

Is the Land Still Israel's?

Review:

This is the last lesson in the series on New Covenant Theology.

Central Truth: Jesus is the most important aspect of New Covenant Theology!

ESV **John 1:1-2, 14-16** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth . . . from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

What's So New About the New Testament? As regards the **Mosaic Covenant**, the New Testament made the Sinai Covenant old and obsolete.

ESV **John 1:17** . . . the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

It is the Scriptures themselves that declare the Sinai Covenant to be old, broken and obsolete.

The Apostles called Mosaic Law an unbearable yoke (Acts 15:10). The author of Hebrews concluded that since there has been a change of priesthood (Levitical to Melchizedek) there has also been a change of law (from Law of Moses to Law of Christ):

ESV **Hebrews 7:12** . . . when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.

The New Testament *cancelled* the Mosaic Covenant.

What's So New About the New Testament? As regards **God's promises to Abraham**, the New Testament is the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham in the Abrahamic Covenant.

The New Testament *fulfilled* the Abrahamic Covenant.

Promises: God promised Abraham three things: Land, Offspring, and Blessing.

Shadow Fulfillments:

1) Land: The initial shadow fulfillment of the Promised Land was Canaan/Palestine/Israel.

2) Offspring: The initial shadow fulfillment of the Promised Offspring (**singular**) was Isaac and of the Promised Offspring (**plural**) were the ancient Hebrews.

3) Blessing: The initial shadow fulfillment of the Promised Blessing included protection and prosperity. God also promised to bless all nations of the earth through Abraham's offspring.

Substance Fulfillments:

- 1) **Land:** The substance fulfillment of the Promised Land is a heavenly country, the new Jerusalem, the land where God dwells.
- 2) **Offspring:** The substance fulfillment of the Promised Offspring (singular) is Jesus, Abraham's ultimate descendant. The substance fulfillment of the Promised Offspring (plural) is found in Abraham's spiritual descendants, those who have the faith of Abraham, regardless of ancestry. In this sense the church is the true Israel.
- 3) **Blessing:** The material blessing Abraham enjoyed was a shadow of the spiritual riches we have in Christ. God promised to bless all nations of the earth through Abraham's offspring. That blessing is the Gospel of Jesus who blesses all believers with salvation by faith.

Introduction:

Today we will explore the impact that the ultimate substance New Testament fulfillments of the land promise to Abraham had on the initial shadow fulfillment:

Do Abraham's physical descendants still have a divine title deed to Middle Eastern real estate?

The Covenant Confirmed

Let's go back in time 4,000 years to the covenant God made with Abraham. God made promises to Abraham in Genesis 12. God cut a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15. Now, in Genesis 17, God confirmed his covenant with Abraham.

- ****1. **According to Genesis 17:7, how long was this covenant to be in effect?** It was said to be an everlasting covenant.
2. **According to 17:8, how long did God intend for Abram's descendants to possess the land?** It was said to be an everlasting possession.

Application? The word everlasting would certainly seem to suggest this real estate still belongs to the Jews, not to the Muslims and not to Gentiles.

Set Up: Even in the 3rd century A.D., Christianity was still an illegal religion in the Roman Empire. The first known Christian martyr in England was a believer named Alban. Saint Alban's Cathedral stands today near the place of his execution, just outside London (along the M2). Alban was buried somewhere in the area, probably in the old Roman cemetery. Will Alban's corpse be in the grave *forever*? No; according to the Bible Alban's body will resurrect at the Appearing of Jesus. Alban's body has been dead over 1,500 years and that is indeed a *long time*, but it is not forever.

The Point: forever and a long time are not the same. Forever is a long time, but a long time is not necessarily forever.

Word Study: In English we have dedicated words that mean unending, such as eternal or everlasting. The ancient Hebrews clearly understood the idea of something being eternal, but they had no dedicated Hebrew word for everlasting. “Everlasting” (17:7, 8) is from *olam* (5769), which fundamentally means “most distant times” (future or past) or literally “a long time” (Holladay). *TWOT* (#1631a) points out that “neither the Hebrew nor the Greek word (*aión*) in itself contains the idea of endlessness.” Thus *olam* did double duty. In some contexts it clearly takes on the meaning of “everlasting.” The proper meaning is determined by context and the translators have to decide which it is. *Olam* is used 300 times to denote indefinite continuance into the very distant future.

