



The Exodus

Lesson 17: The First Settlements

(Numbers 32:1-36:13)

As the time of the wilderness wanderings for the Israelites ended and time came for the Israelites to take possession of the land God had promised them (the land of Canaan), people from the tribes of Reuben and Gad asked Moses, Eleazar (the high priest), and leaders of the people if they could live in land that was not in Canaan (east of the Jordan River). They had so many animals and saw that the land was good. So, they wanted to build pens for their sheep and cities for their families in the land they were in.

At first, Moses asked them why it was right for them to stay in that land while the rest of the Israelites went to war in Canaan. He said that they were acting like their fathers who had rebelled against God by refusing to go into Canaan the first time. He reminded them that God punished their fathers for their rebellion – and said that God would destroy the Israelites if they rebelled like that again.

But, whenever the people from Reuben and Gad promised Moses that they would still go and fight with the other Israelites, Moses gave orders to let them have that land. They would leave their families and their animals in the land while they helped the Israelites conquer the land of Canaan. They would only return to the land after all the tribes of Israel had their inheritance. Later, we are also told that half the tribe of Manasseh would also receive its inheritance on the eastern side of the Jordan River (Numbers 32:39-42 and 34:14).

So, God gave them land east of the Jordan River that was taken when God caused the Israelites to defeat the kings and cities there (also see Deuteronomy 3:1-20). The land was divided between Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh. And, they rebuilt the cities and gave them new names.

Then, while the Israelites were still on the plains of Moab by the Jordan River across from Jericho, God told Moses to instruct the Israelites about taking the land of Canaan. Whenever they would come into the land of Canaan, they were supposed to drive out all the people who lived in the land and destroy all their false gods and all the objects and places used to worship them. God was giving this land to His people and He did not want anyone or anything to cause His people to worship a false god.

If the Israelites would not listen and do as God said, then the people of the land would constantly be a pain and burden to them. God wanted to bless the Israelites and give them the land. But, if they would not obey Him, He would trouble the Israelites instead.

When God gave them the land of Canaan, He was giving them an inheritance by each one of their tribes within a certain area of land. Large tribes would receive more land than smaller ones. And, the land would be divided within those tribes according to how big each family (or, clan) was. Overall, there were twelve tribes of Israelites who would receive land in Canaan (remember that Jacob had twelve sons).

These tribes were: Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh. Remember that Jacob blessed Joseph before he died, promising to give his family a double inheritance in the land of Canaan. Joseph's two sons (Ephraim and Manasseh) would both be given land alongside the other tribes.

Then, God made special arrangements for the tribe of Levi (the tribe of the priests). Remember that God would take care of the Levites in special ways. So, not only would they get food from the sacrifices made in their priestly service, but they would also be given cities among the other tribes rather than being given land of their own.

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Study Questions:

- 1) Who wanted land on the eastern side of the Jordan River? Did God give them the land?
- 2) What did they promise Moses?
- 3) What were the Israelites to do to all the people who lived in the Canaan land?
- 4) What were the Israelites to do to all the false gods in the land?
- 5) What would happen if the Israelites did not listen?
- 6) How would the Canaan land be divided among the Israelites?
- 7) Who were the twelve tribes who would receive land?
- 8) Why did Joseph's sons each get land? What did God do for the tribe of Levi?

Memory Verse:

“Tell the Israelites: When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, you must drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you, destroy all their stone images and cast images, and demolish all their high places” (Numbers 33:51-52).

Draw a picture of the lesson you learned about: