will strengthen us in our own personal journey. We’ll find that people haven’t really changed unless you think that people are always obedient, never grumble at God, always control their tongue and temper, never have moments when faith is weak and are never tempted to run ahead of God without prayer.
What we gain from study in the Old Testament is knowing that our God is the same yesterday, today and forever. His desire is that we be a people set apart from the world by holiness, committed to Him wholeheartedly, and equipped to both extend and receive His grace. Let me congratulate you on taking the first step of the journey by being here today.