

Home Land - Three Exoduses

Turn to Genesis 12, please. We'll look at several of Scriptures today; I intend to keep you busy. It will begin in Genesis 12.

Today we'll cover another turning point in the history of Israel, another part of their history that affected their lives from then on. It's the land, Israel and the land. God gave Israel a particular piece of land, and said it would be theirs forever.

I have been perplexed as to how I would teach this. Israel and their land is a huge piece of the OT story, that's clear; but what has it to do with us? How does that apply to us?

The other OT turning points all apply to us, too, so that Israel's story becomes our story also. But it has not been so clear to me how that might happen with Israel and their land.

There is an old-fashioned picture of the Christian life, a picture more common 50 years ago than now, that used the exodus as a picture of being a child of God.

Coming to Christ, becoming a child of God, was like coming out of Egypt. Egypt was the world, and the slavery of sin, and coming out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea was like being forgiven becoming a believer.

Living as a child of God was like the 40 years Israel wandered in the wilderness, eating manna that God gave, and looking forward to the Promised Land. And crossing the Jordan River and entering into Canaan was dying and going to heaven.

I haven't heard that for quite a while, but when I was young I heard that more often. I found out in the last week that something like that is true. Jesus *is* leading another exodus. We *are* again being taken out of slavery in Egypt into God's Promised Land.

The Story Begins in Eden - In Eden there was a garden that God prepared for the people. The man needed to till the ground and work the garden, but he did not begin it. God made it a good place, and the people lived there for a while.

The garden was the land, their land, Adam and Eve's land, a good land, and they were there and God was there. The people sinned, and so they were put out of their land.

God Promised to Give Abraham a Land - When God called Abraham in Genesis, he was calling in out of one land into another land. Gen 12:1 is very clear about this.

Gen 12:1 - *The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.*

Gen 12:6-7 - *Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.*

This promise is repeated in more detail in Gen 13:14-17, and occurs several times after that also in Abraham's life, and also his son Isaac, and Isaac's son Jacob.

So Abraham and Isaac and Jacob lived their whole lives in this place, but it was not theirs. They guests, nomads, renters. God promised them again and again that it would belong to their family some day - that's why it's called "the Promised Land" - but as long as they lived, it was never their land.

In Genesis 3, the people sinned and were put out of the garden of Eden, and in Genesis 12 God called Abraham to leave his land and go to the land that God would show him, because God was going to give Abraham that land.

I want you to connect those a little bit. One, God puts his people out of the garden, and two, 9 chapters later God promises his people a land. Ask yourself the question if there might not be some connection between those two.

In Genesis 37 we read how Joseph's brothers sold him to slave traders who were going to Egypt, and Joseph became a slave in Egypt, and in Genesis 46 Jacob their father and the whole family moved to Egypt, because of the famine.

Joseph's Bones - Gen 50:24-25 - *Then Joseph said to his brother Israelites, "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." ²⁵ And Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place." See Exodus 13:19 for Moses taking Joseph's bones.*

This is the very end of Genesis, only one closing verse after this. The point here is not the bones of Joseph, it is the promise of a land. Joseph did want his bones to go back to Canaan, but Genesis ends this way to remind us about the land, about the unfulfilled promise of the land.

Genesis begins with God's people in a garden, and it ends by using Joseph's words about his bones to remind us that God has promised his people land that he's not yet given.

In the book of Exodus, some 400 years later, we read how Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. They crossed the Red Sea, and traveled into the wilderness for three months to get to Sinai, where they met God, and then made the Tabernacle.

Leviticus is more about what happened at the bottom of Mt Sinai. They were there about a year. Then in Numbers they started to travel again. God was ready to take them into Canaan, Palestine as we call it today, but Israel rebelled.

Spies came back from Canaan and said the land is wonderful but the people are huge and the cities have high walls and we don't have a chance. So Israel decided not to go in.

God said, you've disobeyed me and tested me like this ten times now. You will all wander in the wilderness for 40 years, until everyone that's now older than 20 dies. And then I will take your children into Palestine, and give it to them. Now, we jump 40 years:

Joshua Leads them In: First Exodus - Josh 1:1-5 - After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ² "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. ³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. ⁵ No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

The book of Joshua is the story of God giving Israel the land that he promised to Abraham.

Josh 21:43-44 - So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their ancestors, and they took possession of it and settled there. ⁴⁴ 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.

[Show on the overhead map the journey of Abraham from Ur to Haran to Canaan, and the journey of Israel from Egypt to the Sinai wilderness across the Jordan to Palestine.]

So far, the story has been about Israel. What does that have to do with us? I want now to connect this story more closely with the Garden of Eden, because if this story connects with Eden it becomes our story, too. Because Eden is about all people, not just Israel.

At the very end of the book of Joshua, God says this to Israel about the Promised Land: Josh 24:13 - *So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.*

Now I will remind you about the way God cursed the land as the first people left Eden: Gen 3:17-19 *To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."*

Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground

Josh 24:13 - *So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.*

God is working against his own curse. God does not want his people, who sinned and brought on themselves the curse on the land, to live under the consequences of that curse on the land. So he brings them to a good place, where there will be far less toil.

