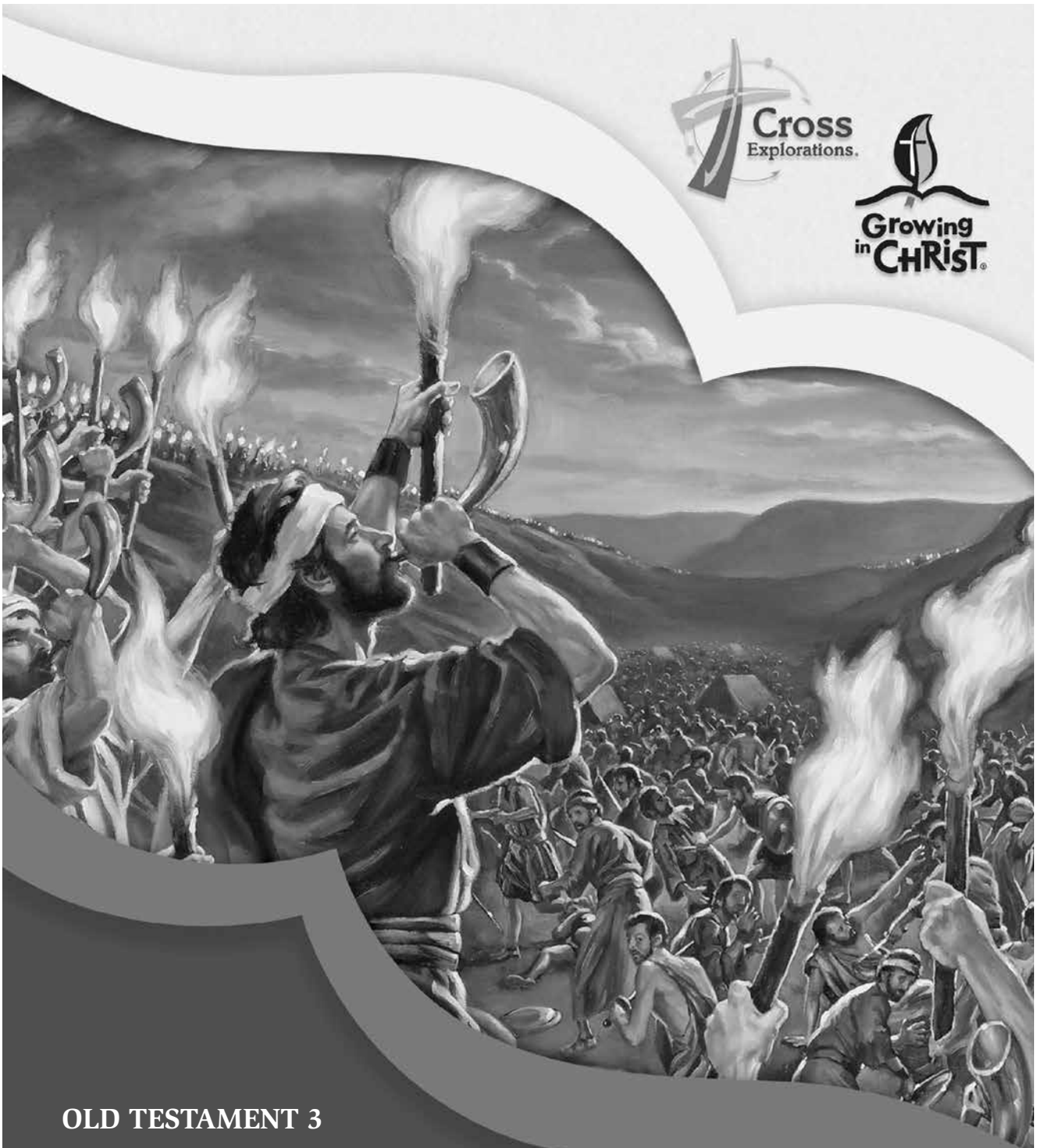




OLD TESTAMENT 3

Adult Bible Study

God Provides Judges and a King

REPRODUCIBLE STUDY PAGES



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Introduction

God promises to strengthen our life in Christ as we study His Word. This Adult Bible Study series provides resources to help you do just that, giving you an opportunity to study some familiar, and possibly some not-so-familiar, biblical accounts in depth.

This guide has thirteen sessions, each divided into four easy-to-use sections:

Start—Section 1 of each session invites discussion and thinking about the topic of the lesson to draw participants into the study.

Study—Section 2 of each session explores a portion of Scripture through the use of a brief commentary and questions that help the participants study the text.

Share—Section 3 of each session helps the participants apply God's Law and Gospel revealed in the scriptural account to their own lives.

Send—Section 4 of each session provides the participants with practical suggestions for taking the theme of the lesson out of the classroom and into the world.

This study is designed to assist both novice and expert Bible students in their study of Holy Scripture. It offers resources that will enable them to grow in their understanding of God's Word while strengthening their life in Christ.

