

INTO THE PROMISED LAND

by Audrun Siebert

KEY VERSE:

Deuteronomy 26:9 And he brought us into this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

FAITH STORY:

Deuteronomy 26:5b-10a

FAITH FOCUS:

These five verses are a very brief synopsis of Israel's salvation story. It begins with God's call to Abram, calling him from the Ur of the Chaldeans. God made several promises to Abram—the land of Canaan, and many descendants. Next, the verses briefly allude to the story of Joseph and how the children of Israel ended up in Egypt. It reminds them of their slavery in Egypt and how God in a mighty way delivered them from their affliction. It briefly tells the story of the exodus, the wilderness wanderings, and their entry into the Promised Land; and ends with their response of thanks to God for everything God has given them and brought them through.

SESSION GOAL:

Students will examine their own faith story as a story of either waiting for deliverance, experiencing deliverance, or entering into the Promised Land. They will also consider an appropriate response to God for God's deliverance.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

- 1 Students will be able to choose which part of the story to identify with:
 - Slavery
 - Israel's experience in crossing the Red Sea
 - The first attempt to enter the promised land at Kadesh-barnea
 - Finally crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land.
- 2 Students will consider responses to God for all that God has done for them.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Set up your classroom as the "Promised Land," with a table of tantalizing food.
- 2 Be prepared to share your faith story and where you have felt you were enslaved and waiting for deliverance, experiencing deliverance, or entering the Promised Land.
Optional—prepare your own poster illustration of your story, similar to what the students will be creating.

Materials needed:

- 1 Pencils and several blank sheets of paper for each student.
- 2 Copies of "Hymnal, A Worship Book" or another contemporary Christian songbook

- 3 Tablecloth, paper plates and cups, food, soft drinks or punch
- 4 Large poster paper, one for each student.
- 5 A food item, such as candy, that can be glued to the poster.
- 6 Markers, glue, grass or sand (to represent the wilderness), rubber bands
- 7 A basket

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (10–15 minutes)

When students arrive, do not let them enter the room, but keep them in the hall or another convenient place. When all students are present, say something like this:

We all make plans. Most of the time things work out the way we plan. Sometimes, though, things don't quite go the way we expect them to. We might have to make some adjustments. Then there are those times that everything that could possibly go wrong does and our well laid plans end up on the scrap heap.

Allow students to look into the room to see the beautiful table of food prepared for them but do not allow them to enter. Tell them maybe later we'll go in, and then proceed to lead them around in the church or go outdoors. After five or ten minutes of wandering around bring them back to look in the room to make sure everything is still okay. Make one more tour around the church or outside and return. Enter the room but do not allow students to be seated at the table. Sit in a circle in one corner of the room.

Divide the class into groups of 3-5 students. Hand out paper and pencils.

Say: *We live in an age of instant everything. We don't like to wait. Waiting is not a desirable thing in our society. Think of times in your life where you had to wait to get something you really wanted very badly. Make a list of things for which you've had to wait. On the back of the same paper list four or five things or places in your life where delayed gratification turned out to be a blessing, or areas where you are still waiting and hoping you will be blessed for waiting.*

Invite students to the table to enjoy the food.

CONNECT: (5–7 minutes)

Discuss with the students:

How did you feel when you weren't allowed to enter the room?

How did you feel when you could come in the room, but there was another delay before you could go to the table?

How do you feel when things don't go according to plan?

Are we sometimes better off if we have to wait for things?

How do you deal with *Murphy's Law*, "If something can go wrong it will."

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (15 minutes)

Transition to this activity by saying: *In scripture, people often had to wait for long periods of time for things they desired. When God made certain promises to Abraham, some of those promises were not fulfilled in his lifetime. In faith, he believed God would keep the promises to him. God's people needed patience many times.*

Read Deuteronomy 26:5b-10a aloud for the class or have them take turns, each reading one verse. Explain that this is a very brief history of early Israel. Point out that there are three events in this history that we are going to focus on in this session and where the details of each are found in scripture.

- 1 Crossing the Red Sea. Exodus 14:10-31.
- 2 Kadesh-barnea- the first attempt to enter Canaan. Numbers 13:17-20 &26-33.
- 3 Entering the Promised Land. Joshua 3:14-17.

