



The Playing Board of Israel

Various OT and Luke Texts

Study Helps and Application

This Sunday will have more of a “classroom” feel to it than a regular sermon. I want to show the value of using those maps at the back of study Bibles that we tend to ignore. For the application part, in the first three illustrations (Abraham, Jacob, and Jonah), part of the lesson is that geography shows these men were not following what God had told them to do. For the fourth illustration, Jesus, I’ll use the Gospel of Luke and look back to a few of Ryan’s sermons to show where Jesus is traveling. The application here will not be so much obeying what God has said but being sensitive to “divine appointments” and not letting things like cultural boundaries stand in our way.

Discussion 1: Abraham & Lot --Living on the Edge (Gen. 13)

Lot moves to live on the very edge of the land of Canaan. We’re not sure if he was technically outside the land of Canaan when he lived in Sodom or not. But Abraham assumed Lot would want to stay solidly within the land of Canaan, but Lot didn’t seem to care about this.

- *Are there any areas of your life where you’re tempted to live right on the edge of God’s promises, one step away from clearly disobeying but still perhaps “technically” within His will?*

[What’s at the bottom of this? Are we trusting God or ourselves to satisfy? Isn’t it *unbelief* when we don’t trust God’s promises fully?]

Discussion 2: “Wrong-way Jonah”

- *How is your and my refusal to proclaim the gospel like/unlike Jonah’s response?*

[Jonah’s rebellion was blatant... ours? (subtle? justified in our own minds?) Jonah’s was hate based... ours? Do you need your own rendezvous with a great fish? (or the like?)]

Discussion 3: Jesus and “Divine Appointments”

Jesus was willing to cross over ethnic, economic, and cultural boundaries. He risked offending not only the religious leaders of his day, but his own disciples.

- *Are you familiar with the term “Divine Appointments”?*

[Don't assume everyone knows what we are talking about. We can often see God's hand in the coming together of events in our lives, especially in our interactions with others. Generally we see these looking back on key moments in our lives. Of course there are infinitely more divine appointments none of us recognize as such...]

- *As you look back and recognize "Divine Appointments" in your life, were you the "sent" (the instrument of God) or the recipient (the one to whom someone was sent)?*

[Hopefully you'll get a nice mix of "both." It may be a hard one for folks to think about on the spur of the moment.

Of course God works these things from both ends... both are sent and both are recipients in a sense, but the times that will stick out are when we received a gospel nugget that struck us to the heart, or we were given the opportunity to speak God's word into someone's life at a strategic time. *If you can't think of a time when God used you, that doesn't mean He hasn't! But let that motivate you to service, to be a fruit-bearing branch of the Vine.]*

- *Can you tell of a time when you in some sense moved out of your "comfort zone" for the sake of the gospel?*
 - *Do you sense that more of that should happen in the future?*

[Are we called to comfort or faithfulness? Is "it's my right to pursue my comfort" a cultural assumption that is creeping into the church? What else prevents you from getting out of your comfort zone more regularly? Man up!]

- *What are some cultural barriers today that may be hindering our faithful fulfillment of the Great Commission?*

[We still have ethnic divisions and economic class structures. *Discuss examples.* What about how we view and treat the elderly? How we treat the sick and dying? Or deal with sickness and death... Do we fearfully isolate ourselves from them ... just like the culture around us? Could we not be speaking the light of the gospel into this darkness and hope in resurrection? Are you afraid of homosexuals? Are you afraid of women who've had or are considering abortions? Others??? Do not fear, and do not underestimate the power of the "foolishness of preaching" (speaking the truth about) the cross.]

- *How can our community groups breach cultural divides?*

[Some CGs are already serving together outside their comfort zones by working with other ministries. What is the "outward" component of our CG? Does it cross

any boundaries? Are there more boundaries you can cross to bring the light of the gospel to our neighbors?]

– *How can church planting breach cultural divides?*

[Leaders--As you may know, we at DSC are increasing our emphasis on the importance of church planting. We believe spreading God's glory broader and deeper occurs most effectively in and through God's appointed instruments of Kingdom expansion--local churches.]