As an added benefit, the sessions in the Adult Bible Study series follow the Scripture lessons taught in both Growing in Christ and Cross Explorations Sunday School series. Parents will enjoy studying in depth the Bible stories their children are studying in Sunday School. This will provide parents and children additional opportunities to

- discuss God's Word together;
- extend lesson applications to everyday situations;
- pray together; and
- engage in family activities that grow out of lesson truths.

How to Use This Bible Study

This leader guide gives you all the material you need to teach the thirteen Bible stories for this quarter. The material is designed to be used in an adult Bible study while children are participating in Sunday School. Shorten or lengthen the study and discussion to fit your time frame.

Each lesson includes a brief Bible commentary with the key point, Law/Gospel statements, discussion questions with leader notes, and a front-and-back reproducible Student Page at the end of the lesson. Make copies of the Student Page to distribute to the members of the class. This format allows for the frequent fluctuation in class size that is common to adult study groups. Additionally, churches will save money by only ordering one leader guide, rather than individual student books for every participant.

We also encourage you to order the set of Bible posters for this quarter. These large, beautifully rendered works of art will provide your class with memorable visuals of the texts they are studying. (To order, call 1-800-325-3040; ask for CPH stock number 44-4110.)

World History	Dates	Biblical Events
Amenhotep III, ruler at the exodus 1450–1425	1529 BC	Aaron born
	1526 BC	Moses born
	1450 BC	
	1446 BC	The exodus and Red Sea crossing Construction of tabernacle
	1444 BC	Spies sent into Canaan
	1406 BC	Moses and Aaron die Joshua appointed leader Jordan River crossing Conquest begins
Time of the Judges 1375–1050	1376 BC	Joshua dies
	1367 BC	Othniel judges 1367–1327
	1360 BC	
Tutankhamen rules 1360 Amenhotep IV becomes pharaoh 1352	1352 BC	
	1309 BC	Ehud judges 1309–1229
	1209 BC	Deborah judges 1209–1169
	1190 BC	
Greece-Trojan War 1190	1162 BC	Gideon judges 1162–1122
	1110 BC	Ruth
	1105 BC	Samuel born
	1075 BC	Samson judges 1075–1055
United Kingdom 1050–930	1050 BC	Saul reigns 1050–1010
	1040 BC	David born
	1010 BC	David reigns 1010–970
Divided Kingdom 930–586	930 BC	

Preparing the Lesson

The Twelve Spies in Canaan

Numbers 13–14

Date of Use

Key Point

By God's power, Israel rose victorious over many great enemies. By the power of Christ, who fought for us on the cross, we are victorious over the greater enemies of sin, death, and the devil.

Law/Gospel

I do not always believe God's promises; instead, I grumble and am afraid. **God, who always keeps His promises, kept His promise to send His Son to save me from my sin through His sacrifice on the cross.**

Context

A year and a few months after leaving Egypt, the nation of Israel stands on the brink of the Promised Land. More than four hundred years have passed since Jacob and his sons entered Egypt. Now, countless Israelites stand poised to sink deep roots in holy soil. But, alas, ten of the dozen spies who have scouted out the land throw a pall over the people's enthusiasm. They return with a good news/bad news report. "The land is lovely, to be sure," they say, "but the inhabitants are gargantuan! There's no way we can conquer them." Such rebellion ignites divine anger, brings down a curse on everyone age 20 and older, and begins the infamous forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

Commentary

Taking the land will not be as easy as taking candy from a baby—and that's not easy. The Canaanites, Jebusites, and a whole pack of other "ites" won't simply pack up and move out when Israel moves in to claim the land. So a plan of attack is needed; thus the mission of the spies to check out the land and its inhabitants. The land "checks out" as God had promised. It's top-notch real estate. The heavy, takes-two-men-to-carry cluster of grapes is ample proof of that.

"But," warn ten of the twelve spies, "we might as well dig our graves before we attack. We are grasshoppers compared to those giants. Plus, their cities are built like castles. God wants us to bite off more than we can chew. Mission: impossible." With such words, the spies (all but Caleb and Joshua) squash the hopes of Israel. The people, first dejected, then infuriated, soon want a pound of flesh from Moses and Aaron. Back to Egyptian slavery they want to go.

Such is fallen human nature. It revolts against God's ways when they seem contrary to reason or common sense. It tells David to put away his sling and kiss Goliath's feet. It tells the ten spies and the tens of thousands of Israelites to turn tail and run back to their former masters. In other words, sin says that God is a liar—that He can't do what He says He'll do. Better to trust in your five senses and one brain than any five words of the one true God.

But God, from creation onward, specializes in the impossible. He makes everything out of nothing. With Him, grasshoppers *can* stomp the life out of giants, sky-high city walls *can* tumble down, ninety-nine-pound Israelites *can* take on *and take out* any muscular "ites" who dare stand in their way. So say Joshua and Caleb, for so says our Lord, who fights for us every step of the way.

