

Introduction to

OLD PLACES, NEW FACES

Places have to do with geography. In the Bible we find God’s people in many different places, both physically and spiritually, in their relationship to the Creator and Savior. We, like them, journey through many lands in our Christian walk. We move from chaos to order, from Ur to Canaan and from disobedience to obedience. The geographical locations of Biblical characters can symbolically refer to places we find ourselves with respect to our faith. As we become more acquainted with our spiritual geography, we will better discern where God would have us go or what changes we need to make in order to serve Him better.

Old Places, New Faces seeks to make the stories and places of the Bible a reality in our lives today. It seeks to get at the relevant messages for today as found in the pages of the Scriptures. This study relates to the Bible as a book that speaks clearly about present realities through stories of the past. The Bible is not only intended to give the reader knowledge about events and people in the past, but through these events and people, inspire greater faith.

Old places from within the Bible can come alive with present significance to *new faces*—that is, us. May this be true for you as you use this study.

LESSON 1:

LIVING WITH A COMMISSION

Desert of Sinai

The fourth book of the Old Testament is called Numbers because there are two censuses of the Israelites recorded in it. The first census takes place at Mt. Sinai where the Israelites were encamped after their escape from Egypt. The second census takes place after the Israelites had wandered in the wilderness for forty years. God commanded that each census take place, placing Moses and Aaron in charge of the task.

God’s command to “Take a census...” in Numbers 1:2 is, outside of the exodus from Egypt, the most significant event of the Old Testament story since the twelfth chapter of Genesis. There God gave another command, this one to Abraham: “Leave your country, your people, and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). These two commands are intimately connected, though they are separated by over five hundred years. The first involves a promise made by God, and the second is the fulfillment of that promise.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

READ NUMBERS 1:1-4, 17-19, 45-46

1. Who ordered the census to be taken? (vs. 1-2)

2. Who was to coordinate the census? (v. 3)

3. Who was counted? (vs. 3, 45)

Leader's Notes

LESSON 1: Living with a Commission

Location: Desert of Sinai

SESSION OBJECTIVES

1. To explore how the hope of heaven should positively affect believers in this life.
2. To remind participants of the great promise we as believers have of life everlasting with God after death.
3. To encourage participants to translate this hope of heaven not into passivity in this life, but into active and aggressive work for the kingdom of God and for the betterment of others.

GETTING STARTED (Optional Activity)

Tell participants, "Imagine that you are seriously ill and need to be hospitalized for many months. You are immobile and in pain." Then ask, "In that situation, what would be the difference between knowing you will fully recover some day and knowing your sickness is terminal and will end your life within a year?"

Allow participants to respond. Then ask, "If you had a terminal illness, would knowing you were going to heaven after death make a difference, versus not believing in an afterlife?"

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. God ordered the census to be taken.
2. Moses and Aaron were to coordinate the census.
3. All men who were twenty years of age and older and able to serve in the army were counted.
4. The total census was 605,550.
5. God promised He would make Abraham and Sarah into a great nation, He would bless them and make their name great.
6. God promised to give Abraham and Sarah the land of Canaan and also to give them more offspring than they could count.
7. The army, with God's help, was going to take the Promised Land.
8. The large number of men plus all of the women and children

- made the total number of descendants over 2,000,000—"as many as the stars in the sky."
9. Our whole life in this world is the Desert of Sinai where we live with great scarcity and want and anxiety.
 10. Our promised land is heaven, where we will live with God.
 11. Answers will vary. The Israelites were, no doubt, encouraged and strengthened in resolve because of the promise of a better place in the future.
 12. Same as answer to #11.
 13. Jesus Christ alone has made us able to inherit eternal life through His death and resurrection.
 14. Jesus is promised when God tells Abraham and Sarah that all nations of the earth will be blessed through them. Their descendant, Jesus provides hope of salvation to all people on earth.
 15. I Corinthians 15:38 comes after Paul talks about the hope of life after death. The "Therefore" at the start of verse 38 connects the two. The hope of eternal life, therefore helps believers "stand firm," and motivates them to fully dedicate their lives here to the Lord's work.
 16. Although believers grieve deeply in losing loved ones who also believe, the grief is deeply tempered by the knowledge that the loved ones are actually better off now than before death.
 17. The descendants were too numerous to count.
 18. John could not count the saints in heaven.
 19. People of all tribes, nations, and races will be in heaven.
 20. Through Abraham's descendant Jesus, people from all nations find salvation.
 21. In heaven there will be unmitigated joy and peace. There will be no threat of death, no mourning, no suffering, and no fear.