

Israel and the Promised Land Today

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It is a common Christian belief that today's nation-state of Israel, which exists on a small strip of land in the Middle East, constitutes the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. But is that truly what the Bible teaches?

God's promise to Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land was part of the covenant God made with Abraham. But was the covenant that God made with Abraham a new covenant, a new promise, or was God, in making the covenant with Abraham, simply carrying out the covenant that He made with Adam in Eden? Is the covenant with Abraham the carrying forward and recommunication of the same covenant of grace already given to Adam after his fall?

The covenant of grace, the promise that God would save sinners, was given immediately after Adam sinned:

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel (Genesis 3:15 NKJV).

This covenant contains God's promise to send Jesus, the Seed of the woman, to overcome and destroy Satan and sin and redeem humanity. The entire Old Testament is the outworking of this promise.

The promise to Abraham is the recommunication of the promise made in Eden, that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head.

In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice (Genesis 22:18 NKJV).

And this promise was repeated to Isaac:

Live in the land of which I shall tell you. Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 26:2-4 NKJV).

And God repeated this promise to Jacob:

And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: "I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you" (Genesis 28:13-15 NKJV).

There is no doubt that God made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob promising that that region of land would be given to them and their descendants and that through them the promised Messiah would come. But does that mean the nation-state of Israel today is part of that promise, or is it possible that we may have missed a larger promise from God because we have remained focused on that smaller regional promise? Is it possible that this promise to Abraham and his descendants is a dual-fulfillment prophecy and we have not fully appreciated its larger applications?

Dual Prophecies in Scripture

The Bible is filled with dual prophecies and promises:

- Joel's prophecy about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit before the second coming of Christ (Joel 2:28-32) is also applied by Peter to the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-21).
- Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 both start out referring to an earthly king and then transition to the fall of Lucifer.
- Jesus' prophecy about the second coming is also blended with the destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 24).

In all these dual-fulfillment prophecies, there is a lesser application and a greater application—the lesser is regional; the greater is global.

The promise given to Adam and Eve is the promise given to the entire human race, for all humans were in Adam and Eve. The promise given to Abraham was a *regional* promise of that *global* promise. It was the promise that through Abraham's family the earlier promise would be realized; that through Abraham's genetic family, the Seed of the woman that will deliver the descendants of Adam from sin and death will come. This is the focus of Scripture, the plan of salvation. This is why the Bible's focus is on Abraham's children and not the Chinese or Eskimos, not because God doesn't love all people—He does—but because the Messiah was not going to come through those other branches of the human family. The Bible even continues to narrow our focus as we get closer to Christ's arrival. We don't follow all of Abraham's descendants, such as Ishmael's or Esau's children, but only Jacob's line because it is through Jacob's children that the greater promise would be realized. And eventually, we follow only Judah, the ten tribes to the north being assimilated and dispersed.

And what was the promise given to Adam and repeated to Abraham? That a Descendant of theirs, a real human, would come and destroy sin and Satan and save the human race from eternal death.

The covenant with Abraham is the same covenant that was given to Adam, but with Abraham we now have the identification of the specific branch of the human family through whom the Messiah would come. And with the recommunication of the covenant to Abraham, God gives a dual-fulfillment prophecy concerning the land: 1) A smaller, local, regional promise that Abraham's genetic descendants would inherit the land of Canaan in order to fulfill their mission to be the genetic family through whom Jesus would be born; and 2) the larger, global, spiritual fulfillment, that the true descendants of Abraham, those who are like Abraham in faith and character would inherit the entire earth!

The covenant with and promises to Abraham focus on two promised lands. The local application is the one in which Abraham's genetic decedents are the branch of the human family through whom God accomplishes the promise of Genesis 3:15 and through whom the Messiah is born. This local regional promise to Abraham informs him that his children would inherit the land in Canaan **for the purpose** of fulfilling their mission of being the avenue through whom Messiah would come **so that** Jesus can fulfill God's greater promise, the covenant of grace given in Genesis 3:15, and crush the serpent's head **so that** the "meek will **inherit** the earth" (Matthew 5:5)—the true Promised Land.

- The *genetic* descendants inherited Canaan *in order* to be the avenue for Jesus our Savior to be born and fulfill the covenant given to the entire human family in Genesis 3:15 so that ...
- ... the *spiritual* descendants of Abraham—all those who have faith like Abraham—will inherit the entire planet, the earth made new.

Satan has tricked much of the Christian (and Jewish) world today into believing that the promises to Abraham's children to inherit the land are exclusively to genetic descendants occupying a small strip of land in the Middle East. God's promise is much bigger than that. The promise for the genetic descendants to occupy the small land of Canaan has been fulfilled—Jesus has come. Jesus has confronted Satan, and Jesus has won the victory. Now the promises to Abraham are to be fulfilled on the global, not regional, scale when Jesus returns and we, the faithful, finally inherit the earth.