The enemies the Israelites fear are tokens also of the greater enemies we still face today: the "ites" of sin, death, and our archenemy, Satan. Who can stand against such mammoth foes? Christ can, and Christ has. He has proven to be faithful to His Father, victorious in all combat. On the cross, He took on and took out every adversary of humanity. God Himself came down from heaven to fight for us.

To hear an in-depth discussion of this Bible account, visit cph.org/podcast and listen to our Seeds of Faith podcast each week.

Lesson 1

The Twelve Spies in Canaan

Numbers 13–14

1 Start (5 minutes)

Pray Almighty God, there is no obstacle that You cannot overcome, and nothing that we fear is strong enough to take us from You. As we study Your words, open our eyes to Your victorious power in history and in our lives; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who conquered death. Amen.

Ask 1. Have you ever been asked to do something that feels impossible to do? How did you react to the request? How did you feel about the person who made the request of you?

Allow people to share experiences with one another. The reality is that this happens to us frequently. We may be asked to do more than we are capable of doing at work or at home. We may be under pressure to attend a meeting at church when there is a meeting at work at the same time. Our reactions vary, but at best, these requests make us uncomfortable. At worst, they make us frustrated and angry with the person who is asking too much of us.

The Israelites experienced this feeling when their spies brought back reports about the Promised Land. It seemed to them that God was asking them to do the impossible. It is not surprising that the Israelites grumbled and became upset with Moses, Aaron, and God after hearing the spies' report. They assumed that the task God gave them was for them alone, when in reality, God promised to make Himself part of the team. And when the team includes God, all things are possible!

2 Study (15 minutes)

Say 2. Read Numbers 13:1–3, 7–20. Who were the spies, and what were they supposed to find out? Why were these important things to know? Read Numbers 13:25–29. What did the spies report?

Moses was instructed by God to send out a chief from each of the tribes. These were prominent men whose word would be trusted when they returned. Each tribe was represented in the inspection of the Promised Land, and so each tribe would hear the report from the mouth of someone they were inclined to trust. This would make the information about the Promised Land easy to distribute and easy for the Israelites to believe. Unfortunately for the Israelites, these chosen men of influence will prove to be poor stewards of the authority that God has given to them. They will use their influence to sway God's people away from obedience to the God of Israel rather than to persuade them to act in faith.

Moses' instructions to the spies indicate that he has conquest in mind. *Are the people strong or weak fighters? Is the land good enough to support us when we*

Leader Note

Encourage participants to bring their own Bibles to class so they can mark key passages each week. Set out Bibles for those who do not bring their own.

conquer and inhabit it? Do they live in walled cities or just camps? The answers to the last two questions would be important considerations for settling the land in the aftermath of their conquest. *Is the land fruitful? Are there trees we can use to build houses, tools, and fortifications?* This information would help them effectively take control of the Promised Land and make it their own.

The Israelites knew that they would have to fight to conquer the land. In Numbers 1, God already indicates that war is coming by requiring Moses to take a census of all the warriors in Israel. In Numbers 10:1–9, the Lord establishes trumpets for sending battle signals. The people know that war is coming, but they do not know how difficult the fighting will be, so the forty days that passed before the spies returned must have been days of nervous waiting for those in the Israelite camp. They were no doubt hoping that they would be able to take the Promised Land with ease. There were more than half a million fighters in Israel, so the people had reason to hope that the conquest would be easy and their enemies would flee before them.

When the spies return, however, the situation does not look promising. Instead of a mostly unoccupied land with a few bands of nomadic shepherds to chase away, the Promised Land is full of large, well-protected cities. The people are strong, and the sons of Anak take on legendary proportions by the time of Joshua's leadership (see Deuteronomy 9:1–3). Most of the spies do not believe that Israel is up to the battle. The situation looks impossible.

Say 3. Read Numbers 14:1–9. How do the people react to the news of their impossible mission? Why do Joshua and Caleb feel differently?

The people of Israel are in despair. Their leaders had come back and reported that the land could not be conquered. In Numbers 13:33, the spies reported that the inhabitants of the land were so tall that the Israelites were like grasshoppers. The plagues in Egypt and the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea are mere memories, while the stone walls and sharp swords that they will have to fight against are concrete realities staring them in the face. Looking ahead at the battles to be fought, looking into the faces of the terrified spies, the Israelites are having a hard time believing that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is up to the challenge.

Joshua and Caleb, however, have a different focus. While the other ten spies and all of Israel are staring at the opposition, Joshua and Caleb see something else. They begin their speech by telling the people that the land “is an exceedingly good land . . . a land that flows with milk and honey” (Numbers 14:7–8). This is not an enticement to take the risk because the gain will be so great. This is a reminder of God's promise. In Exodus 3:16–17, God sent Moses with the promise that He will give the Israelites this very land, “flowing with milk and honey.”

Joshua and Caleb saw that God had brought them to a land exactly as described. Once again, He has shown Himself able to keep His promises, and so their eyes are focused on the promise rather than the challenges in front of them. That is why they confidently announce that the people of the land will be “bread,” easily devoured. Joshua and Caleb announce that “their protection is removed” for “the Lord is with us” (Numbers 14:9). This promise is the only guarantee the Israelites really need.

