

The Road to Christmas

The Promised Land

Preparing to Enter the Land

After 40 years in the wilderness, the Israelites prepared to enter the “promised land.” Joshua would lead them into the land.¹ Moses delivered three great speeches to help prepare them (as recorded in Deuteronomy). Moses repeated much of “the Law” (earlier recorded in Exodus). In his final speech, Moses communicated the following:

- *What God will do:* Give them the land, and not forsake them (*Deuteronomy 31:1-6, 8*)
- *What the people must do:* Keep and obey the Law; be strong and courageous (*31:9-13*)

However, God knew that the people would prostitute themselves to other gods, forsake God, and break His covenant (*31:15-16*).

Receiving the Land²

Under Joshua’s leadership, the Israelites entered the land. Joshua 5-12 records the conquest of the land, and Joshua 13-21 records the distribution of the land among the tribes of Israel.

📖 “So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their ancestors, and they took possession of it and settled there. The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their ancestors. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hands. Not one of all the LORD’s good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.” (*Joshua 21:43-45, NIV*).³



Rules of the Road

Before Joshua’s death, he reminded the Israelites of their obligations. He told them to be strong, obey the Law, not serve or worship other gods, and hold tightly to God (*Joshua 23:6-8*). He told them, “*be very careful to love the LORD your God*” (*23:11*). If the Israelites failed to love God, they would lose their “rest,” and they would “perish” from the land (*23:12-13, 16*). The Israelites responded, “*We will serve the LORD our God and obey him*” (*24:24*).⁴

Not Following Directions

Israel followed God’s directions relatively well during Joshua’s life (*Joshua 24:32, Judges 2:7*), but things changed after his death.

¹ Leadership transferred from Moses to Joshua. Moses would not enter the land because he ‘broke faith’ with God at the waters of Meribah, and ‘did not uphold [His] holiness among the Israelites’ (Deuteronomy 32:48-52; cp. Numbers 20:2-13; Deuteronomy 1:37-38; 3:23-27; 4:21-22).

² We could say ‘taking the land,’ but the term ‘receiving’ better conveys the idea that God is ‘giving’ them the land (Joshua 1:2-3). Of course, the Israelites were involved in military conquest, which is disturbing to many. How should we view Israel’s conquests and wars? See Jay’s ‘War in the Old Testament’ on the ICF website.

³ The term ‘rest’ denotes ‘peace from enemies, security, well-being.’ From our perspective, we know this fulfillment was partial and temporal. Greater fulfillment would be seen in Old Testament history, and the ultimate fulfillment is yet to come (Hebrews 3:12-4:11). But the main point is the total faithfulness of God to His promises.

⁴ All Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version (NIV).

The book of Judges records the first 300 years after Joshua's death. During those days, the Israelites did evil, served and worshiped false gods, and forsook the Lord (*Judges 2:10-13*). "Everyone did as they saw fit" (*17:6; 21:25*). Thus God "handed them over" to their enemies. But God graciously raised up "judges" to deliver them from their enemies. However, they returned to their evil ways after the judges died (*2:14-19*). Israel did *not* seem to be progressing.

What about the promise?

In the dark period of the Judges, God was still working to fulfill His promise. We see this in the story of Ruth.⁵ This Moabite woman married a man named Boaz (an Israelite) and they had a son named Obed. Obed had a son named Jesse, and Jesse had a son named David, who would become the great king of Israel.

The Kingdom Road Begins

The last of the judges was a man named Samuel (*1 Samuel 7:6, 15-17*). He was not only a judge; he was a priest and a prophet (*3:20*). When Samuel grew old, the elders of Israel said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint us a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have" (*8:5*). Though their motivations were not good, God granted their request, and Saul was anointed as Israel's first king (*8:7, 22; 10:1*).



Saul started well, but began to disobey God's rule, so God rejected Saul as king (*13:8-14; 15:6-33*). God told Samuel to anoint a new king (*16:1*). Samuel went to the house of Jesse who had eight sons. Samuel saw the older sons and was impressed with their looks, but God told Samuel, "man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (*16:7b*). God chose the youngest son, named David (*16:11-12*).

