

THE PROMISED LAND

By Keith Eckert

Characters:

Moses, leader of the Hebrew people

Joshua, a follower of Moses

Persons 1-3, other followers of Moses

(Scene: An empty hilltop near the bank of the Jordan River during Old Testament times. Moses, very old, looks out over the audience contemplatively, leaning on his long staff. Joshua enters.)

JOSHUA. Oh great leader, bringer of laws, mouthpiece of god, all-powerful Moses – I must know.

MOSES. Yes, my son?

JOSHUA. Moses, tell me: Is this the Promised Land? *(he takes Moses by the hand which is holding his staff)* Tell me this is the Promised Land!

MOSES. No, that's my staff, you idiot.

JOSHUA. No, is this the Promised Land? *(pointing to the audience)*

MOSES. No, that is your finger.

JOSHUA. No, no, no. I mean is the country before us the Promised Land? Is this our destination? Is our 40 years of suffering and wandering over?

MOSES. This rocky, godforsaken wasteland? Hardly.

JOSHUA. But it's better than the desert.

MOSES. Look at the natives, Joshua – they're a mean and ugly lot – just look what this land did to them! Oy!

JOSHUA. You've got a point there. But wise Moses: How will you know the Promised Land? How will you recognize it?

MOSES. Ah, Joshua, milk and honey will flow from the rocks, loaves of bread will sprout from the ground, full-grown oxen – strong and powerful – will fall from the trees – which is something we'll have to be very careful about.

JOSHUA. Are you sure? I never heard of oxen nesting in trees.

MOSES. My son –

JOSHUA. Oh, Moses! We have been wandering 40 years and the people grow tired. Do you know where the Promised Land is or have we just been marching in circles aimlessly?

MOSES. I don't know where, but god has told me *when* we'll find it.

JOSHUA. He has? Then tell me. When?

MOSES. Another –

JOSHUA. Yes?

MOSES. – Forty –

JOSHUA. Forty what? Days, weeks, months? God, I hope it's not months. But at least there'd be an end in sight. Forty what?

MOSES. Another 40 years.

JOSHUA. Forty – 40 years! I'll be dead in 40 years and all I will have done with my life is wander this freaking desert in circles! Jesus Christ!

MOSES. Who's that?

JOSHUA. Forty years! I can't do it!

MOSES. Do I detect some dissatisfaction?

JOSHUA. You should detect a lot, you old coot!

MOSES. Bah, forty years will go by before you know it. When you get my age, it all flies by in a flash! You'll see. It's all god's plan.

JOSHUA. God's plan? What the – ?? What's god's plan for the country across this river here – the Jordan. It looks perfectly nice.

MOSES. That? Pfft!

JOSHUA. What's wrong with it?

MOSES. I wouldn't stable my second-best donkey's tapeworm in that dung heap. I'd rather have my nipples pulled – pulled – my nipples – ugh! *(Moses collapses on the ground.)*

JOSHUA. *(kneeling over Moses)* Moses! Moses! Are you okay? Should I pull your nipples?

(Moses suddenly revives and sits up.)

MOSES. I'd rather have my nipples pulled off than live in that syphilis-ridden shit swamp!

JOSHUA. Ew!

MOSES. Ugh!

(Moses collapses again and dies.)

JOSHUA. My god! He's – he's dead!

(Several people run onstage.)

PERSON 1. What happened to Moses? We saw him collapse.

JOSHUA. He – he just died. We were talking and –

PERSON 2. Oh my God! What are we going to do? How will we find the Promised Land now? Did he tell you where it was?

(The others start chattering nervously.)

JOSHUA. Uh... well ... yeah. Just before he died he said, "Joshua, behold the Promised Land over the river Jordan." I guess he was overcome with joy and he died.

PERSON 1. It's weird that god wouldn't let Moses get to the Promised Land. Why?

JOSHUA. Because he made water, uh, on, uh, god's rock.

PERSON 2. That makes no sense.

JOSHUA. Someday it will. Don't worry about it.

PERSON 1. Did he say anything else?

JOSHUA. Um ... yeah! He said I should take over for him.

ALL. All hail, Joshua! Leader of the Hebrew people!

JOSHUA. Thank you all. Thank you! Now we must arm ourselves to take the Promised Land from its evil – but otherwise generous and peace-loving – inhabitants. God has decreed we apply the ban to the city yonder.

PERSON 1. A band? What are we to wrap them up in?

PERSON 2. No, silly. He means the music group.

JOSHUA. No, no – ban – B-A-N. We must kill every breathing creature in the city – men, women, children, infants, animals, all!

ALL: Ah! Yes!

PERSON 1. Goats, too?

JOSHUA. Yes, even goats.

PERSON 2. And orangutans?

JOSHUA. Uh, yes, but I doubt we'll see any.

PERSON 1. What about southern rockhopper tree frogs?

JOSHUA. I suppose if you see any.

PERSON 3. Even if they look sickly and about to die?

JOSHUA. Yes.

PERSON 1. They're endangered you know.

JOSHUA. I don't care.

PERSON 2. Geraniums?

JOSHUA. No, those are house plants. They don't breathe.

PERSON 3. Do spiders breathe?

JOSHUA. I don't know. I don't think so.

ALL. *(very confused debate among themselves)* Yes! No! They must breathe? They don't have lungs, stupid. Everything breathes! What should we do? What would god want? Maybe we should wait!

JOSHUA. Look, were not going to kill all the spiders. That would take us forever.

PERSON 1. But god said –

JOSHUA. *(holding his hand to his ear as if listening to an earpiece)* Wait – God just told me not to worry about any insects. Or mice. Just people and farm animals. We're not spending all year killing rodents and insects. We'd never get anywhere. Got it?

PERSON 2. Moses usually sacrificed a goat and looked at its entrails to determine god's blessing.

JOSHUA. Well, god's decided to streamline a few things around here. Now, is everyone ready?

ALL. Yeah!

JOSHUA. All right. Pick up Moses and let's get our weapons!

(They pick up Moses and run off stage excitedly.)

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