3. The Hebrew word for everlasting is *olam* (17:7-8). What can we learn about its range of meanings from its use in 1 Samuel 1:22, 28, 27:8, 12?

ESV 1 Samuel 1:22, 28 Hannah . . . said to her husband, "As soon as the child [Samuel] is weaned, I will bring him, so that he may appear in the presence of the LORD and dwell there forever (*olam*) . . . Therefore I have lent him to the LORD. As long as he lives, he is lent to the LORD."

Samuel went to live with Eli in the tabernacle, but he did not live there forever.

ESV 1 Samuel 27:8 Now David and his men went up and made raids against the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites, for these were the inhabitants of the land from of old (*olam*) . . .

The inhabitants of the land had not been there from eternity past!

NAS 1 Samuel 27:12 ~ So Achish believed David, saying, "He has surely made himself odious among his people Israel; therefore he will become my servant forever."

The Point: The Hebrew word *olam* does not fundamentally nor always mean everlasting. It can simply mean a long time.

\$64,000 Question: Did God intend the Promised Land to be Israel's forever — or — for a long time (Genesis 17:8)? (Rhetorical).

The descendants of Abram lived in the Promised Land off and on for roughly the next 2,000 years. By all accounts, was long time (*olam*). Then in A.D. 70 God expelled them from the land due to their unbelief in rejecting Jesus. They spent the next 2,000 years exiled from the land, not returning until very recently 1948. Coca Cola is older than modern Israel. Ford Motor Company is older than modern Israel. Some of you in this room may be older than modern Israel!

Due to the dual meaning of *olam*, controversy exists among Christians concerning present day Israel's divine right to own the land.

******4. According to Genesis 17:9-14, what is the sign of God's covenant with Abraham?** The sign of the covenant was circumcision, 17:11. The Jews still practice this today. In ancient society, covenants often had signs to remind the parties of the covenant obligations. We still do this today with the wedding ring, a sign of the marriage covenant.

No reason is given as to why God picked circumcision as the sign of this covenant (17:9-14). Evidently:

1) Egyptian priests were circumcised and perhaps this was to indicate all of Israel was to serve as a nation of priests.

ESV **Exodus 19:6** . . . you [the people of Israel] shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

2) It also may have had something to do with both the promise of reproduction (multitude of offspring) and ethnic purity (the offspring of Abraham were not to marry anyone outside the tribe, especially not the Canaanites, De 7:1-4).

5. Timing: The New Testament often draws spiritual lessons from the historical events of the Old Testament. According to Romans 4:9b-11a, what is the significance of the timing of Abraham's circumcision (Ge 17:9-14)?

ESV **Romans 4:9-11** . . . faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.

Circumcision was a "seal" (a guarantee) of the fact that God had already declared Abraham righteous because of Abraham's faith. Circumcision did not come until over 13 years later. Circumcision was the seal of Abraham's righteousness, not the substance of his righteousness.

Baptism Parallel: Abraham was justified by faith, not circumcision. Today, some people erroneously believe it is necessary to be water baptized in order to be saved. However, we are justified by faith, not water baptism. No matter whether a teaspoon or tank full, water baptism won't and can't save you. Like circumcision, water baptism is an outward sign of an inward act of God (the new birth).

6. Based on Genesis 17:13, how long did God intend for the sign of circumcision to be enforced? It was to be an everlasting (*olam*) sign, throughout their generations. Remember that there is no dedicated Hebrew word for everlasting. The word meaning a long time had to do double duty. It is possible God meant the Jews to circumcise a long time, but not necessarily forever.

7. What penalty did disobedience carry (17:14)? The penalty was to be cut off from the covenant. This was a very serious penalty.

The Issue: What does the New Testament do with circumcision? Does the New Testament require circumcision of Jewish believers now that the New Covenant was come? (Rhetorical).

8. How does 1 Corinthians 7:18-20 help us answer the question of the importance of circumcision under the New Covenant? According to the New Testament, circumcision counts for nothing. This is a curious statement to make in light of Genesis 17.

9. In what light is circumcision cast in Galatians 5:2-6? It is cast in a very negative light.

10. Based on Galatians 6:15-16, who is the Israel of God? Neither circumcision (being a Jew) nor uncircumcision (being a Gentile) counts for anything with God. What does count is being made into a new creation in Christ. Old Testament Israel was not the church. Israel was only a type of the church. Abraham's true and promised descendants are those who have the same faith that Abraham did. Thus, the church, the new creation, is in a sense the true Israel of God.

