

14 Israel enters the Promised Land

The people of Israel left the land of Egypt. Their leader was Moses. It took forty years for the people to travel to the land of Canaan. Canaan was the Promised Land. God had promised it to Abraham and his children for all time. Now God was going to keep His promise.

Moses had died, and the new leader was Joshua. Joshua was a military leader. He was good at leading the army, because that was what was needed to take over the land of Canaan and to remove the wicked people who lived there. You can read about how Israel took the land of Canaan in the book of Joshua.

Crossing the Jordan River

If you look at a map of Canaan, or Israel as it is now known, you can see the Jordan River runs from the mountains in the north to the Dead Sea in the south.

The Israelites came towards Canaan from the east, and their first problem was how to cross the Jordan River. There may have been several thousand people with all their animals and possessions. At that time of the year, the Jordan River was in flood; there was water everywhere, so it was even harder to cross over. There were no bridges. There were no boats. How could so many people cross the River into the Promised Land?

God's answer was simple. Let them walk across through the dry riverbed! And this is what the people did. With Joshua and the priests leading the way, God stopped the Jordan River from flowing for several hours while the Israelites walked over on dry ground. It was another miracle, just like God had done at the Red Sea forty years earlier. See Joshua chapter 3 for the details.

So the Israelites were now in the land of Canaan. But there were many people to overcome. Canaan was made up of a number of small states. There were cities that were strongly built to stop invaders. Each city-state had a king. Peasants and slaves grew crops in the fields. Some of these city-states traded with each other, and with countries beyond the Land. The people of Canaan worshipped statues of wood and stone. Their religion was cruel and wicked. It had things such as human sacrifice and other barbaric acts.

The destruction of Jericho

The first city that stood before the Israelites was Jericho. Jericho was a big city with strong, high walls. It would not be easy to take. God also told the Israelites that all of the treasures of Jericho had to be given to God.

God helped them to take the city. God told Joshua to march around the city once each day for six days. The army was not to make any noise. Then on the seventh day, the army had to march around the city seven times. Then all the army was to shout with all their might. When the army did so, the walls of Jericho came crashing down. Each soldier was able to go forward into the city and take it. It was a great victory that God made possible by a miracle. You can read about Jericho in Joshua 6.

But one soldier, Achan, saw some treasures in Jericho and kept them for himself. He should have given everything to God. No-one knew Achan had done this, except God, who sees and knows everything.

The city of Ai

Joshua sent some spies to the next city, called Ai. The spies said that the city was small; only a small army was needed. So a small group of men went to take Ai. But the people of Ai defeated the army of Israel. Thirty-six Israelite soldiers were killed. Joshua 7.

Joshua and the people were so upset. Had God left them? Had God brought them to Canaan only to destroy them? God told Joshua that there was a thief in the camp. Soon Achan confessed what he had done, and he was stoned to death for his sin.

The army of Israel made another attack on Ai. This time, God helped the soldiers of Israel. You can read about the battle in Joshua 8.

After these large battles, the people of Canaan were terrified of Joshua and the Israelites. Some groups joined together to fight Israel. Others decided that they should try a peace treaty.

The Gibeon deception

One group lived in a city called Gibeon. They decided to make a peace treaty with Israel. But God had told the Israelites that they were not to make peace with anyone in Canaan. Everyone had to be destroyed, or they would make Israel stop worshipping God. But the people of Gibeon were very clever. They sent some men to the camp of Israel, but they told Joshua that they were from a country far beyond Canaan. To prove it, the men from Gibeon had old, torn clothes. They carried dry mouldy bread. The men said to Joshua and the Israelites, "We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant (peace treaty) with us." Joshua 9:6

Joshua and the Israelites believed the men and their story. They did not ask God, and they made a peace treaty with them to protect them from harm.

The Israelites were very angry when they found out the Gibeonites lived just a few kilometres away. But they had made a treaty, and so the Israelites let the people of Gibeon live. Read Joshua 9 for more about Gibeon.

Other groups in Canaan joined their armies to fight against Israel. There was a big battle in Joshua 10, and Israel was winning. God sent a huge hailstorm that killed many of the enemy. But alas, the night was coming, and there would not be enough time. So Joshua prayed to God that the sun would stand still. God answered Joshua's prayer. How God did this we do not know. But there was another big victory for the Israelites that day.

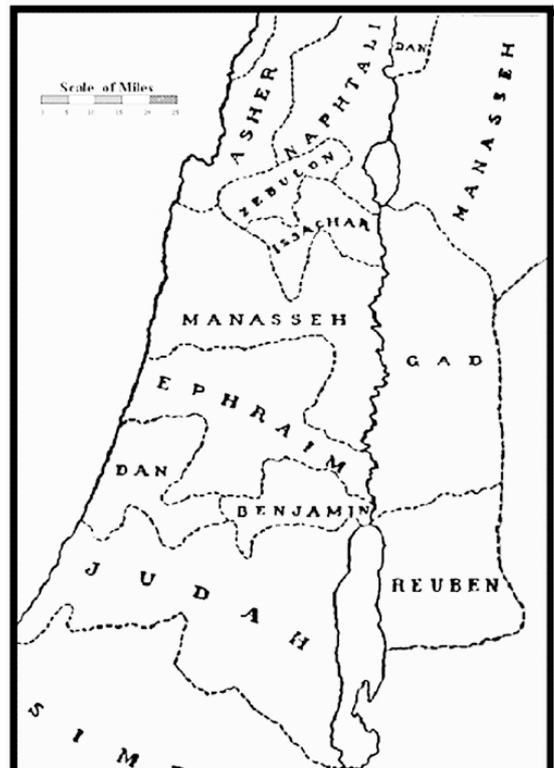
Peace comes to the land of Canaan

And so after a few more battles, the land had peace. Joshua and the elders of Israel divided up the land between the tribes (the tribes were named after the sons of Jacob [Israel]).

The land had peace, and the Israelites went to their allotted areas of lands to settle down in cities and in the country.

How was Israel governed? God had set up the tribe of Levi as the teachers of the people. The Levites studied God's Law, and then taught all the people. The tribes were united because they were descended from Abraham, and now God had kept His promise to give Abraham's descendants the land of Canaan. The main centre of worship was the Tabernacle in the town of Shiloh.

Israel had been chosen by God to show the world that He was the true and living God. We know that God has looked after the Israelites, or Hebrews, or Jews throughout history. Soon, Jesus Christ will return from heaven to be the King of Israel and the King of the world.



1The land was divided between the twelve tribes