

LAND & PROMISED LAND: CENTURIES OF CONFLICT AND MISUNDERSTANDING

Romans 11:11-36; Genesis 1:1-13

I. WHAT ARE WE TO THINK OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL: THE SMALL NATION IN SOUTHWESTERN ASIA, LOCATED ON THE EASTERN SHORE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA?

- A. Is the land of Israel intrinsically “holy?”
- B. The Land of Israel is one of the most heated and controversial questions in world politics. To whom does Israel belong? Palestinians or Jews?
- C. Back in the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries Europeans, who claimed to be Christians, went on military expeditions to recover the Holy Land from Muslims. These expeditions are known as the Crusades.
- D. A wrong concept of “land” in the church has had centuries of devastating consequences. Bad theology can have overwhelming and unimaginably horrible consequences – consequences that span centuries and sometimes eternity.

II. MEANINGS OF LAND/EARTH

- A. Foundational to our understanding of “land” is that the concept of land *does not begin* with Abraham. The first time land was given to God’s people was not to *Abram* and his offspring but to *Adam* and his posterity.
- B. The Hebrew word for land (אֶרֶץ, [אָרְצָה • אֶרֶץ]) is the fourth most frequently used noun in the Old Testament, appearing 2,526 times.
- C. In Genesis 1-2 (אֶרֶץ, [אָרְצָה • אֶרֶץ]) occurs 31x. It is used in four different ways in Genesis 1:
 1. “heavens and the earth” (v.1) – a reference to the invisible and the visible
 2. “the earth was formless and void” (v.2) – a reference to the material God created to create with.
 3. “dry land” (vv.10-12)
 4. “planet” or a “world” (Gen.1:15,17,20,22,24,25,26,28,29,30)
- D. The book of Genesis begins with an emphasis upon “land” and ends with an emphasis on “land” (Gen.50:24,25; Ex.13:19; Josh.24:32; Heb.11:22).
- E. Adam was created from the “ground” that he was to cultivate (Gen.2:7)

III. REFERENCES TO THE PROMISED LAND IN SCRIPTURE HAVE IN VIEW A RETURN BACK TO PARADISE AND A WORLD FREE FROM THE CURSE AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE FIRST ADAM’S SIN.

- A. The Promised Land given to Abraham and his seed cannot be understood apart from the Promise that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent (Gen.12:1-3).
- B. What are we to make of the fact that God gave the Promised Land to Abraham and his descendants as an *everlasting possession*? (Gen.13:15; 17:8; 48:4; Psalm 105:10,11; Jer.7:6,7; 25:5,6)
 1. Various types and shadows were spoken of as perpetual and everlasting
 - a. the Aaronic priesthood was perpetual (Ex.40:15)
 - b. the observance of the Day of Atonement was a permanent statute (Lev.16:34)
 - c. the priesthood of Phinehas was to be a perpetual priesthood for his descendants (Num.25:13)
 - d. the covenant God made with David was also an everlasting covenant (2 Sam.23:5)
 - e. All of these looked forward to the coming of Jesus Christ, Who is the Yea and Amen of all God’s promises (2 Cor.1:20)
 2. The possession of the Land by Israel’s descendants is dependent upon the overarching goal of the covenant, “I will be their God” (Gen.17:7,8; Ex.6:7; 29:45f; Lev.11:45; 26:12,13,45; Deut.29:13; 2 Cor.6:16; Heb.11:16; Rev.21:1-7).
 3. The promise of a perpetual possession of the Land was a looking forward to an eternal inheritance in heaven (Heb.11:8-16; 1 Pet.1:4; 2 Pet.1:11). This is clear when we remember that the concept of Promised Land did not begin with Abram, but Adam. What the first Adam lost, the Second Adam has regained.
- C. The Promised Land is described in terms of a garden, it was a good land flowing with milk and honey, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, a land of wheat, barley, vines, fig trees, pomegranates, and olive oil (Ex.3:8,17; 13:5; Deut.8:7-9; 11:10-12).
- D. The laws concerning the Land of Israel in the OT were redemptive:
 1. gleaning (Gen.3:17-19; Lev.19:9,10; Deut.10:17-19; 24:17-22; cf. 2 Cor.8:9; Phil.2:4-8)

2. The sabbatical rest given to the land every seven years was redemptive (Ex.23:10,11; 2 Chron.36:21)
3. Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25 with Daniel 9:24-27)