That is, in some ways God is taking them back to Eden, back to the way it was before people sinned and before God cursed the ground. God is working against his own curse; he does not want his people to suffer the full consequences of the curse on the ground.

So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.

This kind of thinking occurs in quite a few places about the promise land.

See also Deut 8:7-9 *For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; ⁸ a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; ⁹ a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing;*

"A land flowing with milk and honey" - I looked that phrase up in a concordance, and it occurs 14 times between Exodus and Joshua. The Promised Land is a land flowing with milk and honey. It was a luxurious place. There will be lots of good things for Israel.

As much as possible in a fallen world, God was taking them back to Eden, because God did not enjoy his people living with the consequences of the cursed ground.

This is the thinking and logic behind giving a tithe to God. Moses instructed Israel in no uncertain terms to give a tenth back to God, and not just any tenth, but the first and best tenth. Because God had blessed Israel, they were to give the first tenth back to God.

This was not a matter of them being generous, or being good stewards. It was honouring the God who had given this all to them.

For people to have all the food they need, and to have enough clothes to cover their bodies and be warm, and to have decent shelter from cold and rain, and yet to think they cannot afford to give God the first tenth, shows a deep ignorance of where this all comes from. It is not only ignorance; it is a refusal to give honour to the Giver.

God does not need our help to feed or clothe himself. He does not need anything from us. *We* need to honour him and worship *him*. That is why we give a tenth to God.

Back to the land: God wanted his people to have a home land, a place that would be good to live in, and where he could live with his people and enjoy them.

Second Exodus - turn to Isaiah 40. There is not just one exodus in the Bible. There are actually three exoduses. The first one is the exodus where Moses and Joshua led Israel from Egypt into the Promised Land, which we've been talking about.

Isaiah 40 talks about a second exodus. Israel did not stay on the land. After about 800 years, God got so fed up with Israel worshipping other gods and not paying attention to him that he had the Babylonians come and capture them and take them to Babylon.

Isaiah 40 begins the part of Isaiah in which God promises to bring the Jews out of Babylon back to Palestine. That is the second exodus. The first exodus was from Egypt to Palestine, and the second exodus is from Babylon to Palestine, the Promised Land.

They have been in exile for about 70 years, and they have paid for their sins. And the road to be made smooth is the road God will lead his people on as they return from Babylon to Canaan.

Isaiah 40:1-5 - *Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.*

Just as God led Israel from Egypt to Canaan, so God will lead Israel from Babylon to Canaan. This text does not make it clear that this journey is a second exodus, but Isaiah 43:16-21 does make that quite clear. Babylon to Canaan is a second exodus.

Even in this text you can get a hint of it, because the return to Canaan is traveling through the desert, and having a good road through the wilderness.

Third Exodus - But now I want you do listen to a part of this again: ³ *A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.*

Does this sound familiar to you? These are the words that the Gospels use to introduce Jesus. John the Baptist is the voice calling to prepare a way for the Lord, and Jesus is the Lord that is coming. Matthew and Mark and Luke all use these words to introduce John and Jesus.

These words describe God leading his people out of captivity and into the Promised Land. We can understand that of the first exodus, God leading Israel out of Egypt to Canaan, and we can understand it of the second exodus, God leading the Jews out of their captivity in Babylon and back to Canaan.

Buy why would these words be used of John and of Jesus? Why would Jesus be the Lord who needs a prepared way in the desert, a highway through the wilderness?

Because Jesus is leading a third exodus. There are other OT Scriptures that the Gospel writers could have used to introduce John and Jesus.

By using these words at the opening of Isaiah 40, they are telling us that Jesus will lead another set of people out of captivity and into a Promised Land.

So when Jesus says, "Follow me," it does not just mean "live as I live and obey me." It also means, "I will take you to a good place."

God has been working a long time to get his people back to Eden. The story of God promising a land to Abraham, and giving it to Israel under Joshua, is a small picture of what God has been trying to do since his people were put out of Eden.

There is a sense in which we are all wanderers, and we are all homesick. This place is good, but not good enough. And sometimes it is not very good at all. But even when it is good, it is only a taste of the real thing, which we do not yet have. This is our story, too.

Rev 22:1-3 - Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.

There's quite a bit of Eden imagery in there: river, tree of life, fruit, no longer any curse.

Preparing this sermon satisfied a little question that has been niggling at the back of my mind for a long time. The name "Jesus" is really the name "Joshua." "Jesus" is how you say "Joshua" in Greek. When the angel told Mary what to call her baby, and later the angel told Joseph, what they both heard was "call the baby 'Joshua.'"

Everyone in the NT heard "Joshua." The OT "Joshua" was "Joshua son of Nun," and the NT "Joshua" was "Joshua from Nazareth," "Joshua Christ our Lord," "Joshua of Nazareth, the Son of God." It sounds strange to us, but that's what Peter and Andrew heard, and James and John, and Paul and Barnabas, and all of them: "Joshua."

My question always was, "why Joshua?" Why name the Christ after "Joshua son of Nun," Moses' assistant? And now I know. It is because of the third exodus, because Joshua of Nazareth, our Jesus of Nazareth, is leading us to the real Promised Land.

Like the first Joshua, only better. So, stick with him. Follow him. We're on the way. Don't lose hope. God keeps old promises. Stick with Jesus. We're going home.