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A sevenfold blessing in the Promised Land, and the gift of the Spirit

*'For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water,
of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills'.*

Deuteronomy 8:7

A good land

God had rescued His chosen people Israel out of Egypt and led them through the wilderness for forty years. The Israelites were not to forget this as they were about to enter the land of Canaan, but to continue to serve Him in love and obedience so that they could live under His favor in the future as well. God's benefits required gratitude from them, but also obedience to His commandments. In his speech, Moses looked back on the arduous wilderness journey, but he also looked ahead to the imminent entry into Canaan.

We also find both of these elements in Deuteronomy 8. It is both a look back and a look forward, as we know it for example at the transition from the old to the new year. The Israelites stood on the threshold of a new phase in their existence. On the one hand, they had to remember all the ways in which the Lord had led them over the past forty years in the wilderness. This had been a process of trial and error.

They had gotten to know both their own evil heart and God's goodness "in the great and terrible wilderness, with fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land without water" (Deut. 8:15). Now, in humility, dependence, and obedience, they were to remain faithful to the Lord, to walk in His ways with a resolution of the heart, and to fear Him. On the other hand, they also had to prepare for the entry into Canaan, because they were on the eve of the conquest of the Promised Land. They had to show the right attitude and a humble spirit, so that they could accept the rich blessings of the land from God's hand with a grateful heart and not rely on their own strength to acquire possessions.

It was indeed a good land that the Lord wanted to give them. After exploring Canaan, Caleb even spoke of an "exceedingly good land" (Num. 14:7). Unfortunately, the remaining ten spies spread an evil rumor about the land they had explored (Num. 13:32-33), so the Israelites scorned the good land and refused to go and take possession of it. This presumably happened in the second year of the wilderness journey; and thirty-eight more years would follow, until the unruly warriors had all died in the wilderness.

Moses, when speaking to the Israelites in the fields of Moab, spoke repeatedly of "the good land" which they were to inherit (Deut. 1:35; 3:25; 4:21-22; 6:18). It was a land flowing with milk and honey (Deut. 6:3). Deuteronomy 8 elaborates on this theme, describing the good land in contrast to the great and terrible wilderness through which they had passed.

A fullness of blessing

We find here a detailed description of the land into which the Lord would bring them. The land was:

1. a good land (vs. 7a, similarly vs. 10b);
2. a land with streams, springs, and deep waters (vs. 7b);
3. a land with wheat and barley, with vines, fig trees and pomegranates (vs. 8a);
4. a land with oil-rich olive trees and honey (vs. 8b);
5. a land in which they would have no poverty and would lack nothing (vs. 9a);
6. a land whose stones were iron, and in which they would cut copper from the mountains (vs. 9b);
7. a land of praise because of the rich blessings and the abundance God gave them (vs. 10).

Thus, the good land had a sevenfold blessing. Moses described the riches of the Promised Land in contrast to the wilderness, in which Israel had hitherto lived. He began with the water supply, which was the guarantee for the fertility of the land (vs. 7b). Thus, it was also rich in precious produce, both in agriculture and trees and plants (vs. 8a). The wealth of olive oil and honey occupied a special place (vs. 8b). Thus, one would not eat bread there in poverty, but in wealth and abundance (vs. 9a).

Added to all this was the fact that the soil contained iron and copper ore (vs. 9b). Probably we should then think of the land east of the Jordan, the north of the country and the Lebanon (Deut. 3:11; 33:25; 2 Sam. 8:8; 1 Kings 7:46). This picture was completed by the sight of the grateful people, as they would eat to satiation and praise God for all His favors (vs. 10).

Life in the Promised Land would be a richly blessed life. Thus Christ now gives to His own life, and that they may have it more abundantly, for which we can also thank and praise Him (John 10:10). The blessings of the land of Canaan correspond to the many blessings that the Christian finds in the heavenly places. Yes, this inheritance is also pleasing to us (cf. Ps. 16:6). The hostile powers in Canaan are a picture of the authorities and powers in the heavenly places that want to deny us the possession of our inheritance (Eph. 6:10f.).

