

The Promised Land: Joshua 1:1-9

Ben Reaoch, Three Rivers Grace Church

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Do you ever feel like you're in the wilderness? Do you ever feel like your life is wandering? Like you're waiting and waiting and waiting for something to actually turn out well? And you feel weary in your waiting? Your weary body, your weary soul, aches for rest. You want there to be peace in the world, peace in your thoughts and attitude. You want to find that place, that home, where everything will be in harmony, where there will be peace and security and enjoyment, and where nothing will ever threaten to disrupt that restful dwelling.

One area of life where I feel that yearning for rest is in the midst of the daily chores of life, when I feel frustrated by whatever it is in my household that's not working the way it should. A vehicle or an appliance that is breaking down, technology that can be very helpful, but can also be infuriating if it's not working right. It's that 2nd law of thermodynamics—entropy—that things in this fallen, broken world will move from a state of order to disorder if left to themselves.

When Stacy and I are considering different house projects that could be done, I wish I could say something like, "How about we just wait a couple years, and then I think the paint on those walls will look better." "I think the appliances will improve over time." "I think the garage will become more organized if we just leave it alone for a few months." "I think the windows will become more energy-efficient with age." Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way, at least not in my house. And in those moments of petty frustration I feel that longing for an eternal home where nothing ever breaks down, where everything works perfectly and efficiently, where there are no defects and no decay.

On a more significant level, I feel this sense of unrest and a longing for true rest when I see news headlines about the latest terrorist strike, when I read about fighting that is going on in the world, when I think of the senseless violence that happens in our neighborhoods. I feel it when I consider the horrific fact that there are millions of slaves in the world today. It's almost unbearable to think about. Our world is deeply broken. It is tearing itself apart. There is discord, decay, destruction.

And then on yet another level, in a very personal way, I feel the brokenness inside of me. The brokenness, the unrest, is

not just out there in a violent world, in a world where so many things are not as they should be. I can point to my own life, my own actions, my own sinful thoughts and attitudes, and I know that things are not as they should be. I saw this vividly this week when I was irrationally angry because of things not working as they should. A clothes dryer that wasn't working right, and various other things like that, made me so angry and miserable. It was total foolishness. I thought of one of Jonathan Edwards' resolutions. You know, Jonathan Edwards, the great American preacher and theologian of the 1700s, he had all these very wise resolutions for his life. One of them went like this . . . Resolved, never to suffer the least motions of anger towards irrational beings. He didn't have a washer or dryer, but if he did, they would fit into that category. Resolved: never to get angry at broken appliances or slow computers or a nail that won't go in the right way. I had to repent of my foolish anger and my miserable attitude.

The world is not as it should be. I am not as I should be. As a believer in Jesus Christ, the Good News I can cling to each day is the fact that He has redeemed me from my bondage to sin. That brokenness I sense within myself is not the final word. Something has changed, and is changing.

But I'm not home yet. That's the ache within the heart of every Christian. We're redeemed, but we're not yet at rest. We've been set free from slavery, but we've not yet arrived in that peaceful, restful dwelling place that has been promised to us. The Lord has brought us out of Egypt, but we're not yet in the Promised Land. And therefore so much of this life can seem like we're wandering in the wilderness. We are sojourners in this land. This is not our home. We're just passing through. And what keeps us going is the Promised Land out in front of us, the promise of that eternal, heavenly rest that we will inherit someday.

We're starting a sermon series in the Old Testament book of Joshua today, and I'm really excited to delve into this book. It's a captivating book, filled with action-packed narratives. It's also a complicated book, as it presents us with some difficult questions about war and holy war. We'll have to wrestle with those questions as we come to them.

But for this morning I want to begin this study by tracing some things through the Old Testament books leading up to Joshua. I want to set the stage. I want us to remember the storyline of Scripture that is the background to the events in Joshua.

So we're going to rewind to the beginning of Genesis and get a birds-eye view of the Pentateuch (the first 5 books—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). And what we'll be focusing on specifically is the promise of the land. The Promised Land is mentioned repeatedly. It's in view. It's being anticipated. I want us to feel that anticipation so that as we embark on this study of Joshua we can appreciate the gravity of what's happening as the Israelites finally enter Canaan. This is no small event. It's the fruition of promises that had been given to Abraham many, many generations before this, and repeated again and again down through those generations.

