

THE BIG JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation



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Olive trees in Israel – an image of the Promised Land.

eight ► From Sinai to Solomon

Introduction and Questions

God's people spent almost a year encamped at Mount Sinai. There God brought His people into covenant with Himself and gave them His Law. And there they constructed His new home, the Tabernacle. When all was complete, God moved in and dwelt among His people.

Wandering in the wilderness

God provided for His people in the wilderness in every way. But even before they got there – even before the Exodus, in fact - God's people complained. These grumblings were only the opening fusillade. God's people tested His patience for 40 long years with their complaints and rebellion.

After celebrating their second Passover, Israel broke camp, bound for the Promised Land. Along the way, Moses sent 12 men to spy out the land. Two, Caleb and Joshua, were confident that God would give them victory. The other ten weren't, and their scepticism won the day. The people spoke of selecting a leader to take them back to Egypt. They had forgotten what bondage they had suffered there.

So God decreed that every man *“able to go to war”* (Numbers 1.3) who was numbered in the recent census would die in the wilderness. For the next 38 years, God's people wandered in the desert, till those faithless warriors had perished. But the women and children and those not in military service would enter the land alongside Caleb and Joshua.

Poised for possession

After 38 weary years, God's people were encamped east of the Jordan, overlooking Jericho, poised for conquest. Terrified, Balak, king of the Moabites, hired the heathen prophet Balaam to curse God's people. But instead, Balaam

blessed them in some of the most wonderful oracles in Scripture (Numbers 23.7-10,18-24, 24.3-9,15-24).

And there, east of Jordan, Moses preached to Israel and pronounced the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience. The covenant between God and His people was renewed. Just as Adam and Eve had the life-defining choice between the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, so Moses set before Israel the life-defining choice of *"life and death, blessing and curse"* (Deuteronomy 30.19). If they obeyed God they would enjoy great blessing. If they rejected Him, they would suffer trouble and distress and be driven into exile, just as Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden.

Conquest



[The Seven Trumpets of Jericho](#) courtesy of [The Jewish Museum, New York City](#)

The Seven Trumpets of Jericho painted by James Jacques Joseph Tissot (1836-1902) (held at The Jewish Museum, New York City). *"And the Lord said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, . . . You shall march round the city, all the men of war going round the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march round the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets."* (Joshua 6.2-4).

Then the people crossed Jordan (perhaps around 1406BC). God held back the waters. It was another Exodus.

God commanded His people to utterly destroy the inhabitants of the land. First, they captured Jericho and Ai. This gave them a base in the centre of the land. After a campaign in the south and in the north, the land enjoyed *"rest from war"* (Joshua 11.23). *"Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass."* (Joshua 21.45). God is faithful!

Before his death, Joshua - like Moses before him - reminded Israel of their history, and urged them to be faithful to God. The people continued to serve God until all the elders who outlived Joshua had died.

Descent into darkness

But much land remained in enemy hands. The tribes of Israel began to mop up the remaining Canaanites. After a good start, things began to go badly awry. They failed to destroy the Canaanites and their pagan altars. That spelt disaster.

Judges 2.11-19 sums up what happened again and again: (1) Israel abandoned God and served pagan gods; (2) God gave them over to their enemies, who oppressed and afflicted them; (3) the people cried to God; (4) God gave them a *"judge"*, or deliverer, through whom God defeated their enemies. After a period of peace, the Israelites fell back into idolatry and the cycle was repeated. This went on for as many as 300 years or more.

The end of the book of Judges paints a picture of utter religious and moral degradation. Judges 19.16-30 must be the most sickening story in the entire

history of God's people. It involved homosexuality and gang-rape. In Stephen Dempster's words, "Israel has become Sodom!"

Judges ends with this lament: *"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."* (Judges 17.6, 21.25). God's people were like Adam and Eve. They chose for themselves what they thought was right.

Back from the brink

But even in these darkest of times, God was working His purposes out. The book of Ruth - set in the time of the judges - ends with a Gentile, Ruth, becoming great-grandmother to a great king, David, and ancestor of Jesus.

Then Samuel was born (around 1100BC). Last of the judges, he was also a prophet. He entered service under the high priest Eli at the Tabernacle in Shiloh. Eli was weak and his sons were greedy and immoral. But God spoke to His people through Samuel.

Then an event took place that shook Israel: the Philistines defeated them and captured the Ark of the Covenant. This was the first time the Ark had ever fallen into enemy hands. God plagued the Philistines and they sent it back. Then something wonderful happened: 20 years pass by and we find the nation repentant. In 1 Samuel 7.2 we read: *"all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD"*. Seeing their godly sorrow (compare 2 Corinthians 7.10) Samuel led the people in an act of spiritual renewal. They repented, put away their idols, and bound themselves again to God in covenant. Their old enemies, the Philistines, drew near to attack. But God *"threw them into confusion"* and they were *"routed before Israel"* (1 Samuel 7.10-11).

The search for a king

Righteous Samuel judged Israel for the rest of his life. But his sons were unfit for office. What would happen when he died? Israel's elders demand a king *"to judge us like all the nations"* (1 Samuel 8.4-5). But God tells them that, in doing so, they have rejected Him from being King over them.