ESV **Romans 2:29** . . . circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.

ESV **Colossians 2:11** . . . you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ . . .

Physical circumcision was a shadow of the spiritual circumcision we have in Christ.

11. How are the various New Testament declarations about circumcision possible in light of Genesis 17:14? Though physical circumcision was an absolute requirement of the Abrahamic covenant, the New Testament says outward circumcision is now in fact of no value. What *does* matter, according to the New Testament, is inner, spiritual circumcision, the spiritual circumcision of the heart.

Implication: *How can the New Testament take the eternal sign of an eternal covenant and say it simply does not matter unless there has been a radical change?* The New Covenant's disregard for the need to keep the sign of the Abrahamic covenant (circumcision) suggests that **something fundamental has changed**. We are playing by **new rules**. There has been a shift in significance from **outward sign to inward reality**. We have already clearly seen that the Abrahamic Covenant had two fulfillments, a short term and a long term, an intermediate and an ultimate, and shadow and a substance. So too with the sign of the covenant: from physical circumcision to spiritual circumcision.

12. Since the New Testament clearly has no use for physical circumcision, despite what Genesis 17 requires, what does this imply about the present day validity of the initial physical promises to Abraham? That the New Testament has no use for physical circumcision suggests a similar New Testament disinterest in the other initial aspects of the Abrahamic covenant (physical land, physical nation, physical blessing). The initial fulfillments of the covenant pale into insignificance now that the ultimate fulfillments have come. What *really* matters is the promised **Seed** (Christ, Ga 3:16 and Abraham's spiritual descendants - those who believe as Abraham did, Ga 3:7, Ro 4:11, 16), the spiritual **Blessing** of justification by faith (Ga 3:6-9), and the real **Promised Land**: a heavenly country (Heb 11:8-10, 13-16).

Based on the way the New Testament handles circumcision, a strong case can be made that there some sense in which the initial, physical fulfillments of the promises to Abraham are no longer important.

Car Example: An automobile is used to get you where you want to go. Once you have arrived, you don't sit in the car any longer! The car is the Abrahamic Covenant. The destination is the New Covenant.

— **The Physical Land** —

Fact: It is a fact to be reckoned with that the New Testament shows no interest what-so-ever in the real estate known as the "Promised Land." For instance:

13. What attitude do Galatians 4:21-26 and Hebrews 13:11-14 toward physical Jerusalem? It is obviously unfavorable. The destruction of A.D. 70 was the result of this unfavorable attitude as God's divine judgment fell on Jerusalem.

Galatians 4 Summary: slave woman/free woman; flesh/promise; two covenants (Sinai Covenant/New Covenant); present Jerusalem/Jerusalem above. We are children of the free woman, not the slave woman.

Hebrews 13 Summary: Christ suffered outside the camp (outside physical Jerusalem). Here we have no lasting city (like Abraham we look for the city above).

ESV Revelation 11:8 . . . their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.

Note: In contrast to physical Jerusalem, **Revelation 21:2** describes the "new" Jerusalem as a holy city coming down out of heaven from God. **Revelation 21:9** describes it as the "Bride, the wife if the Lamb" (the church).

14. James' letter was written to Jewish believers, to the "twelve tribes in the Dispersion" (i.e., not living in the Promised Land). Where did James tell them to move back to Palestine and reclaim their Canaan? Where did he tell them that, as true believers, they were the rightful heirs of the Promised Land? He did not, and if he believed this his letter would have been the logical place to state it.

15. Where did the author of Hebrews instruct the Hebrew believers to send money to help all Jews throughout the Roman Empire relocate to Judea? There is no mention of any such relocation plan. Paul did take up a collection for the church in Judea, but that was to help with famine relief.

Insight: Jesus gave instructions to flee physical Jerusalem:

ESV **Luke 21:20-22** . . . when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.

16. Where does the New Testament teach that the Roman Empire would fall if it ever attacked the Jews of the Holy Land (Because even unbelieving Jews are the apple of God's eye)? No; in fact God moved the Romans to invade and destroy Judah in A.D. 70. The Roman Empire continued on after that for hundreds of years. They were God's hands of judgment against unbelieving Israel.