And I want us to feel this anticipation ourselves. Because, as we'll need to understand, Canaan was not the ultimate fulfillment of those promises. It was a land flowing with milk and honey, but God's people did not remain there forever. They eventually got kicked out because of their disobedience.

But there is a Promised Land, an eternal rest, an eternal home, awaiting those who trust in Jesus Christ. This is the encouragement to us today. We're looking for a home. We're looking for a land where we can live in peace forever. And that's the glorious hope we look forward to as we contemplate God's promises to His people to give them a land.

This sermon is going to begin in Genesis 1 and conclude in Revelation 22. And believe it or not we'll be done before lunch. I mainly want to tell you the story of God's people and the promises He made to them regarding the Promised Land. Maybe this week you'll want to thumb through the pages of Genesis through Deuteronomy to recall these events in more detail. Or another idea, if you have kids (or even if you don't have kids) is to pick up a children's Bible that summarizes these stories. In fact, I did that this week as part of my study.

Stacy found me sitting on the couch with 3 different picture Bibles spread around me. She said, "Are you having your devotions?" Then our son Noah walked in and wondered what I was doing. I said, "sermon prep." So now you know. Those are my real study Bibles. And they are helpful.

I had read what the biblical scholars had to say about themes in the Pentateuch, and specifically about the land. And that reading was, of course, insightful. But *The Big Picture Story Bible* and *The Jesus Storybook Bible* helped me about as much as anything. And also a little book by Jim Hamilton called, *The Bible's Big Story: Salvation History for Kids*, was helpful as well.

So let's get into the story. This is a fascinating story. And it's our story. If you're part of the people of God, then this is part of your heritage. And, like I already said, the promises made so long ago are promises we still cling to today as we look forward to heaven, the ultimate Promised Land.

I'm going to use 7 one-word headings to give structure to the story I want to share with you—like 7 scenes in a play. They are: Eden, exile, Abraham, Egypt, Exodus, Wilderness, and then lastly we'll skip to the very big picture and talk about eternity.

Eden

Our story this morning begins in the Garden of Eden. God created out of nothing. He miraculously breathed life into Adam and Eve, and He gave them a land—a very good land—where they could live and flourish. He gave them every good thing to enjoy. It was paradise. Things were not yet broken. So there was peace and tranquility, harmony and happiness. It was a wonderful place.

Kids, think of your very favorite park. Think of a beautiful, warm afternoon (this takes some imagination on a day like today). Picture the tall trees casting their shade on the green grass, with branches that are great for climbing. There are wide open spaces to run and play, to ride your bike, to get on swings and slides, to play ball with your friends, or just sit and talk. And there's a gently flowing river with crystal clear water, perfect for swimming. Maybe you've enjoyed some great summer afternoons like that.

But now imagine this. Imagine that in this park it's impossible to fall and scrape your knee. That never happens. And you don't have to wear sunscreen because it's impossible to get a sunburn. And you don't have to wear shoes because there's nothing there that could hurt your feet. And your parents have no concern when you get in the water, because nobody ever gets hurt.

Even beyond the physical safety of this place, there's also emotional and relational safety. Your friends will never say anything that hurts your feelings. There are no arguments, no power struggles, no disagreements about which game we should play. Nobody is left out or picked last for a team. There are no cliques, no unhealthy rivalries.

Well, that's a taste of what the Garden of Eden was like. And it's also a taste of what heaven will be like. What Adam and Eve experienced in that garden was a preview of what we look forward to in heaven. They were in a land of paradise.

Exile

But then something really bad happened. This brings us to our second scene in the play. Exile. Exile is when you get kicked out of your land. That's what happened to Adam and Eve. They disobeyed God. God had given them every good thing to enjoy, and had given them just one restriction. Don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It doesn't seem like that would be a problem when there are plenty of other trees to eat from. It's not like they were going hungry. Not at all! God had provided abundantly.