God gives them king Saul, who begins to reign around 1050BC. He's tall and impressive and begins well. But Saul is disobedient and God has to reject him. So God tells Samuel to anoint another man to replace Saul - *"a man after [God's] own heart"* (1 Samuel 13.14). That man is David. After Saul's death (around

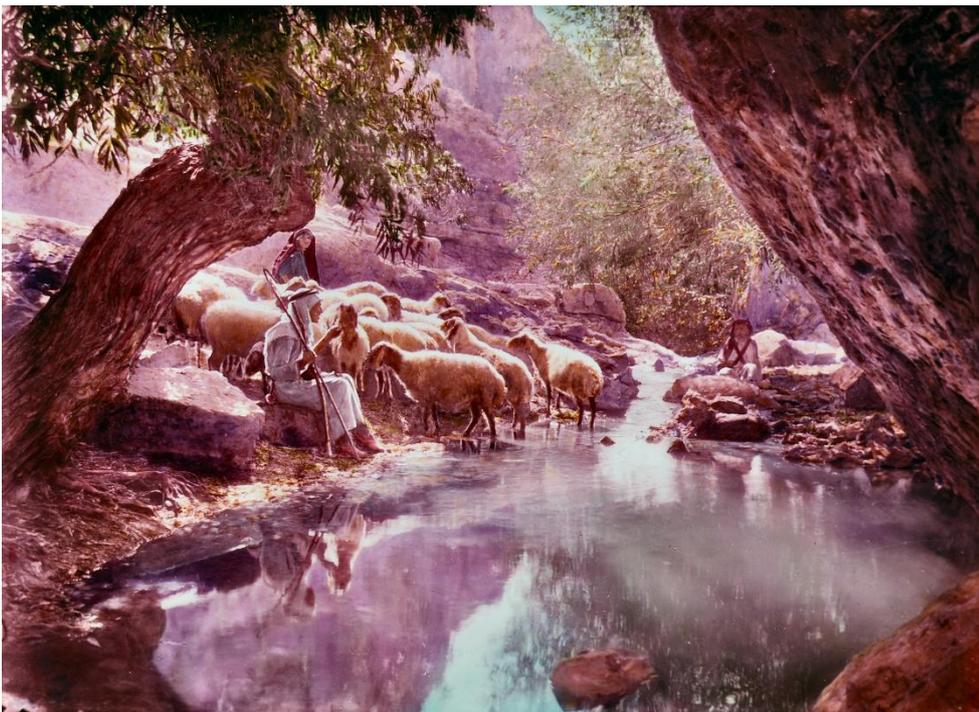


Image © Life in the Holy Land.com

God said to David through the prophet Nathan: *"I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel"* (2 Samuel 7.8). An early photograph created between 1900 and 1920, one of a set illustrating Psalm 23, one of the psalms that David wrote.

1010BC), he's proclaimed king by Judah at Hebron and, some years later, by all Israel.

David was God's warrior king. He's victorious over the house of Saul. He captures Jerusalem and makes it his capital. He defeats the enemies of God's people - Philistines, Moabites, Aramaeans, Edomites, Ammonites and Amalekites. David completed the conquest.

God's covenant with David

David wanted to replace God's sanctuary – by then relocated to Jerusalem - with a Temple. So God sends Nathan to speak to David (2 Samuel 7.4-17, 1 Chronicles 17.3-15). This is a key Bible prophecy. God made these tremendous promises:

- He will give His people a secure place of their own to live. The wicked won't oppress them any more.
- He will build David a "house" - meaning a royal dynasty – that will never be extinguished.
- David's offspring will build God a house.

These promises are called the **Davidic Covenant**. On one level they were fulfilled through David's son Solomon and his dynasty. On another level they're fulfilled through Jesus Christ, the great king of David's line.

David's sin

Time and again, when things begin to look really hopeful for God's people in the Old Testament, sin enters. The echo of Nathan's remarkable prophecy hardly dies away before David commits adultery with Bathsheba, and arranges for her husband to be slain in battle. David repents, and God forgives him. But he and his family suffer trouble and strife.

King Solomon

But God's promises to David stand secure. Solomon is proclaimed king (around 970BC). Israel enters a period of peace and prosperity unequalled before or since.

Bible passages and questions

- ❗ Read Deuteronomy 8.7-10, 11.11-12, 28.1, 29.22-28, 2 Samuel 7.23, 1 Kings 4.34 and Ezekiel 5.5. Also look at a world map or globe. God could – in theory – have gathered a people and placed them in a land anywhere in the world. But he chose to locate His people in Canaan. What's significant about this land?
- ❗ Read Balaam's prophecies (Numbers 23.7-10, 23.18-24, 24.3-9, 23.15-24). What do these prophecies mean?
- ❗ Read Genesis 15.12-21, Deuteronomy 7.1-5, 12.1-4, 29-31. God commanded His people to slay the Canaanites. Why did He command this?
- ❗ Read Deuteronomy 6.4-15, 30.11-20, Joshua 1.1-9, Judges 2.6-23, 10.6, 21.25, Psalm 106.34-46. Why did everything go so wrong with God's people?
- ❗ Read Genesis 17.3-6, Deuteronomy 17.14-20, 1 Samuel 8.1-22, Psalm 78.70-72. Why was God displeased with His people for asking for a king?
- ❗ Read 2 Samuel 7.1-17. How were these promises fulfilled? And what is God's key promise here?