

# The Promised Land

## On the Edge of the Promised Land

After leaving Egypt, Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness. The book of Numbers records this history. At the end of Numbers, Israel is on the plains of Moab, across the Jordan River from Jericho (*Numbers 33:48-49; 36:13*). Thus they are on the east side of the "Promised Land."

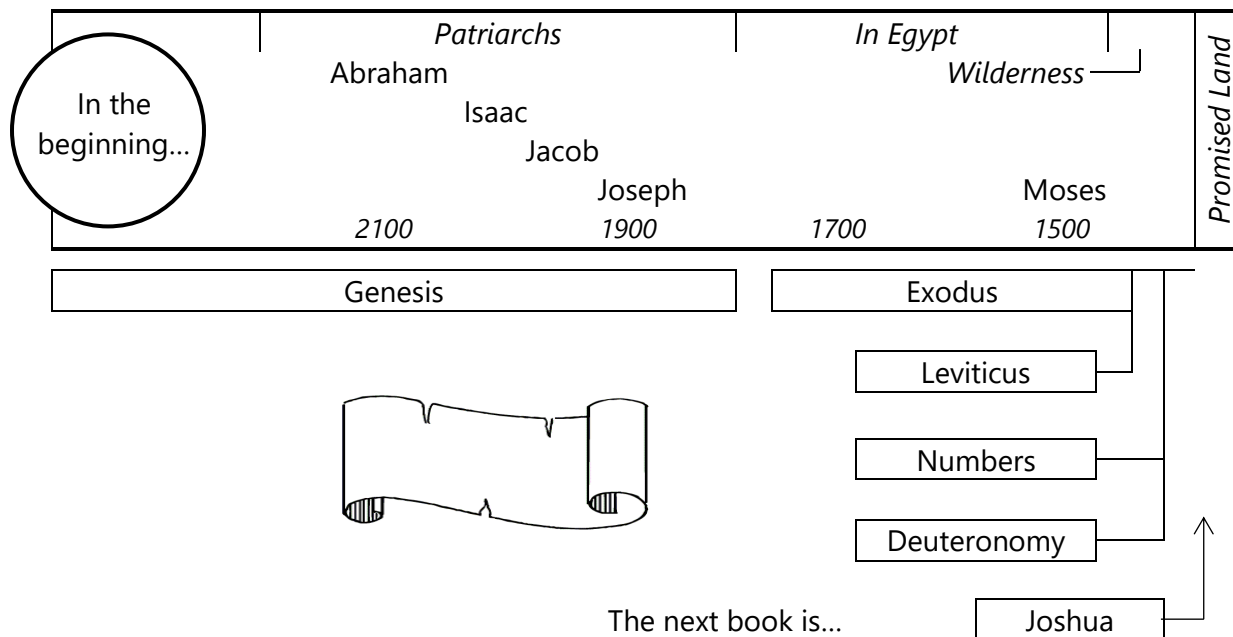
The next book, Deuteronomy, records three great speeches by Moses. Moses reviews Israel's wilderness experience and the Law. These speeches were given to prepare Israel for the Promised Land. Moses would not enter the Promised Land <sup>1</sup> (*Num. 20:2-13; Deut. 1:37; 4:21-22; 32:48-52*). Joshua would become the new leader (*Deut. 1:38*). Moses' final farewell speech is recorded at the end of Deuteronomy.



## Moses' Farewell Speech (*The last instructions of Israel's leader Moses*)

Promise: What God will do	Deut. 31:1-8	Give them the land. Go with them. Not forsake (leave, abandon) them.
What the people must do	Deut. 31:6-13	Know and obey the Law. Be strong and courageous.
What God knows the people will do ( <i>revealed to Moses</i> )	Deut. 31:15-16	Prostitute <sup>2</sup> themselves to other gods. Forsake God. Break His covenant.