But the serpent, the Devil, came and tempted them and caused them to doubt God's goodness. And they both rebelled against God by eating from that tree which they were commanded not to eat from.

Because of their disobedience they had to leave that land of paradise. They were exiled from Eden. They were forced out of their peaceful, restful home into the harsh world which was now infected by sin.

In those early chapters of Genesis we see the massive impact of sin on humanity and the world. Things got so bad so quickly that God was compelled to flood the earth and start anew with Noah and his family.

But sin was still in the world, and people continued to rebel against God. The tower of Babel is a striking example of this. This group of people wanted to make a name for themselves, wanted to establish a land, a home, for themselves. They attempted to build a city with a great tower, but their ambition was entirely self-centered rather than God-centered. So God punished them by exiling them from that place. He confused their languages and dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

These are sad scenes. Desperate, depraved people yearning for a home, but left wandering in the wilderness of their own rebellion.

But next we come to a hopeful scene as we read God's promise to Abraham.

Abraham

Abram, later called Abraham, was chosen by God to be the father of many nations. He didn't deserve this. It's a picture of God's sovereign grace. This is what we read at the beginning of Genesis 12:

“Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”” (Genesis 12:1–3, ESV)

There’s the promise of a land, among other great things. But notice that the Lord is promising to take Abram to a land. He’s going to give him a home. In the very next chapter the Lord allows Abram to see the land. There was strife between Abram and his nephew Lot, so they decided to go their separate ways. Abram said to Lot, You choose which way you want to go, and then I’ll go the other way.

Lot decided to journey east and settled in Sodom, which didn’t go well for him. Abram settled in Canaan. And this is what the Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, *“Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever.”* (Genesis 13:14–15, ESV)

The Lord adds more detail to that promise in chapter 15, revealing that Abraham’s descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there (that is, slaves), and they will be afflicted for four hundred years (Genesis 15:13).

The promise of the land is reiterated to Abraham’s descendants. In Genesis 26 the Lord speaks to Isaac saying, “to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father” (Genesis 26:3). Then to Jacob, in chapter 28, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring” (Genesis 28:13). And again to Jacob, when the Lord changed his name to Israel, in Genesis 35, “The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you” (Genesis 35:12).

Egypt

Most of the rest of Genesis tells the story of Joseph, Israel’s favored son. And this is the story that involves the transition to Egypt. Through a course of events that involved wicked sinful actions on the part of Joseph’s brothers, but were also part of God’s good and sovereign plan, Joseph ended up in Egypt.

Joseph was the one who received the coat of many colors from his father. The other brothers hated Joseph because he was “the favored one.” They hated him so much they conspired to sell him into slavery. That’s how Joseph ended up in Egypt. He was a servant to Potiphar, the captain of the guard. But then Potiphar’s wife, who was trying seduce Joseph (to no avail), accused him of misconduct which landed him in prison.

But then God helped Joseph to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams, and Joseph became second in command. He was eventually reunited with his brothers when they came to Egypt to get food during the famine. The family then moved to Egypt and settled in the land of Goshen. Joseph forgave his brothers and said, “you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Genesis 50:20).

In the closing paragraph of Genesis, Joseph is on his deathbed, and he says to his brothers, *“I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”* (Genesis 50:24)

At this point they are not in the land, but they are anticipating a return to the land. But then begins the 400 year time of bondage, predicted back in Genesis 15. The book of Exodus opens with the sad news that a different king rose to power in Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he ordered that the Israelites, who were now great in number, should be treated as slaves. The people cried out to the Lord. They didn’t want to be in this land of slavery any longer. They longed for their own land, where they could be free.

Exodus

And then God sent Moses, and this brings us to the next chapter in the narrative—the Exodus. Moses is a Christ-figure here. He is the one God ordained to be a deliverer. At the burning bush the Lord spoke to Moses and said,

“I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.” (Exodus 3:7–8)

Through the 10 plagues, culminating in the Passover, the Lord delivered His people from bondage in Egypt. The Lord used Moses to lead the people out of that land of slavery. They exited that land of chains. It was the exodus. They were now on their way to the Promised Land.