Say 4. In verse 10, the people are ready to stone Moses, Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua, and so God announces judgment against them. Read of God's judgment in Numbers 14:26–35. Then read about the people's reaction in Numbers 14:39–45. What messages does God send by this defeat?

The people's faithless grumbling had serious consequences. God declared that they would never enter the Promised Land; instead, Israel would wander in the desert one year for every day the spies had spent exploring the land. Their children would fight the battles and win the victories to make the Promised Land their own. As for the generation that rejected the Promised Land, they would spend the rest of their lives in the wilderness.

It's no wonder that the Israelites tried to avoid these consequences. Early the next morning, the people decided to show God that they were ready now to enter the Promised Land. The fear they experienced at the thought of battling the Canaanites paled in comparison to the reality of another forty years of wandering in the wilderness. The Israelites were ready to fight. Unfortunately for them, God was no longer ready to give them victory. Their misguided attempt to prove their faithfulness and avoid the consequences of their sin ended in dramatic defeat. The message to Israel (and to us) is twofold.

- We cannot erase the consequences of our sin. When we rebel against God by breaking His commands, we cannot make the consequences of that sin go away. God is merciful, and the judgment that He handed down on Israel was actually an act of mercy, since He was initially prepared to destroy the entire people with a plague (see Numbers 14:11–19). In verses 20–23, God announced that He forgave the people, but the consequences of their actions would remain. They had rejected the Promised Land, and so they would never enter it.
- The Israelites' defeat also served as a reminder that Joshua and Caleb were right. "If the Lord delights in us, He will bring us into this land and give it to us," they said (v. 8). Only by God's power would Israel be able to take this land. The inhabitants were too strong, and Israel was too weak. With God, all things are possible, but apart from Him, it was an impossible mission. Likewise for us; with God, all things are possible, but apart from Him, we can do nothing (see John 15:5).

Share (10 minutes)

Say 5. The Israelites faced an impossible mission, but God specializes in doing the impossible. What "impossible" work has God done in your life, and how did you respond?

Answers will vary as participants consider times in their lives when God has intervened in miraculous ways. This serves as an opportunity for you to guide the discussion toward the greatest enemy that God has defeated in a battle that is truly impossible for us. Jesus healed many people during His earthly ministry, and God continues to heal people every day, sometimes miraculously, but often through the work of doctors and modern medicine. Yet there remains one sickness that we can never cure.

No matter how medicine advances, it will never cure the disease of sin. Even Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead, was infected with this disease—and the wages of sin is death. Eventually, Lazarus died again. But there is one man who rose from the dead and will never die again. And that man, Jesus Christ, comes to us with an impossible victory. Through Baptism, He cures this disease of sin and frees us from the death that it brings. He forgives our sins again and again through the Lord's Supper. Death is defeated and the impossible is accomplished through Jesus Christ.

Have the class read Romans 8:31–39. It is no longer the people of God who face an impossible battle. Instead, it is Satan and the powers of darkness whose battle is impossible. They cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord! Now that is victory!

Our response to this God-given victory is perhaps best summarized in Martin Luther's explanation to the First Article of the Apostles' Creed: "For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him." This is most certainly true!

Say 6. The Israelites stood on the edge of a Promised Land that they could not see but believed was there by the promise of God. So do we! How does God work in our lives to keep our eyes on His promise of eternal life?

These are some of the most important ways that God keeps us focused on His promises:

- God reinforces His promises through His people. The Israelites failed to remind one another of God's promises, but through the Holy Spirit, God's people today can continually point one another to the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. When we gather together as the Church, we build one another up, hold one another accountable, and serve as living reminders of the future that God is preparing for us. Pastors especially are called to keep us focused on the life to come (see 1 Timothy 6:17–19).
- God reminds us of His promises through worship. When we worship, we step out of the world and into God's presence in a unique way. Many of the elements of the liturgy connect us with the saints in heaven. When we sing the Sanctus in preparation for the Lord's Supper, we join all those in heaven in singing, "Holy, holy, holy" (Revelation 4:8). The words of "This Is the Feast" (*LSB*, pp. 155 and 171) are a heavenly Te Deum being sung by every creature in heaven and on earth (Revelation 5:13). At the Lord's Supper, we see, touch, and taste our risen Savior's body and blood. Worship bridges the gap between heaven and earth and invites us to a foretaste of the feast to come!
- God focuses us on His promises through His Word. Joshua and Caleb recognized God's promise because they remembered it. They had made God's Word a part of them, and that kept them from becoming afraid of the inhabitants of the land. As we read and study Scripture, our minds are drawn naturally toward the glory that awaits us in the resurrection of the dead. When we memorize God's promises, they become a part of us and come to mind quickly when the challenges seem impossible. A few of these promises are listed in the Personal Reflection section of the Student Page.

4 Send (5 minutes)

Before they go home, give participants the text for next week's lesson, and encourage them to read and think about it during the week in preparation for next week's class.