Ethnic and geographical ... OK, but what about "church culture" divides? The goal of popular church growth models is more people in the seats, giving more, serving more ...numerical growth. The true church's goal is gospel growth. Numerical growth is good, but not the goal. We are called to make disciples. Disciples will multiply. Which is more representative of gospel growth, numerical growth of a single large church or the infiltration of growing and dividing churches into the neighborhoods all around us?]

– *What's the best way we can corporately (as a church and as a CG) support a church plant?*

We must never underestimate the power of prayer. Can we begin giving extra amounts to one of the church plants? (Currently North Africa and Rio Rancho are in the works.) Can we support these families in other ways? Would we be willing to go and help start the church?

Discussion 4: Discerning God's Will

It's hard to obey when you aren't sure what God is calling you to do, right? How do we figure out God's will for our lives? There is a lot of material available for Christians to use to try to figure out God's will for their lives. Much of this material is very bad leading us to search for something that isn't lost (God's will), to pursue knowledge from God via divination (a pagan practice), to practice superstition by looking for signs and hints in billboards and bumper stickers, and to treat our Bibles like Ouija boards or Magic 8 balls.

– *How are you discerning God's will for your life?*

[Leaders--We have a course on this topic available on objectivegospel.org. Please try to take mental note of how common these practices are among your group. If you think your CG may need to have this course taught to them, let Pastor Jay know. God's revealed Word and wisdom are key in your discussion here. God is not going to tell you whom to marry on a random bumper sticker or which college to attend in a secretly coded message on a license plate ...]

Memory Verse

^{ESV} **Mark 16:15** And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

Additional Resources

- *ESV Study Bible* by Crossway Publications. Good map and drawing collections.
<http://www.esvstudybible.org/features>
- *Decision Making and the Will of God* course taught at DSC by Tim Ragsdale
<http://objectivegospel.org/training/DecisionMaking/>

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This Sunday will have more of a “classroom” feel to it than a regular sermon. I want to show the value of using those maps at the back of study Bibles that we tend to ignore.

Three goals today:

- (1) to learn the main routes of travel in the land of Israel;
- (2) to see why this is important, that is, how it helps us see the lessons God wants us to get out of a story in the Bible; and
- (3) to learn what Luke wants us to see in his gospel about where Jesus travels to and from.

Example: Monopoly-- If you don't know the playing board, then you can't play the game. It's similar with the land of Israel. If you don't know that “playing board,” there are lessons in some of the stories of the Bible that you won't fully understand.

Three different regions of Israel: (*Jesus walked in and through all three of these regions, some multiple times in his three-year ministry.*)

[CG leaders: this is where you'll need to look at the PowerPoint slides that can be downloaded from the church's web site, next to the sermon audio]

- Judean wilderness (ref. pictures)
- Galilee region (ref. pictures)
- City of Jerusalem in time of Jesus (ref. drawing)

We're going to learn four roads that were in the land of Israel in Bible times.

- Coastal Highway
- King's Highway
- Way of the Patriarchs
- Way of the Jordan

On the Way of the Patriarchs, there are five cities. North to South:

- Shechem
- Bethel
- Jerusalem
- Mamre (also called “Mamre-Hebron” or just “Hebron”)
- and Beersheba

Memory Aide: "Show Beth Jesus Makes it Better"

Do you see how that could help us remember the cities? Starting at the north, the word "Show" has the same "sh" sound as Shechem. then "Beth" is real close to "Bethel." then "Jesus" goes with "Jerusalem." Then the last two have the first letter.

[I confess. I found "Shaq Bought Jerry's Mom's-Husband a Beer" easier to remember--not sure what that says about me... The more bizarre ones are often easier to visualize and remember. "Mom's-Husband" -> Mumre-Hebron. -Rags]

The Story of Abraham (Gen 13)

Abraham and his nephew, Lot, both have not only lots of livestock (again this is mostly sheep and goats) but even shepherds who work under them. They've grown too big to all fit into one area. Therefore Abraham realizes that they have to separate.