IV. ONLY TWO TIMES IN HISTORY WERE THE GEOGRAPHICAL BOUNDARIES PROMISED TO ABRAHAM POSSESSED BY ISRAEL (Gen.15:18-21; 2 Sam.8:3; 1 Kings 4:21)

V. THE NEW TESTAMENT MAKES CLEAR THAT INHERITING THE LAND IS A REFERENCE TO THE NEW HEAVENS AND THE NEW EARTH (Rom.4:13; Rev.21-22)

- A. “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5 with Psalm 37)
- B. Heaven was the inheritance that Abraham was looking forward to when he left Ur (Hebrew 11:8-10)
- C. The expansion of the Land to the ends of the earth is also found in Apostolic teaching (Ephesians 6:1-3).

VI. WHAT ARE WE TO THINK OF THE MODERN DAY STATE OF ISRAEL?

- A. Romans 11:25 teaches that ethnic Israel will continue to exist as a people group until Jesus returns. The nation-state of Israel may be the means by which God will preserve Israel ethnically. The preservation of the relatively small ethnic population of the Jews is an incredible phenomenon when we consider that there aren’t any more Moabites, Amorites, Kenites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Hivites, or Hittites.
- B. I don’t believe that the formation of the nation-state of Israel in 1948 was a fulfillment of biblical prophecy *per se*. The Promised Land in the OT served a redemptive purpose that has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. “Progression toward consummation in the new covenant cannot allow for a retrogression to the older, shadowy forms” (O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God* p.17).
- C. Will there be a massive turning of Jews to Jesus in the future (Matthew 23:37-39; Luke 13:33-35; 21:24; Acts 3:19-21; Rom.11:11-32)? Within Reformed theology, since the 17th century, there has been a fervent hope for the conversion of the Jews:
 1. Voetius (1609–1676) believed that the Reformed community must deal responsibly with the Jews by giving itself to prayer, godliness, sound interpretation of the OT Scriptures, and sympathy towards the Jews.
 2. Jacobus Koelman (1633–1695) went so far as to teach that ethnic Jews *must* be restored to Palestine, and that the testimony of the converted Jews will be a light to the Gentiles.
 3. The seventeenth-century concern for ethnic Jews comes to expression in the Larger Catechism (Question 191) and in the Directory for the Public Worship of God.

QUESTIONS FOR SABBATH DISCUSSION & MEDITATION:

Take what you have learned this morning and make it into a prayer for yourself, your family, the church and/or your nation. Remember that prayer consists in Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication (Feel free to use the outline for praying).

Are there any places in the world today that are more “holy” than others? (i.e. Can you get closer to God by being in Jerusalem than in New Hartford?)

At first glance, the concept of land may seem unimportant. But how has the church’s past theology of the land contributed to Islamic terrorism today?

How has the church’s unbiblical theology of “land” affected foreign missions?

In what ways are Christians in the U.S. still insensitive to such things as the Crusades?

Where does the concept of “land” begin in Scripture? Why is this foundational?

How is the importance of “land” emphasized in Genesis?

How are we to understand Abraham’s “everlasting possession” of the land?

How did the Promised Land anticipate redemption?

Give three New Testament passages that make clear that the Promised Land is in the new heavens and the new earth.

Was the formation of the nation-state of Israel in 1948 a fulfillment of prophecy? What does the Bible teach about the preservation of Israel’s ethnic identity? (Romans 11:25)

Prepared by Pastor Aaron Goerner (10/28/2001). See Dt.33:8-10; Ezra 7:10; Malachi 2:7; Acts 17:11; Col.1:28,29; 1 Tim.4:12-16.
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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The Crusades did incalculable damage to the Christian witness to Jews and Muslims. What was done in the name of the Church back in the 11th-13th centuries was not Christian. It had no grounding in Scripture; it was in my estimation of the evil one.

The Cross means:

The voluntary suffering and death of Jesus on our behalf

The Crusades were:

The enforced suffering inflicted on others by a gang of "out of control soldiers" who operated under the abuse of the name of Jesus.

Christians continue to show a great deal of insensitivity toward the historical past. One large national campus group is named "Campus Crusade for Christ." How do you think that that name sounds to Muslims and Jews who haven't forgotten the evils of the crusades? What sensitive Christian, with any sense of history, would want to associate evangelism with the crusades?