For the **Family Connections** section, encourage the adults with children in Sunday School to review their children's leaflets together at home. Continue to remind members of the class to take advantage of the opportunity to review the Small Catechism together, especially the Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer.

For the **Personal Reflection** section, encourage members of the class to read and reflect on the Bible passages listed on the Student Page. Suggest that they choose one passage each day during the week and read it in the morning and again over lunch. Encourage those with families to then read the same passage together with their family in the evening and discuss our future hope together as suggested in the Family Connections section.

Lesson 1 Student Page

The Twelve Spies in Canaan

(Numbers 13–14)

- ① Have you ever been asked to do something that feels impossible to do? How did you react to the request? How did you feel about the person who made the request of you?
- ② Read Numbers 13:1–3, 7–20. Who were the spies, and what were they supposed to find out? Why were these important things to know? Read Numbers 13:25–29. What did the spies report?
- ③ Read Numbers 14:1–9. How do the people react to the news of their impossible mission? Why do Joshua and Caleb feel differently?
- ④ In verse 10, the people are ready to stone Moses, Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua, and so God announces judgment against them. Read of God's judgment in Numbers 14:26–35. Then read about the people's reaction in Numbers 14:39–45. What messages does God send by this defeat?
- ⑤ The Israelites faced an impossible mission, but God specializes in doing the impossible. What "impossible" work has God done in your life, and how did you respond?
- ⑥ The Israelites stood on the edge of a Promised Land that they could not see but believed was there by the promise of God. So do we! How does God work in our lives to keep our eyes on His promise of eternal life?

Lesson 1 Student Page

Through the Week

Family Connections

If you have children in Sunday School, go over their Sunday School leaflets together, sharing with one another what you learned about today's Bible story.

As a family, learn by heart the Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer and its meaning from the Small Catechism. Talk with your children about why it is important that we ask God to do His will instead of ours.

Choose one of the verses from the Personal Reflection section and look it up in the Bible with the rest of your family. Have someone in your family read the verse, and then spend a few minutes talking together about what you are looking forward to when you enter the heavenly promised land that God is preparing for you. Close this time with a prayer thanking God for His promises and for sending Jesus to earn for us the right to join Him in eternal life.

Personal Reflection

Look up some of the following passages and spend a few minutes thinking about what each one tells you about your future, thanks to Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection for you.

A new heaven and earth—Revelation 21:1–5

A place for you—John 14:1–3

God's house—Psalm 23

A peaceful place—Isaiah 11:6–10

An immortal victory—1 Corinthians 15:50–57

I shall see God—Job 19:25–27

Resurrection—1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

Preparing the Lesson

Entering the Promised Land

Joshua 3:1–5:12

Date of Use

Key Point

Led by Joshua through the Jordan River, Israel left the desert and entered the Promised Land. Led by Christ through the water of our Baptism, we leave behind the desert of sin, death, and Satan and enter into the promised land of His heavenly kingdom.

Law/Gospel

Complaining and unrepentant, I wander in a desert of sin, determined to go my own way—a way that leads to death. **In Baptism, Christ lifts me from the grave, joins me to His own Baptism and Body, the Church, and leads me to my heavenly home.**

Context

Following the death and mysterious burial of Moses (Deuteronomy 34), Joshua now leads the nation. His name means “the LORD saves.” In Greek, his name would be “Jesus.” God has assured Joshua that He is with him and Israel, even as He was with Moses. The miraculous stoppage of the Jordan’s waters and the Israelites’ traversal on dry ground is dramatic proof of God’s presence. It is a mini-exodus of sorts. Having crossed the river, the nation will next take up arms against the current inhabitants, who have fallen under God’s curse. Israel will be the divine instrument for uprooting the nations that have defiled the Holy Land.

Commentary

In the Bible, geography often expresses theology. Certain places become larger than life because of some divine deed performed there. Sinai becomes the symbol of the Law. Sodom and Gomorrah are emblems of godless cities. The Jordan is the locale of death and life, departure and arrival, the going of the old and the coming of the new.

Here, Israel leaves the desert of death to enter the living land that flows with milk and honey. Her forty-year sentence is finished. A new era has begun. Israel started out from Egypt, under the headship of Moses, and crossed the Red Sea. Now, at the end of her pilgrimage, under the headship of Joshua, the nation crosses the Jordan—same song, second verse. This is God’s way of affirming to Israel that His devotion to her has not changed.

This story is but one of many Jordan stories in the Bible. It is the place where Elijah passes on a double portion of his spirit to Elisha (2 Kings 2). Here, also, in the waters of the Jordan, the Lord washes away the leprosy of Naaman (2 Kings 5). Of course, it is in the Jordan where John baptizes the One whose way he prepared. Together, this collage of stories pictures the significance of the Jordan. In each case, there is the passing away of the old: Israel leaves the desert; Elijah departs in the fiery chariot; Naaman’s leprosy is liquefied; and John decreases so that Jesus may increase.