Divide the class into three groups and assign each group one of the above events to read, study and prepare to act it out for the class. After seeing the skits, discuss with the class:

How were these three events similar?

How were these events different?

What feelings and emotions do you think the Israelites felt at each event?

Was this an instance of delayed or instant gratification?

What was God's part in this event? The Israelites' part?

How do these events link up with the salvation history story they heard from Deuteronomy 26?

APPLY: (10–15 minutes)

Share your faith story, emphasizing times where you were awaiting deliverance, experiencing deliverance, or entering the Promised Land. Then explain that students are to think about their own life so far, and times they have felt enslaved to something or by someone, times when they have felt they were waiting for deliverance, or experiencing deliverance, or times when they felt they have reached the Promised Land.

Make supplies available: poster paper, markers, grass or sand, rubber bands, candy. Explain that the grass or sand can represent waiting for deliverance in the wilderness, the rubber bands symbolize slavery, and the candy represents the Promised Land. Ask students to use the supplies to create a picture illustrating their life experiences so far—what has been the salvation story of their life? Ask: What types of slavery have you been delivered from? How did you experience an “exodus”? Did you cross any “Red Seas”?

Have you entered the “promised land?”

After students have finished their posters, invite them to share them with the group but allow students to pass if they don't want to talk about their poster.

RESPOND: (5–10 minutes)

Have someone from the class read Deuteronomy 26:10a

Set the empty basket in the center of the room.

Say: *The Israelites brought baskets of produce they had raised to offer to God the first of the fruit of the land that God had given to them. What can we give to God as an offering representing the first of the fruit from the new life that we have experienced in Christ? What can we give to God that would demonstrate our thankfulness for the salvation we have experienced? What do we place in the basket? Brainstorm together what they could put in the basket. Encourage them to think of actual items but also ideas or representations of their offerings.*

Examples: Time, money, a year of service, worship.

Ask students to search the hymnals or another contemporary worship songbook to find a hymn that would express thanks to God for the gift of salvation. Have the class choose one hymn and sing it together as a class. If a piano is available and someone can play, use it to lead the music.

Close the class period with a prayer of thankfulness to God.

INSIGHTS FROM THE SCRIPTURE:

In preparation for this class period, familiarize yourself with Israel's early story in the historical episodes of crossing the Red Sea, the first attempt to enter Canaan, and the final and successful crossing of the Jordan River in the land of Canaan. The following background scriptures will be helpful in preparation to teach this lesson.

- Exodus 14:10-31
- Numbers 13:17-20 & 26-33
- Joshua chapter 3-4:7

Israel's historic story began when God called Abram from the Ur of the Chaldeans. God made two covenants with Abram, one covenant promising the land of Canaan to his descendants, the other promising that his descendants would be as numerous as the dust of the earth.

The story continues when God saves Jacob's family during a famine in the land by bringing them to Egypt via the Joseph story. In Egypt they are enslaved. They multiply, becoming a great nation in spite of heavy affliction. God hears their cries and sends Moses. God rescues them through the Exodus-Sinai event. Their final escape from the Egyptians is made possible by God's miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea, when God parted the water, allowing them to cross over on dry land. This is still seen today as Israel's salvation event. Although God rescued them from slavery in Egypt, the Israelites are left to wander in the wilderness for forty years because of their lack of faith. Finally, God led them into the Promised Land.

At Kadesh-barnea the twelve spies are sent to check out the land, but only two came back—Joshua and Caleb—saying they could conquer the land with God's help. The other ten spies said that the land was indeed good, but occupied by giants and they are as grasshoppers in comparison to the people in the land. The people are afraid to go in so God sentences them to wander in the wilderness for forty years.

Forty years later, they are finally able to the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership.

If God led Israel from Egypt, through the Red Sea, through forty years of wandering in the wilderness, and finally into the Promised Land, what can God do for us? Just as God wanted to give the land of Canaan to Israel, God wants us to lead us out of the things that enslave us and into the Kingdom where we can live with God, now and forever.