Here's what Abraham says in verse 9: "If you go to the right, then I will go to the left."

Now both of these men are standing near the city of Bethel. They're on the top of the north-south chain of mountains that runs down the middle of Canaan.

*Here's one of the keys to understanding this story: In Israel, in turns of directions **people oriented themselves toward the east, not the north.** And one way of saying "go north" was to "go left." Similarly one way to say "go south" was to say "go right." And one way of saying "go west" was to say "go backward" or "go behind yourself."*

I don't think Abraham here is saying to Lot, "You pick any direction you want, and whatever direction you go in, I'll go in the exact opposite direction." I think he's saying: "If you go north, I'll go south. And if you go south, I'll go north."

In other words Abraham is assuming that Lot, like Abraham, will want to stay on the way of the patriarchs (in the middle of the land of Canaan). Why would Abraham assume this?--Because God has commanded Abraham to go to Canaan.

Lot's response? (v 10-11) "And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan ..."

Lot does not look north or south. Rather Lot looks to the east, to the Jordan Valley. Remember the Jordan River runs north-south, right in-between the Sea of Galilee in the north, and the Dead Sea in the south. Because this is a river valley, much like our Rio Grande valley, it's very green.

"... and Lot journeyed eastward ... and moved his tents as far as Sodom."

Lot moves well away from the Way of the Patriarchs, and sets up his livestock and workers and family in the Jordan Valley, near the city of Sodom.

Now there are two things wrong with what Lot does. First, he walks away from being right in the middle of the land of Canaan. Second, he moves very close to the city of Sodom-- a place of extreme wickedness.

So what does the “playing board” help us to see? That Lot did not care about God’s commands and promises. That he cared more for building his own estate; growing his livestock from the green pastures of the Jordan Valley. Maybe Lot is a kind of prototype for the rich young ruler we heard about last week.

Shortly thereafter (within two chapters) Lot has moved into the city of Sodom, where bad stuff happens to him and his family.

The Story of Jacob (Gen 33)

Jacob has to leave the land of Canaan for quite some time, about 20 years, because of conflict that arose between him and his older brother Esau.

Whereas the last story started near Bethel, this one will end up focusing on Shechem.

In Gen 31 we read that Jacob, when he returns to the land of Canaan with his family and servants and livestock, comes down along the King’s highway, from the north. The map shows how he came down east of the Sea of Galilee. Esau is living just east of the Dead Sea. Somehow Esau learns that Jacob is coming down the King’s highway, so Esau takes some men and moves north, up the King’s Highway, to meet Jacob.

We read about how the two brothers meet each other, after having been separated for twenty years, in Genesis 33. But keep in mind where the father is, Isaac. Isaac is in Mamre, along the Way of the Patriarchs.

Part of the key to the story is that when Jacob was way up north, God commanded him to return not just to the land of Canaan, but to his father.

Now it’s fine for Jacob move south along the King’s Highway. This would be the natural way to come back to the land of Canaan from where he has been. But as you can see Jacob needs to cross the Jordan River and get on the Way of the Patriarchs. Jacob does do this, and comes to the city of Shechem. Then he stops and the story takes a turn for the worse. He buys a piece of land in Shechem, and starts living there with no intention of moving farther south to his father, still three cities away.

In fact both through an ugly episode that ensues because of Jacob's decision to stay in Shechem, *and* God directly telling Jacob to get moving again to the south, Jacob finally and eventually does go to see his father.

What the playing board helps us to see here is that Jacob is not yet reformed in his character. He is not the godly man, father, and husband that he will later become.

The Story of Jonah

Jonah starts in the city of Joppa, which is on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. God speaks to Jonah at the very beginning of the book. God says "Jonah, arise and go to Nineveh." But Jonah went down ... to Joppa. Look at Joppa again. It's on the coast. In verse 3 we read this ... "*So he (Jonah) went down to Joppa, and found a ship which was going to Tarshish.*" Nineveh is a *land* trip to the east, and Jonah went by *sea* to the west!!! A person could not be more blatant in his disobedience.

