

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*).
- ❑ Deuteronomy¹ records three great speeches by Moses. Moses reviews Israel's wilderness history and the Law. These speeches were given to prepare Israel for the Promised Land.
- ❑ Moses would not enter the Promised Land² (*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 (*Deut. 29-33*).



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

Promise: What God will do	Deuteronomy 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 ³ themselves to other gods. Forsake God. Break His covenant.

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

Promise: What God will do	Read Joshua 1:1-5	
What the people must do	Read Joshua 1:6-9	
What the people ⁴ say they will do	Read Joshua 1:16-17	Obey.



Entering the Promised 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.⁵

¹ The name "Deuteronomy" literally means "second law." The name arose from an apparent mistranslation of the phrase "copy/repetition of this law" in the Greek *Septuagint*, Deut. 17:18. The name is somewhat misleading because the book does not record a second law, but rather *repeats* much of the law recorded in the previous books. Deuteronomy serves as a renewal of the covenant between God and His people prior to their entry into the land.

² Moses saw the Promised Land from Mount Nebo (Deut. 34:1-4) but could not enter it. He died in Moab (34:5).

³ "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.

⁴ 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.

⁵ Israel's conquest of Canaan raises ethical questions. See Jay's "War in the Old Testament" for more information.

What God Does

What God did	Read Joshua 21:43-45 ⁶	
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Settling in the Promised Land

As Israel began to settle in the Promised Land, Joshua, “by then old and well advanced in years, 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.

Joshua’s Farewell Speech

What the people must do	Read Joshua 23:6-8, 11	Be strong. Obey the Law. Do not 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	Expel them from the land.
What the people say they will do	Read Joshua 24:24	Serve the LORD (not 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 book of Judges records the 300 years (more or less) after Joshua’s death.

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” to deliver them from their enemies.
What God <i>also</i> did	Ruth	See question 5.

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; Judges 2:11-13, 17, 19*)?⁷

⁶ 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.

⁷ The great concern was serving and worshiping “other gods” – the false gods of the Canaanites and others in the land. 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). God’s concern was *not* that Israel merely obey a set of rules. God was concerned about Israel’s relationship with Him. To forsake that relationship was like unfaithfulness in marriage.

2. Despite the repeated reminders, Israel seemed to easily go astray and serve and worship “other gods.” Why do you think this happened?⁸
3. When a person serves or worships “other gods,” he/she robs the one true God of the devotion that only He deserves. What types of things can rob God of devotion in our lives?⁹



4. What are the consequences of serving and worshipping “other gods?” (*Deut. 31:17-18; Joshua 23:12-13, 16; Judges 2:14-15; Romans 1:18-32*)¹⁰

Questions for Personal Reflection

- Are you serving or worshipping “other gods” or the one true God?
 - If you are a Christian, what is robbing God of devotion in your life? What do you need to change in your life in order to be fully devoted to God?
5. In the Scripture covered today, what progress, if any, do you see in God’s fulfillment of His promise to Abraham?¹¹



⁸ 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 carnal human desires. Canaanite religions, in particular, appealed to sexual desires. It is the common tendency of people to focus on physical and material gratification.

⁹ 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. 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.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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 story of Ruth. It 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.