

Rabbi David Wolpe's

# *Off The Pulpit*

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## **Ideal and Real**

Why do the five books of the Torah end with Israel still in the wilderness? The entire story points toward the Promised Land, yet Moses dies and the Israelites are outside the land.

One possibility is the Torah's lesson that the land is both a reality and an ideal. In the book of Joshua, the Israelites enter the land and have to fight to establish themselves. In the wilderness, they will dream of the land and envision an ideal.

Robert Browning famously wrote: "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, Or what's a heaven for?" In other words, the ideal is what motivates us to stretch ourselves, especially if we know that we

are trying to achieve something out of reach. We will always fall short; if we set great goals, however, in our falling short we can still achieve remarkable things.

The Torah overestimated what the Jewish people could accomplish in the land. It would never be a perfect, peaceful place flowing with milk and honey. But only by presenting the ideal could they hope to make it a home worthy of the land God gave them.

[What Today's Boundaries Mean for Inclusion](#)

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Rabbi Wolpe's new book *David: The Divided Heart* is available now.