In the Jordan of our Baptism, the same thing happens. The old Adam, the old Israel, within us is drowned—or, if you prefer, is left as a corpse in the desert sands. But the new Adam in Christ, the new Israel, emerges on the other side of the Jordan font very much alive. The leprosy of our sin is not merely washed away but washed *into* Jesus, our substitute. He fills us with His own sevenfold Spirit (Isaiah 11:2). As the ark of the covenant parted the waters at the crossing of Joshua, so when our new Joshua, Jesus, steps into the water, the heavens are opened for us. The way is clear for us to enter our heavenly fatherland.

To hear an in-depth discussion of this Bible account, visit cph.org/podcast and listen to our Seeds of Faith podcast each week.

Lesson 2

Entering the Promised Land

Joshua 3:1–5:12

1 Start (5 minutes)

Pray Gracious God, You are the giver of new life. You gave the Israelites a new beginning as they entered the Promised Land, and You have given us new life in our Baptism. Lead us in this study of Your Word, and guide us into a deeper understanding of the life we lead in You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Say 1. Think back to the last graduation ceremony you attended. What ceremonies and symbols marked the end of one phase of life and the beginning of the next? Was the focus on the past or on the future?

Graduation ceremonies are filled with symbolic actions and ceremonies to mark the occasion as important. The graduates enter in an orderly procession. They wear caps and gowns, either in school colors or in colors representative of their degrees and disciplines. Speeches are made. Awards are presented. The graduates file across the stage, shaking hands with important figures and receiving their diplomas. A charge to the class is given. The tassel on the cap is moved from right to left. Often a reception is held. While the details of these traditions vary, the ceremony is always intended to provide a clear sense that this phase of the students' education has been successfully completed and they are now prepared to enter the next phase of their lives. Awards and speeches may recognize and remember what the students have done in the past, but the real focus of the ceremony is on the new beginning. That is why these ceremonies are often called "commencement" ceremonies. On this day, students commence, or begin, their new lives as graduates.

In today's Bible lesson, the Israelites are ready to commence the next phase of their lives. They will graduate from a forty-year lesson in the wilderness as God brings them into the Promised Land. Their entry will be accompanied by both symbol and ceremony as God reminds them of the past and points them toward the future and their new life.

2 Study (15 minutes)

Say 2. Read Joshua 3:1–6, 14–17. What does the ark of the covenant represent, and what role does it play during the crossing of the Jordan River? What does it tell us about the Israelites' relationship with God?

The ark was the visible representation of God's presence with His people. It was natural that the ark of the covenant would lead the Israelites into the Promised Land because the ark represented God's presence, and this was the moment in which God would fulfill His promise to give this land to the great

nation that He had made from Abraham's descendants (see Genesis 17:1–8). In the eyes of the Israelites, following the ark meant following God. He will take Israel into the Promised Land. They will not walk alone.

The officers' instructions to follow the ark reflect the Israelites' dependence upon God. The people do not move until they see the ark. When they see the ark, they follow it, but from a distance of more than half a mile. The ark will lead them into the Promised Land, a land that they never could have reached apart from God's gracious intervention. From the miraculous way in which He freed the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt to their daily meal of quail and manna, the Israelites have been entirely dependent upon God. They rely upon God completely, and yet at the same time, there also remains a distance between them. The distance between the Israelites and the ark of the covenant reflects the distance between the Israelites in their sin and God in His holiness. Their sinfulness that has so often manifested itself in grumbling (and worse) in the desert cannot approach God in His righteousness and holiness.

The Jordan River is the dividing line between the wilderness through which Israel has wandered for the last forty years and the Promised Land that God will give them as an inheritance. Crossing the Jordan represents the end of their wanderings in the desert, and as they cross the river, Israel puts behind them all of the sinful rebellion that has laced their escape from Egypt to this point. The golden calf at Mount Sinai (Exodus 32), the grumbling lack of faith at Meribah (Numbers 20), the idolatry at Peor (Numbers 25)—all of their sinful failures during the journey are behind them as they pass through the waters of the Jordan. Behind them is their old life, trapped in sin. Before them is their new life, shrouded in promise. And miraculously opening the way for them is the ark of the covenant.

The Jordan River at flood time would have been impossible for the Israelites to ford; therefore, God leads the way with the ark of the covenant. As soon as the ark reaches the water, the rushing river stops flowing and the ground is solid, allowing hundreds of thousands of Israelite feet to trample their way into Canaan. The Israelites who had been following the ark from a great distance now pass by it as the priests holding the ark of the covenant wait in the middle of the riverbed. Suddenly, the ark is in the midst of the people; God's people surround the symbol of God's presence. They enter their new life with God in their midst.

Say 3. Read Joshua 4:1–8. Why did God command them to make a memorial? How did it represent an end and a new beginning? Are there memorial "signs" that you can identify at church? in the liturgy?

God did not want the Israelites to forget the day on which He brought them through the Jordan River. He commanded them to mark the occasion with large stones, which would last much longer than fallible human memories. Joshua calls this arrangement of stones a sign and a memorial. It is intended to point the Israelites both forward and backward.

