



# THE JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation

## Part 8 Into the Promised Land

### Introduction

These notes give some guidance on how to lead the group through the questions and discussion. *The additional Bible references in the notes give more details that you may find useful. You may like to ask group members to read out a few of these, as appropriate.*

You may want to begin by asking if anything particularly struck people as they watched the video. However, it would be wise to limit this part of the discussion to ten minutes at most.

Read **Deuteronomy 8.7-10, 1 Kings 8.41-43, Ezekiel 5.5.**

### Question 1

God chose to locate His people in Canaan. What's so significant about this land?

God's paradise home – the Promised Land - is at the centre of the world. It's at the crossroads of the world, a bridge between three continents- Asia, Africa and Europe. It was God's bridgehead into a world under Satan's domination. As Michael D. Williams tells us, "Rather than send his evangelists and witnesses out to the far-flung corners of the earth, as he does in New Testament times, God set a mission station in the midst of the nations for all to see." They were to be a light to the nations.

Through the Law, through their festivals and special days and years, through the sacrifices, and through the peace and wellbeing of the nation, *Israel would show what God was really like* - not unclean, cruel and capricious like their own gods, but holy, trustworthy and kind (compare Deuteronomy 4.5-8). And so Israel was to draw people to worship the true God.

And in their politics and economics and culture, *God's people would show the nations what God intended mankind to be.* They were to be, as John Durham explains, "a display-people, a showcase to the world of how being in covenant with Yahweh changes a people."

Because Israel was at the crossroads of the world – on trade routes linking Europe, Asia and Africa - people from many surrounding nations would pass through the land and see and experience God's blessing on Israel for themselves. Some might even find themselves settling there. They could actually become members of God's covenant people.

Read **Numbers 14.2-4,26-34, Deuteronomy 8.2-5.**

### Question 2

Why does God make His people wait for 40 years before leading them into the Promised Land?

While they were encamped in the Wilderness of Paran, Moses sent 12 men, one from each tribe, to spy out the Promised Land. The spies returned bearing grapes, pomegranates and figs – proving the Promised Land to be a paradise. But there were powerful people in the land, who lived in fortified cities.

Two spies, Caleb and Joshua, were confident that God would enable them to conquer the land. The other ten weren't, and their report won the day. The people wailed, "*Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?*" (Numbers 14.2-3). God had promised that He would clear the land of its inhabitants. The Canaanites themselves were cowering in dread of God and His people (as we learn from Joshua 2.8-11). Israel's unbelief was rank disobedience.

God couldn't work with people who distrusted Him. So He said that every Israelite eligible for military service – except for Caleb and Joshua - would die in the desert. These warriors – who should have spearheaded the conquest of the Promised Land - would now never enter it. But Caleb and Joshua did trust God. They did enter the land. So, for 38 years, God's people wandered in the desert. They remained there until all the faithless warriors had died. Tim Gallant comments, "In a rather practical way, those

who wished to go back to Egypt . . . got their wish: God 'stopped time' and treated them as if the exodus had never occurred." During these 38 years, a new generation of warriors came into being – a generation who *did* trust Him and obey God and who *would* conquer the land.

And during those years in the wilderness, God was testing and disciplining His people. He wanted to know what their basic attitudes were, whether they would wholeheartedly keep His commandments or not. God let them hunger and fed them with manna so that they might learn that people do not live by bread alone, but by *"every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD"* (Deuteronomy 8.3). God was teaching them to depend on Him for all their needs, and to obey Him.

Read **Deuteronomy 6.4-15, Deuteronomy 28.1, Judges 2.8-12.**

### Question 3

Did God's people learn the lessons God taught them in the wilderness? How is that relevant to us today?

Ultimately, God's people failed to learn the lessons God taught them and to benefit from their time in the wilderness. There are a number of reasons for this:

- ▶ They failed to keep God's word in their hearts, and obey it. God said *"these words that I command you today shall be on your heart"* (Deuteronomy 6.6). They were to treasure God's word to them, make sure they never forgot it, and diligently obey all His commandments.
- ▶ They failed to complete the conquest of the land. And so the wicked Canaanites continued to live alongside them in the land.
- ▶ They committed spiritual adultery by abandoning God and worshipping pagan gods.
- ▶ They failed to pass on the knowledge of God and His law down the generations. God commanded them to teach the law to their children (Deuteronomy 6.7). Their failure to do this is clear from what we read in Judges 2.10: *"... there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel"*.
- ▶ Ultimately – there was something fundamentally wrong with their character. God needed to do something radical in them. He need to give them *"a new heart"* (Ezekiel 36.26). We'll explore this in our next session.

*You may want to explore how Israel's failures are relevant to us as God's people today.*

Read **2 Samuel 7.8-17, Psalm 89.3-4.**

### Question 4

God made covenants with Noah, Abraham, Israel (at Mount Sinai), and David. In our next session, we'll learn that God promised to make a new covenant with His people (Jeremiah 31.31-34). Why does God keep making covenants with people?

A covenant is an agreement that brings two parties into relationship with each other. In the ancient Near East a covenant was a means to bring people who weren't blood relatives into a relationship. They would agree to act as if they were family – with all the privileges and responsibilities that entailed. In a covenant, one or both parties make promises under oath to do, or not to do, certain things in relation to each other. If the parties had equal status, they might now speak of each other as *brothers*. If one party exercised dominion over the other, they might speak of each other as *father and son, or lord and servant*.

We today have such covenantal arrangements, too. When parents adopt a child, they incorporate that child into their family. Another example is marriage. By the legally-binding process of marriage, a man and a woman who are not (at least closely) related commit themselves to care for each other as close family – in fact, closer than any blood relative.

Making covenants is a natural thing for God to do. Why? The reason is this: God is a relational Being, and covenants are to do with relationship. God is Triune – He is One, yet He is also Three Persons. In Donald Macleod's words, *"The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit live in community and fellowship."* God is love (1 John 4.8,16). Love is at the very root of Who God is. God wants to be in relationship with people. So it's no surprise to find Him making covenants with them.

And, as we saw just now, covenant partners in the Bible world made promises to do, or not to do, certain things in relation to each other. So when God made covenants with people, He made promises to them. God has wonderful plans to establish His Kingdom on Earth – to live together with His people in His paradise.