## Where We Are in the Bible



<sup>1</sup> Moses saw the Promised Land from Mount Nebo (*Deut. 34:1-4*) but could not enter it. He died in Moab (*34:5*).

<sup>2</sup> 'prostitute' (*zanah*) – refers to Israel's unfaithfulness to God. Like an unfaithful wife who commits adultery or prostitution, Israel's involvement with other gods is a horrible act of unfaithfulness.

**God's Commission to Joshua** (*God's instruction to Israel's new leader*)

Read the verses below and fill in the blanks in the table.

Promise: What God will do	Joshua 1:1-5	
What the people must do	Joshua 1:6-9	
What the people <sup>3</sup> say they will do	Joshua 1:16-17	

**Entering the Promised Land**

Joshua 5–12 records the conquest (conquering, taking) of the land, and Joshua 13-21 records the distribution of the land among the tribes of Israel.<sup>4</sup>



**What God Does**

Read the verses below and fill in the blank in the table.

What God did	Joshua 21:43-45 <sup>5</sup>	
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**Settling in the Promised Land**

As Israel began to settle in the Promised Land, Joshua, "by then a very old man, summoned all Israel – their elders, leaders, judges and officials" (*Joshua 23:1b-2a*). After stating what God had done in fulfilling his promises (*23:3-5, 9-10; 24:1-13*), Joshua tells Israel what they must do.

<sup>3</sup> The specific Israelites speaking here are the 'Reubenites, Gadites and half-tribe of Manasseh' (*Joshua 1:12*) – the tribes allotted land on the east side of the Jordan. In any case, their response is probably representative of all Israel.

<sup>4</sup> Israel's conquest of Canaan may raise ethical questions. The Bible is clear that particular people were enemies of God, not just enemies of Israel. The battles for the 'promised land' were part of God's war, undertaken at a particular time in history according to God's program of redemption. What about other people and groups who have claimed to fight 'holy wars' for the sake of God? What is the difference between them and ancient Israel? This leads to other questions such as: Who is the true God, and what is his nature? Has God revealed himself and his will to human beings? Which supposed 'revelations' of God are genuine? Christians have good reason to believe that the God of the Bible is the one true God, and that all of his actions are righteous and just. See Jay's 'War in the Old Testament.'

<sup>5</sup> God gave Israel the Promised Land. He gave them 'rest' (*21:44*), meaning secure well-being; peace from enemies. 'Every [promise] was fulfilled' (*21:45*). From our perspective, we know that this stage of fulfillment of 'God's promise for the nations' was partial and temporal. Greater fulfillment would be seen in subsequent Bible history, and the ultimate fulfillment is yet to come (*Hebrews 3:12-4:11*). But the main point is this: At this stage of God's plan, He has done everything He promised to do. God is faithful to His promises.

### Joshua’s Farewell Speech

What the people must do	Joshua 23:6-8, 11	Be strong. Obey the Law. Don’t serve or worship other gods. Hold tightly to God. Be very careful to love God.
What God will do if they fail	Read Joshua 23:12-13, 16 and fill in the blank	
What the people say they will do	Joshua 24:24	Serve the LORD ( <i>not</i> other gods) and obey him.

### In the Promised Land, after Joshua’s Death

Israel did relatively well during Joshua’s life (*Joshua 24:31; Judges 2:7*), but what happened after his death? The next book, Judges, begins to answer that question.

What the people did (again and again)	Judges 2:10-13, 17, 19	Did evil. Served and worshiped the false gods of the region. Prostituted themselves to other gods. Forsook God.
What God did (again and again)	Judges 2:14-16, 18	“Handed them over” to their enemies; then, in his mercy and grace, raised up “judges” (leaders) to deliver them from their enemies.