The stones point them *forward* to their new life in the Promised Land. In Joshua's instructions, he speaks of the children who will be born knowing nothing of the old life lived in the wilderness. Israel needs this memorial because they are leaving that life behind. It is for the sake of future generations that God commands the creation of this sign. Harstad emphasizes this point when he writes: "The purposefully piled rocks are to serve as a solid springboard for parents to teach their children about the wonderful works of the Lord at the Jordan. . . . The Lord through

Joshua is creating a teaching tool that will shout perpetually of his grace as fathers and mothers tell the story" (*Joshua*, pp. 194–95).

The stones also point Israel *back* to the day when this new beginning was made. They will remember that they did not always live in the Promised Land and that it was only by God's gracious intervention that they were able to enter this land of abundance. Harstad describes the memorial function of these stones:

Parents are to present the account in such a way that their children are not just fascinated by the physical fact of the Jordan's waters being cut off. They are to know that their covenant Lord did this for the salvation of his dear people. Far beyond mere infatuation with the spectacular, children are to grow in faith in their relationship with their faithful Lord. The stones are thus to be a "memorial" (4:7) in a full sense of the word. (*Joshua*, p. 195)

They are drawn from the place where the bearers of the ark stood in the Jordan River. In verse 3, God instructs them, "Take twelve stones from here *out of the midst* of the Jordan" (emphasis added). This memorial reminder of God's grace is taken from the very spot where God stood in the midst of His people to bring them into their new life.

When we gather at the divine liturgy at church, we see "signs" that evoke a similar reaction. For example, the altar, the baptismal font, and the cross all serve as signs of what Christ has done for us. Additionally, the Lord's Supper is sometimes referred to as "the memorial meal" because we celebrate it in memory of Jesus, as He commanded. The Lord's Supper points us back to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and it points us forward to the day when we will celebrate in the heavenly promised land. And yet, the Lord's Supper is much more than a memorial. When we receive the Lord's Supper, God again stands in the midst of His people. We do not simply remember His grace; we receive God's grace as the forgiveness of sins through the body and blood of Jesus Christ. In the Lord's Supper, God is truly present once again for the salvation of all His people.

Say 4. Read Joshua 5:2–12. What was the significance of circumcision and the Israelites' celebration of the Passover?

Circumcision was the outward sign of the covenant between God and Israel. God established this sign when He promised to be God to Abraham and his descendants, and to give them the land of Canaan. God then instructed Abraham to circumcise every male child at the age of eight days to mark him as a part of the covenant people of God (see Genesis 17).

We do not know why the Israelites were not circumcised at the age of eight days during their years in the wilderness; we only know that the Lord commands Joshua to circumcise them now. The timing makes perfect sense. The Israelites are making a new beginning, and just as God marked the covenant with Abraham by circumcision, He commands Joshua to mark the renewal of that covenant in the same way. The words of the Lord in Joshua 5:9 emphasize that the rite of circumcision is marking this new beginning, leaving the sins of their forefathers behind them: "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." God intends that the Israelites recognize anew that they are the chosen people of God. They will be His covenant people, and they are to keep the covenant by loving the Lord and serving Him only.

Like the stone memorial, the Passover is intended to point both backward and forward. The celebration of the Passover meal is an opportunity for parents to teach their children about the four hundred years of slavery in Egypt (which many in this generation had never experienced). In this way, the Passover meal looked back to their life in bondage and their escape from Egypt through God's miraculous intervention. At the same time, the celebration pointed the Israelites forward to their new life. Their days of eating manna in the wilderness had ended. After the Passover, they ate the fruit of the land, and their new life had officially begun.

Say 5. This story is filled with connections to other “water” passages in the Bible. Skim Genesis 7–8; Exodus 14; 2 Kings 5; and Matthew 3. How do these Scripture passages use water to mark an end and a new beginning?

Many passages relate God's act of re-creation and restoration through water. Here are some of the most important:

- Genesis 7–8—God destroyed all creation, drowning its sin under the waters of the flood. Through Noah and his family on the ark, God restored life to His creation, giving mankind a new beginning.
- Exodus 14—God parted the Red Sea, definitively ending Israel's life in bondage and drowning their enemies under the water. Israel began a new life of freedom.
- 2 Kings 5—God cured the leprosy of a Syrian army commander after he bathed in the Jordan River seven times. Naaman began a new life as a worshiper of the Lord, the God of Israel.
- Matthew 3—John the Baptist called people to new life by baptizing them for repentance in the Jordan River. Then Jesus came to him to be baptized, though He had no need to repent. Instead, at His Baptism, Jesus was recognized from heaven as the Son of God. Then He began His earthly ministry, which would culminate in the cross through which we are restored.

3 Share (10 minutes)

Say 6. The Israelites began a new life surrounded by symbol and ceremony. When do Christians begin their new life? What symbols and ceremonies surround this event? What part of this event is not symbolic?

As Christians, we begin new life when we are born of water and the Word in Baptism. Just as God used water to re-create and renew throughout biblical history, God re-creates us through water and His Word. We begin our new, eternal life on the day that we are baptized. This is a transformation (see Colossians 2:11–13).