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with many spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3vv.). It is not difficult to discover seven or even more blessings in Ephesians chapter 1. Our blessings are related to the knowledge of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Our position as children, sons and heirs is based on this. This should also result in us giving thanks and praises to the Source of all blessing, as the apostle also clearly states: Blessed, or praised be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Streams, springs and deep waters

We would like to confine ourselves here to the first mentioned aspect of the blessings of the land, namely the water supply. The land was amply supplied with water; God provided it. The land of Canaan was not like the land of Egypt, from which the Israelites had migrated, which had to be irrigated with Nile water after sowing. In Canaan they had to expect the blessing from above, the land drank water

from the rain of heaven. The Lord took care of that, for His eyes were steadily fixed on it from the beginning of the year to the end (Deut. 11:10-12).

Therefore, they were to expect blessing from Him alone, not from the gods of the Canaanites. These were weather gods, who were thought to control the course of the seasons and could bestow rain and fertility (Deut. 8:19). The worship of the idols took place under every green tree (Deut. 12:2). If the Israelites would serve the Lord with a perfect heart, He would give the rain for the land in its time, the early rain and the latter rain, so that they could gather corn and wine and oil. However, if they did not do this and turned to the idols, the Lord would close the heavens so that no rain came and the soil no longer yielded (Deut. 11:13-17). Then they would soon perish in the good land, which the Lord had given them. We have a well-known example of such discipline in the history of Elijah (1 Kings 17:1).

As already explained, the streams of water are a picture of the heavenly gift we have received as believers: we have all been made to drink into one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). The early rain speaks of the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the latter rain of the outpouring of the Spirit in the end times (Zech. 10:1). It is the Spirit who unlocks and makes fruitful for us the good land we have received as Christians, the field of blessings in the heavenlies. If we sow on this "field," we will of the Spirit reap everlasting life (Gal. 6:8). Eternal life, the precious fruit of the good land promised to us, is the knowledge of and the fellowship with the Father and the Son (John 17:3).

When we read of "a land of brooks, of springs, and of deep waters", this shows the abundance and the rich activities of the Spirit. When we think of streams we should not think of small, shallow waters, but of rivers and streams. God "visits the land and gives it abundance; the brook of God is full of water" (Ps. 65:10-11). Springs were found everywhere in the land, and they were found where the groundwater bubbled to the surface. The Spirit is the Source of living water for us, springing up into eternal life (John 4:14). The "deep waters" refer to water depths, water floods, coming from subterranean reservoirs (cf. Joseph's blessing in Gen. 49:25 and Deut. 33:13). Here we can think of "the depths of God," the mysteries of the wisdom of God, as now revealed by the Spirit and recorded in the writings of the New Testament (1 Cor. 2).

On the mountains and in the valleys

So the waters were to be found everywhere in the land, on the mountains and in the valleys. In the plains they appeared, but also on the mountains (see Ezek. 31:3-4). God does not give the Spirit by measure (John 3:34). Wherever we are in the land of God's promise, blessing flows everywhere. The living waters spring up both in the valleys and on the mountains. If we cannot see the activity of the Spirit in our lives, we must first seek the cause in ourselves. We can grieve the Spirit (Eph. 4:30), and even quench Him (1 Thess. 5:19).

Do you long for the free streams of the Spirit in your life? He wants to fulfill your desires and to do so in every area of your life. A beautiful illustration of this is found in the life of Achsah, the daughter of Caleb, in Judges 1. Upon conquering the city of Debir, on the border between the mountains of Judah and the Lowlands, she became the wife of Othniel and asked her father for a wedding gift. She wanted not only a piece of land, but also springs of water with it. Her father gave her what she wished: 'Then Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs' (Judg. 1:15).

The land was not complete without springs. Caleb had given his daughter a piece of arable land, but that was not enough. To make the barren land fertile, she also needed springs of water – both on the mountains and in the valleys. We have also received spiritual goods and possessions. But do we realize, like Achsah, that we cannot do without springs of living water, without the powerful working of God's Spirit?

Caleb gave his daughter the upper springs and the lower springs. This is a beautiful picture of what God has given us so that we might bear fruit for Him. The upper springs remind us of Christ in glory, who has clothed us with power from on high. What a joy it is to see Him with the eye of faith: the glorified Lord at God's right hand! How He meets all our needs as the great High Priest there, and as the Advocate with the Father! How He transforms our lives as we are changed in His image from glory to glory!

The lower springs point more to the activity of the Spirit here below. He dwells in us on earth and wants to fill our hearts and lives. What a stream of blessing will spring up in our lives if we continually refresh ourselves at this Source, if we act and walk in accordance with the free working of His will! What fruit will sprout from the land entrusted to our care, when the life-giving Spirit can pour out unimpeded into the dry and thirsty ground around us!

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