The Kingdom Road Promise

Under King David, Israel prospered (*2 Samuel 5:10, 12*). Israel defeated its enemies and extended its territory. There was peace ("rest") in Israel (*7:1*). David wanted to build a "house" (dwelling place, temple) for God (*7:1-2*), but God told David that He had another idea (*7:4-17*).

God made David the following promise:

- God will establish a house for David (*7:11b*). The word "house" means "family; a line of descendants." God will also establish the throne of David's son's kingdom (*7:13*). David's "house" will be a dynasty.
- David's offspring will succeed him, and he will build a house for God (*7:12-13*).
- David's house and kingdom will endure forever. His throne will be established forever (*7:16*).⁶
- God will be David's offspring's father, and like a father, God will discipline him, but always love him (*7:14-15*).

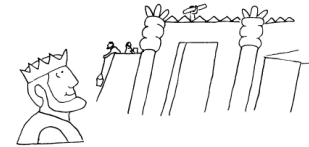
⁵ The book of Ruth records a beautiful story of God's providence involving a woman from Moab during the period of the Judges. It is significant that she is a Moabite, yet she serves the one true God.

⁶ David was from the tribe of Judah, whereas Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin. Promising David a dynasty is consistent with Jacob's blessing over 700 years earlier, when he said, "The scepter (royal authority) will not depart from Judah" (Genesis 49:10; cf. Numbers 24:17).

A "Great Nation"

David had a son named Solomon (*2 Samuel 12:24*), and Solomon succeeded David as king of Israel (*1 Kings 1:17, 34; 2:1-4*). During the reign of Solomon, Israel saw many of the promises to Abraham and David fulfilled.

- ✓ The people were as “numerous as the sand of the seashore.” (*1 Kings 4:20; cp. Genesis 15:5; 22:17*)
- ✓ Solomon ruled over the land “from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt.” (*1 Kings 4:21; cp. Genesis 15: 18*)
- ✓ David’s son (Solomon) became king and built a temple (house) for God. (*1 Kings 8:20*)
- ✓ At the dedication of the temple, Solomon said, “Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses” (*1 Kings 8:56, NIV*).



Israel was a “great nation” (*Genesis 12:2*). However, the great nation would not last.

The Road Divides and Collapses

“King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth” (*1 Kings 10:23*). However, Solomon took hundreds of wives who worshiped other gods. His heart was turned toward other gods, and away from the Lord (*11:1-6*). As a result of Solomon’s sin, Israel became a divided kingdom (*11:9-13*). Eventually, as a result of Israel’s continuing sins, the divided kingdom was destroyed and exiled (*2 Kings 17:7-23; 2 Chronicles 36:15-20*).

What about the promise? To be continued in Lesson 3.

Our Own Journey

1. When we serve or worship “other gods,” we rob the one true God of the trust and devotion that only He deserves. What kinds of “other gods” are in our world today?⁷
2. Worshiping and serving “other gods” leads in the wrong direction! What do we need to do to stop or avoid serving “other gods”? What practical steps can we take?⁸