The Exodus is a pivotal event in the Pentateuch . . . in all of Scripture, really. God moved powerfully, miraculously, to free His people. We think of the parting of the Red Sea, and what a spectacular thing it must have been to witness that. For the Israelites to pass through on dry ground, and then to look back and see the waters collapse on the Pharaoh's men who were chasing them. What an amazing picture of miraculous deliverance.

It's not only an historical event. It's a spiritual portrait of salvation. That's our story as well—all of us who are covered by the blood of the Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ. We were in bondage to sin, entrapped in the things of this world. But God brought us out of that. And the spiritual significance of what God has done in our lives is no less astounding than the parting of the Red Sea.

The Apostle Paul writes in the New Testament book of Romans, in chapter 6,

“But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.” (Romans 6:17–18, ESV)

God has brought us out of Egypt to make us His own. We now belong to Him. We must follow Him and obey His orders. To do so is true freedom.

Wilderness

The next sad part of the story takes place in the wilderness. We read of God's people grumbling and complaining and even make a golden calf to worship as an idol. All this right on the heels of them witnessing God's supernatural deliverance. Their rebellion incited God's wrath against them. He wanted to destroy them. But Moses interceded for the people. He is like Christ in that way, diverting God's wrath from destroying the sinful people who deserve punishment.

Numbers 14 is one of the places where the Lord is ready to disown His people. The spies had been sent into the land, but only Caleb and Joshua trusted that the Lord could surely give them the land. All the other spies were afraid. They said, we felt like grasshoppers compared to them. They're huge! They're strong!

There's no way we can defeat them! And so the people rebelled. They said, we might as well die in this wilderness. We might as well have died in Egypt. That would be better than dying by the sword. They wanted to choose a new leader and head back to Egypt!

“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.’” (Numbers 14:11–12, ESV)

But then Moses pleaded for their pardon, and the Lord responded with grace, but also consequences. He did not disinherit them, but He did punish the rebellious generation. A little bit later in that chapter we read:

“And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, ‘How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me? I have heard the grumblings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against me. Say to them, ‘As I live, declares the LORD, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.’” (Numbers 14:26–30, ESV)

This is the sadness of the wilderness wanderings. God was taking them to the Promised Land, but they refused to enter. They had seen the Lord's power with their own eyes, but they didn't believe Him in their hearts. They didn't trust His promises. And therefore they were not allowed to enter His rest (see Hebrews 3).

When we come to the book of Deuteronomy, the last book in the Pentateuch, the book right before Joshua, what we have is Moses' final sermons to the Israelites before they are to enter the Promised Land. The forty years have come to an end. That first generation has been wiped out (see Deuteronomy 2:15-16). And now Moses gives the people a final word before they proceed into Canaan and he is only allowed to look on.

One of the things Moses emphasizes is the undeserved favor of God upon them. He wants the people to realize that they do not deserve this Promised Land.

“And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give

you—with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” (Deuteronomy 6:10–12, ESV)

“It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 7:7–8, ESV)

““Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, ‘It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,’ whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you. Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” (Deuteronomy 9:4–5, ESV)

So remember you’re not receiving this reward because of your goodness but because of God’s grace.

Well, we’ve spent some time looking at 6 scenes so far related to this theme of Promised Land. Adam and Eve were given a land of paradise: Eden. Because of their sin they were exiled from that land. The Lord promised a land to Abraham and his descendants. Those descendants ended up in Egypt, and were then made slaves in Egypt. But then God brought them out of Egypt in the Exodus. And after 40 years in the wilderness it was finally time to enter the Promised Land.

That brings us to the opening of the book of Joshua, where we will pick up the story next Sunday.

Eternity

But the last scene I want us to peek at before we close today is in the last chapter of the Bible. Here we have a glimpse into eternity—the eternal rest, eternal home, eternal land, eternal city, where God’s people will dwell with Him in complete peace and without anything to disrupt our worship of Him.

Think back to what Adam and Eve enjoyed in Eden. And look forward to what we will enjoy in our eternal Promised Land.

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.” (Revelation 22:1–5, ESV)