Many people think the book of Jonah is about missions. But I think it's much more about (1) God's sovereignty, and (2) one person's relationship with God (Jonah).

For the first, God's sovereignty, there are several times in the book in which God sends or "appoints" something: a storm, a great sea creature, a plant, and a worm.

For the second, there is much in this book about Jonah's heart and how he responds to God's divine appointments. We've seen that he clearly disobeys God in chapter 1. There's some hope at the start of chapter 3 when God gives Jonah the same command, and Jonah does indeed to go Nineveh this time.

But how does the book end? Does it end with Jonah submitting, joyfully, to God's commands and appointments? Or is Jonah little changed from the beginning? Perhaps read the book yourself this week to find out.

The Story of Jesus

The city of Samaria is a little farther north than the city of Shechem. Samaria was the place where Samaritans lived. We learned a little about them in the parable of the "Good Samaritan" in Luke 10. The Jews hated Samaritans because the Samaritans were a "half breed."

When the Jewish people were exiled to Babylon, some were left by the Babylonians. Those Jews who were left ended up inter-marrying with some of the pagan peoples in the land of Canaan. They not only intermarried, but adopted some of the religious practices.

Thus when the Jews came back from exile, they found a people group which was really neither Jewish nor pagan, but a kind of mixed religion. To devout Jews, this was really worse than being pagan.

Now let's see how this affected travel on the playing board.

The Galilee region is the land around the Sea of Galilee, and the Sea of Galilee is the lake to the north. When Jews from Jerusalem wanted to go to Galilee, the best route is to go due north along the Way of the Patriarchs.

However, if they went that way they would have to pass through Samaria, where the hated Samaritans were. Therefore, Jews did not go to Galilee by that route. Instead they would, starting at Jerusalem, go east to the Jordan River, then turn north on the Way of the Jordan. Remember that the Way of the Jordan goes north-south along the Jordan River. So they would travel north along the Jordan River, and then when they hit the Sea of Galilee turn west to get to one of the cities in the Galilee region, say Nazareth. *They would go out of their way so that they would not have to pass through Samaria.*

Before Luke 17 we learn that Jesus starts a journey to Jerusalem. In fact Luke chapters 9 through 19 are taken up with this journey to Jerusalem. Before that, in chapters 4-8, Jesus is ministering in Galilee. In Luke chapter 17 Jesus has left the Galilee region, and he is approaching Samaria. Therefore we know he is on the Way of the Patriarchs. Here is where Jesus comes across the ten lepers, which we heard about earlier this Spring.

Imagine the day that Jesus told his disciples they were leaving Galilee. Jesus starts walking, and the disciples realize Jesus is on a footpath that will take him to the Way of the Patriarchs. Not the Way of the Jordan. The Way of the Patriarchs means Samaria. I can almost see the disciples saying to Jesus, "Um ... Jesus ... are you sure you want to go that way?" And then Jesus looking over his shoulder and saying, "Come on."

The thought being: the Father has work for us in this direction, not the safe, comfortable direction where you've got friends, nice hotels, and clean, safe gas stations.

Finally, after the healing of the ten lepers in Luke 17, it's clear that Jesus does change to the Way of the Jordan, not because it's safer but because the Father has some divine appointments for him along that road as well. Jesus will meet and talk with several people, among them Zaccheus in Jericho in Luke 19, whom we also heard about just a few weeks ago. Jericho is the southernmost part of the Way of the Jordan. After Zaccheus in Luke 19, Jesus travels west, enters Jerusalem, and begins the final week that leads up to the crucifixion and resurrection.

So what might we learn from the playing board in the gospel of Luke?

Perhaps we learn that the will of the Father was paramount for Jesus. It took priority over everything: cultural norms, ease and comfort, even perhaps personal safety.

How do we know what the will of the Father is?

Well, read the gospel of John this summer, on your own, once we're done with Luke.

Jesus said if you want to see the Father, look at Him (Jesus). If you want to hear the Father's voice, listen to Him (Jesus). If you want to see the Father, look at Jesus. If you want to honor the Father, honor the Son.



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