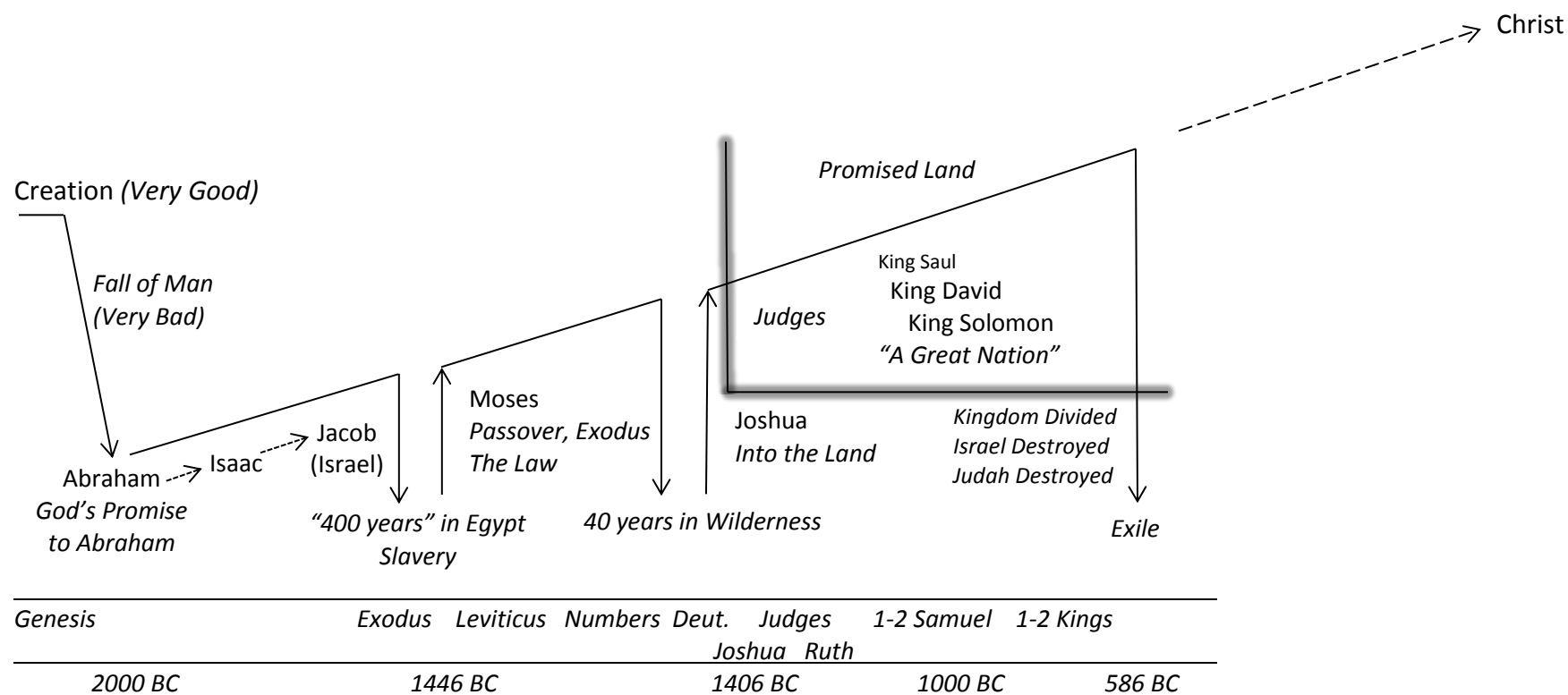


⁷ Of course, ‘other gods’ include the gods of other religions. But even professing Christians can serve other gods to varying degrees. Syncretism is common throughout the world (that is, the mixing of biblical belief and practice with other religions and philosophies). The Israelites were often guilty of syncretism rather than total abandonment of God. Even the person who does not believe in ‘gods’ serves ‘other gods’ because he/she serves something other than the one true God. ‘Other gods’ can apply to anything we trust or value more than God, such as power, status, career, position, influence, acclaim, achievement, competence or skill, success, approval, saving face, beauty, intelligence, romantic love, family, spouse, children, social standing, political or social cause, ideology, morality or virtue, etc.

⁸ The first step for the non-Christian is to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, since not worshiping the God of the Bible is worshiping ‘other gods.’ As Christians, we must still take steps to avoid serving ‘other gods.’ Jesus said, ‘Love the Lord your God with all our heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’ (Matthew 22:37).

Questions for Personal Reflection

- Are you serving and worshiping “other gods?” Or are you serving and worshiping the one true God? If you are seeking answers concerning the “one true God,” keep seeking!
- If you are a Christian, is there anything in your life that is robbing God of your full trust and/or devotion?
- Read Matthew 6:19-7:29 and sincerely ask God to have His way in your heart.



Road to Christmas - Big Picture
(Timeline Not to Scale)