### Discussion Questions

1. Israel was continuously told to know and obey God’s law. What particular concern was emphasized again and again (*Deut. 31:16; Joshua 23:7-8*)<sup>6</sup>
2. What are the consequences of serving and worshiping “other gods?” (*Joshua 23:12-13, 16; Judges 2:14-15*)<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The Ten Commandments began, ‘You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol’ (*Exodus 20:3-4; Deuteronomy 5:7-8*). The great concern was serving and worshiping ‘other gods’ – the false gods of the Canaanites and others in the land. God’s concern was *not* merely that Israel obey a set of rules. God was concerned about Israel’s relationship with Him. To forsake that relationship was like unfaithfulness in marriage.

<sup>7</sup> For the Israelites, it was God’s anger; God’s ‘handing them over’ to their enemies for their destruction, and ultimately expulsion from the Promised Land. In the New Testament, Paul writes concerning those who rejected worship of the true God, saying God ‘gave them over’ to their sinful desires, allowing sin to run its course to condemnation (*Romans 1:24-32*). This is the path for the person who has rejected the one true God. Does this have application to Christians? Like the Israelites found themselves in a counter-cultural situation, so do we. The ‘world and the devil,’ along with their false religions and self-seeking values, are enemies of God. When we accept their values, we are on the wrong side, the losing side, not the side of blessing. One day, the Christian will experience the complete ‘rest’ of God (in ‘heaven’). Until then, we need to ‘be strong and courageous’ and if we are faithful to God, we will experience victory and rest. Though partial now, it is the greatest rest we can know.

3. Despite the repeated reminders, Israel seemed to easily go astray and serve and worship "other gods." Why do you think this happened?<sup>8</sup>
  
4. When people serve or worship "other gods," they rob the one true God of the devotion that only He deserves. What types of things can rob God of devotion in our lives?<sup>9</sup>



5. In this lesson, what progress, if any, do you see in God's fulfillment of His promise to Abraham?<sup>10</sup>



### Reflection & Application

- Are you serving or worshiping "other gods" or are you worshiping the one true God? The Way to the one true God is Jesus Christ (*John 14:6*). Do you need to trust in Jesus?
- Brothers and sisters, what is robbing God of devotion in your life? To be fully devoted to God, what do you need to change in your life?
- Brothers and sisters, like the Israelites found themselves in a counter-cultural situation, so do we. The world has beliefs, values and behaviors that are opposed to God. Are you helping influence the world around you, or is the world influencing you and pulling you away from God? Read Matthew 5:13-16 and Romans 12:1-2 and commit to be a light in this world.

<sup>8</sup> One reason may be that some Israelites had never really broken away from the false religions of their forefathers in Egypt (*Joshua 24:14-15*). More directly, they were influenced by the practices of the surrounding culture. Israel was supposed to influence the culture, but they found themselves being influenced instead. Why were they attracted to false religions? Partly because they appealed to their fleshly desires. Canaanite religions, in particular, appealed to sexual desires. In general, people tend to focus on physical and material gratification.

<sup>9</sup> According to the Bible, if we are not Christians, we are serving 'other gods.' But even professing Christians can serve and worship other gods to varying degrees. Syncretism is common throughout the world (that is, the mixing of Christian belief and practice with other religions and philosophies). The Israelites were often guilty of syncretism rather than total abandonment of God. True worship is worship of the one true God as He has revealed Himself in His word (the Bible). One definition of 'god' is anything of supreme value in our lives. We may say that the Lord is God, but we may actually value position, status, money, possessions, education, or other pursuits more.

<sup>10</sup> Israel has entered the Promised Land, which is good. However, in the book of Judges, everyone is 'doing as they see fit' (*Judges 17:6; 21:25*), which is *not* good! But God is still working to fulfill His promise. We see this in the next book of the Bible, Ruth. Ruth is a beautiful story of God's providence involving a young woman from Moab. Though she is a Moabite (not an Israelite), she serves the one true God. She marries a man named Boaz (an Israelite) and they have a son named Obed, who has a son named Jesse, who has a son named David, who would become the great king of Israel. It is through King David that 'God's promise for the nations' would continue to be fulfilled.