Here is the biblical evidence for this position:

The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land" (Genesis 12 7).

This is the regional promise for the genetic descendants to occupy Canaan for the purpose of being the branch of the human family through which the Messiah would be born.

The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you" (Genesis 13:14-17 NIV84).

This is the larger, global, promise—that the entire earth (east, west, north, south, all points of the compass) will be given to the people of God; the earth will be made new, and those who are like Abraham in character, in faith, whose hearts have been circumcised from sin, will be heirs to this promise and inherit the earth.

The apostle Paul, a former Pharisee of the tribe of Benjamin and a highly trained Jewish theologian of the first century, wrote:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. **If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise** (Galatians 3:26-29).

Jesus Himself explicitly told the Jewish leaders of His day these very truths, that genetics did not determine who is considered an heir of Abraham and who would inherit the promise. We find Jesus' explanation to the Jewish authorities in John 8:34-45; my comments are in red:

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a **slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.** [If we don't experience freedom from sin through Jesus, then we are not part of the family of God—that is, not part of Abraham's family.] So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what **you have heard from your father.**" [Jesus tells them plainly that even though they are genetic descendants of Abraham, God doesn't see them as being children of Abraham, but children of a different father. Note, the Jews, to whom Jesus was speaking, understood this point and protested, claiming their genetic heritage.]

"Abraham is our father," they answered. [Jesus' response disallows their genetics as being a valid basis for being considered a descendant of Abraham.]

"If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did. [Those recognized by God as children of Abraham are those who have the same faith in God as Abraham did and who act on that faith as Abraham did.] As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father does." [Jesus again tells them that their

heritage is not determined genetically but characterologically. They have embraced another father, but again, they protest and claim a higher father than Abraham.]

“We are not illegitimate children,” they protested. “The only Father we have is God himself.” [The Jews claimed God as their Father because God created humanity. But Jesus disallows this claim as well, for we are born in sin (Psalm 51:5) and Jesus already said that those who remain slaves to sin have no permanent place in the family of God. Only those who, through Jesus, are freed from sin become part of the family of God and are considered children of Abraham. Note Jesus’ answer.]

Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. **You belong to your father, the devil,** and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:34-45 NIV84). [Jesus unequivocally destroys the idea that genetics determines who is an heir of Abraham, and He makes it clear that it is all about faith, character, love, and trust like Abraham.]

The dual-fulfillment promise to Abraham had two starting points and two ending points. The starting point of the global promise was in Eden, in Genesis 3:15; the starting point of the regional promise was with Abraham when he was called out of Ur. The ending point of the global is when Jesus recreates the earth and the meek inherit it; the ending point of the regional promise for the genetic people to be the avenue for the Messiah was when they crucified Christ and Jesus said to them, “Your house is left to you desolate” (Matthew 23:38 NIV84).

Jesus masterfully weaves these two covenant promises together in His prophetic description of the destruction of Jerusalem and His second coming as described in Matthew 24 and Mark 13. The destruction of Jerusalem occurs because the regional fulfillment of the promise has ended. The genetic descendants kept open the avenue, Messiah had come, but they rejected Him and now there is no further purpose for a regional land to be occupied by them. The gospel must now go to the world. It is time for the global application, which culminates in the second coming and the meek inheriting the earth.

Israel as a political entity today is not the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that his descendants would be a great nation. That great nation is the global nation whose ruler is from the line of David. As the angel said to the virgin Mary about her Son, “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:32, 33 NIV84).

And the writer of Hebrews agrees with our assessment. Hebrews tells us that the faithful of God in Bible times—Abel, Enoch, Noah, along with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who lived “in the promised land” (Hebrews 11:9)—“did not receive the things promised” (Hebrews 11:13), that they were “looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10). “All of these people” of faith “did not receive the things promised; they saw them and welcomed them from a distance. ... They were longing for a better country—a heavenly one” (Hebrews 11:13, 16).

The Bible says that “all of these people” did *not* receive the things promised; note who is included on

that list—Enoch, who was taken to heaven! Enoch, who has already received eternal life, a glorified body, who currently lives in heaven with Jesus, surely he has received the promise, hasn't he? Not in its complete and fullest sense. What was Abraham promised? That his spiritual descendants would inherit the earth. This promise will not be realized until Jesus comes again, all sin and sinners are eliminated, the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven, and the earth is made new to be the home of the righteous. Then the promise will be realized and we, who have faith like Abraham, will receive our inheritance of a goodly land, a beautiful home, perfect and flawless that God intended Adam and Eve to possess. It is true that the meek will inherit the earth, for what God has promised He will fulfill.