Conclusions

17. Is the covenant with Abraham still in effect today? How so?

Jesus said He came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. Yet the New Testament clearly states we are not under the Law. In fulfilling the Law Jesus also abolished it. So too God's promises to Abraham have been fulfilled both physically (short-term) and metaphysically (long-term). The ultimate spiritual fulfillments of God's promises to Abraham are eternal since they are tied up with the New Covenant. The spiritual reality is what the physical fulfillments typified. A good case can be made that the physical fulfillments are now obsolete and irrelevant but the spiritual fulfillments are forever relevant.

Scaffolding Example: Scaffolding is used until a building is constructed, then it is removed. The initial physical fulfillments of the Abrahamic Covenant were like scaffolding used until the final metaphysical fulfillments were complete.

Check Example: A check is valuable until it is deposited. After that it is merely an historical record with virtually no value. The physical promises to Abraham were like a check. The spiritual fulfillments constitute the deposit of the check.

Rocket Example: A rocket is designed to deliver a pay load or put a satellite or space capsule in orbit. However, once the capsule reaches attitude, the booster rocker falls away and back to earth, leaving the capsule (or satellite) alone. So also it is with the initial fulfillments of the promises to Abraham.

18. What impact did the spiritual fulfillments of the promises to Abraham have on the physical fulfillments? Whether these ultimate meanings allowed the initial fulfillments to still have any present application has really only been debated in the church for the past one hundred years. Historically, the church has believed those initial fulfillments to be closed chapters with no relevance for today. The destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, along with the dispersion of unbelieving Judaism, was seen as God's final hand of judgment in divorcing himself from physical Israel as a special geopolitical nation (Re 2:9).

19. Test: *Are Jewish Christians divinely obligated to circumcise their children?*

20. Test: *A common stereo type is that Jewish people have a lot of money and are good at banking and business. Is that because of the material blessing promise to Abraham?*

Lagnaippe (Sinai Covenant):

Based on Exodus 31:12-17, what was the sign of God's covenant with Israel? The sign of the Sinai covenant is observing the Saturday Sabbath.

What day of the week is the seventh day (31:15)? The seventh day is Saturday. Sunday, the Lord's Day, is the first day of a new week. Jewish people still worship on Saturday.

What does Sabbath mean? It is from *shabbat* (7676), "to cease, desist, rest."

How long are/were the Hebrews supposed to do observe the Sabbath (Ex 31:16-17)? The text states that they were to observe it forever.

What does "forever" (Ex 31:16-17) mean? It is from *olam* (5769), which fundamentally means "most distant times" (future or past). In some contexts it can mean "everlasting." However, the *TWOT* (#1631a) points out that "neither the Hebrew nor the Greek word (*aion*) in itself contains the idea of endlessness." It is determined by context. It literally means "a long time" (Holladay). *Olam* is used 300 times to denote indefinite continuance into the very distant future.

Why is it that most churches assemble together on Sunday (as opposed to Saturdays)? See *Acts 20:7, Galatians 4:9-11, Colossians 2:16-17, Revelation 1:10*. It is because Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday, the first day of the week. However, while Sunday meetings clearly were the custom of the early church, the NT does not expressly command it (NBD, p. 1043). In any event, even though the church met on Sunday, Sunday did not replace Saturday as a Sabbath for the church. For Gentile Christians, neither day was a Sabbath day.

1.) Most Christians are Gentile and never were party to the Sinai Covenant, Exodus 31:12-18.

Why would you want to keep the sign of a covenant you never were party to?

ESV Galatians 4:9-11 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

2.) The covenant with Israel is now old and obsolete, having been canceled out by the new covenant, Hebrews 8:13. Thus there is no need to keep the sign of the old covenant, even if a believer is Jewish.

Example: After a divorce, the wedding ring is no longer worn.

ESV Colossians 2:16-17 . . . let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

3.) Of all the Ten Commandments, only one is not repeated in the new covenant: the one concerning the Sabbath.

Summary: The sign of the Mosaic Covenant (Sabbath keeping) was “forever” required as a sign for “generations to come” (Ex 31:16-17). Yet, the New Covenant makes it clear that Sabbath keeping, like circumcision, is now unimportant, Col 3:16-17, Ga 4:10-11, Ro 1:5-8. Remember, “everlasting” in the OT does not necessarily mean forever. The actual Hebrew phrase means “length of days” (i.e., a long time, but not necessarily forever).

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.

Stephen E. Atkerson
www.NTRF.org
Revised 04/1016