Baptism acts for us like circumcision did for Israel, making us a part of the people of God. Yet it does even more; Baptism raises us to a new life. As God forgives our sins, He makes us alive. We leave behind the wilderness and death of life as slaves to sin. God ushers us into a new life as saints, holy in His sight.

Because Baptism is such a significant event, we surround it with symbols. Just as the Israelites built a memorial by the Jordan River, we may commemorate Baptism with white clothing to symbolize the righteousness of Christ that covers our sin; with a burning candle to signify Christ's presence within us through the

Liturgy Link

The Introit is another time to enter. We “enter” into worship, where Christ comes to us in His Word and His Sacraments. After receiving forgiveness of sins, we are led into His Church and to life with Him.

Holy Spirit; and with baptismal certificates to record the event and remind us of it in the future. These symbols help us to remember and recognize that on the day of our Baptism, we began new life.

The Baptism itself, however, is anything but symbolic. As Colossians 2:11–13 demonstrates, God acts in Baptism. He buries our sin with Christ. He raises us to new life. Our rebirth in Baptism is spiritual, but just as real as our first birth in the flesh. As Martin Luther stated in his Small Catechism, “[Baptism] works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.” Far from a mere symbol, Baptism is God’s action to bring us new life!

Say 7. God instructed the Israelites to create a memorial to remember the day they entered their new life. How are Christians to do the same thing with respect to their Baptism?

In Baptism, we begin our new life, but until the return of Christ, we will continue to battle against the sinful desires with which we are born. Christians live their entire lives caught in the tension between being a perfect saint, regenerated by God and holy, and being utterly sinful, trapped by sinful desires we cannot escape. As a result, we fight daily battles against sin, battles that humans cannot win apart from God’s intervention (see Romans 7:15–25).

Since Christians must fight these battles daily, God calls us to continually remember the day on which the war against sin was won in our lives, the day of our Baptism. We return to our Baptism through daily contrition and repentance. Every day, we recognize that we have sinned and that our sin separates us from God. This contrition is followed by repentance, as we turn away from our sin and reject it. Through this act of confession, we return to our Baptism, which reminds us that our sinful nature has been drowned and calls us to live out the new life God created on the day of our Baptism.

4 Send (5 minutes)

Before they go home, give participants the text for next week’s lesson, and encourage them to read and think about it during the week.

For the **Family Connections** section, encourage the adults with children in Sunday School to review their children’s Sunday School leaflets together at home. Highlight the suggestion to celebrate Baptism birthdays. Remind members of the class that Baptism marks our birth into eternal life. If time permits, allow the class to offer suggestions for ways to observe this important day in our lives.

For the **Personal Reflection** section, encourage the members of your class to return to their Baptism each day through contrition and repentance. You may wish to remind them that as they confess their sins to God each day, they may struggle to believe that God has truly forgiven them. If that happens, the best place for them to go is to your pastor. He can offer them private absolution and assure them with the authority of God Himself that their sins are forgiven for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Lesson 2 Student Page

Entering the Promised Land

Joshua 3:1–5:12

- ① Think back to the last graduation ceremony you attended. What ceremonies and symbols marked the end of one phase of life and the beginning of the next? Was the focus on the past or on the future?
- ② Read Joshua 3:1–6, 14–17. What does the ark of the covenant represent, and what role does it play during the crossing of the Jordan River? What does it tell us about the Israelites' relationship with God?
- ③ Read Joshua 4:1–8. Why did God command them to make a memorial? How did it represent an end and a new beginning? Are there memorial "signs" that you can identify at church? in the liturgy?
- ④ Read Joshua 5:2–12. What was the significance of circumcision and the Israelites' celebration of the Passover?
- ⑤ This story is filled with connections to other "water" passages in the Bible. Skim Genesis 7–8; Exodus 14; 2 Kings 5; and Matthew 3. How do these Scripture passages use water to mark an end and a new beginning?
- ⑥ The Israelites began a new life surrounded by symbol and ceremony. When do Christians begin their new life? What symbols and ceremonies surround this event? What part of this event is not symbolic?
- ⑦ God instructed the Israelites to create a memorial to remember the day they entered their new life. How are Christians to do the same thing with respect to their Baptism?

Lesson 2 Student Page

Through the Week

Family Connections

If you have children in Sunday School, go over their Sunday School leaflets together, sharing with one another what you learned about today's Bible story.

Work with your whole family to learn by heart the questions in the Small Catechism concerning Baptism, along with their answers. Allow these questions to serve as a springboard for a discussion about the new life that we have in Christ. Also, mark on the calendar the anniversary of each family member's Baptism. Make it a point to celebrate these Baptism birthdays in a special way.

Personal Reflection

Take time in your prayers to confess your sins to God each day this week. As you experience sorrow for your sins, remember that in your Baptism, God put your sinful nature to death and raised you into new life. Rejoice that when Christ comes again, you will experience that new life fully, and sin will never again taint who you are.