

Premillennialism Lesson #4

God's Promise to Abraham

The doctrine of premillennialism asserts that God *unconditionally* promised Canaan to the descendants of Abraham. Further, it is contended that the promise has never been completely granted, hence, the claim is made that the Jews eventually will be restored to Palestine in order that the Abrahamic covenant might be fulfilled. Indeed, some are declaring that, with the establishment of Israel as an independent government in 1948, the Jewish restoration was begun, and this is a signal of the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Again, we must kindly note that this notion is not consistent with biblical teaching.

Concerning Canaan, Jehovah promised Abraham, "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (Gen. 12:7). This land-covenant with the patriarch involved all that land "from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates," (Gen. 15:18), and it was pledged to his seed "for ever" (Gen. 13:15).

Several questions here are of great concern:

- Was the promise ever totally fulfilled?
- What is the meaning of "for ever"?
- Was the promise in any sense conditional?

Was the promise ever totally fulfilled?

An understanding of these queries is crucial to this discussion. Note the following: When the law of Moses was given, provision was made for the establishment of "cities of refuge" where the manslayer who had killed without premeditation might flee for the preservation of his life. Initially, three cities were to be set aside for this purpose. Moses declared, however, that:

" . . . if Jehovah thy God enlarge thy border, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, and give thee all the land which he promised to give unto thy fathers; if thou shalt keep all his commandment to do it, which I command thee this day, to love Jehovah thy God, and to walk ever in his ways; then shalt thou add three cities more for thee, besides these three . . ." (Dt. 19:7-9).

Thus, six cities of refuge would be evidence of the substantial fulfillment of the land promise to Abraham's seed.

A reading of Joshua 20:7-8 reveals that the cities of Kedesh, Shechem, Hebron, Bezer, Ramoth, and Golan were assigned as havens of refuge — six cities. Thus, "all the land" had been given; the land covenant has been fulfilled! This is further demonstrated by Joshua 21:43. "So Jehovah gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein."

This refers principally to Canaan. There was to be some expansion later. Scripture specifically states of Solomon's time:

"And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River [Euphrates] unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt . . ." (1 Kgs. 4:21; 2 Chron. 9:26).

Finally, Nehemiah rehearses the fact that God brought Abraham from Ur of Chaldees to give him the land of Canaan, and, says he, you "have performed your words: for you art righteous." (Neh. 9:7-8) It is tragic that the premillennial theory implies the opposite.

What is the meaning of “for ever”?

But millennialists contend that Palestine was promised to Israel “for ever” (Gen. 13:15). This fails to recognize, of course, that the term “for ever” is not always used in the Bible in a completely unlimited sense.

For instance, circumcision was an “everlasting covenant,” (Gen. 17:13); the Passover was an ordinance “for ever,” (Ex. 12:15), and the Levitical system had an “everlasting priesthood” (Num. 25:13). These Old Testament institutions, however, passed away with the abrogation of the Law, thus demonstrating that “for ever” sometimes has a temporary significance.

Was the Promise Conditional?

The truth of the matter is, the Old Testament clearly indicates that Israel’s possession of Palestine was conditioned upon their faithfulness to God — a condition which they violated repeatedly; hence, it was foretold:

“When ye transgress the covenant of Jehovah your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods, and bow down yourselves to them: then will the anger of Jehovah be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which he hath given unto you” (Josh. 23:16).

That time eventually came, and the Jews lost their “deed” to the Promised Land!

Jeremish’s Visual Aid

In the 19th chapter of the book that bears his name, the prophet Jeremiah was instructed of Jehovah: “Go, and buy a potter’s earthen bottle.” Subsequently, he was told to go to the valley of Hinnom, and to prophesy to the inhabitants of Jerusalem concerning their sins, and their eventual destruction.

As a symbol of this promised punishment, Jeremiah was commanded to “break the bottle” and to proclaim its meaning,

“Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter’s vessel, that cannot be made whole again . . .” (Jer. 19:10-11).

This prophecy was partially fulfilled with a siege of the Babylonians in 586 B.C. (2 Kgs. 25), but was completely and ultimately fulfilled with the destruction of national Israel by the Romans in 70 A.D. (see: Adam Clarke, **Commentary on the Bible**, Nashville, Abingdon, n.d., Vol. IV, p. 305). After the Jewish nation was destroyed, it was so permanently scattered by the providence of God that it *cannot be made whole again*. Regardless of the fact that some Jews are migrating back to Palestine, they will never be restored as *God’s nation!*

The Pronouncement of Christ

Further evidence that national Israel will never be restored is found within the teaching of Christ himself.

In Matthew 21, Jesus told what is called the parable of the wicked husbandmen, the design of which was to emphasize how wretchedly the Jews had treated God’s prophets, such rebellion reaching its zenith with the crucifixion of Christ. Because of their rejection of Jehovah’s precious stone, the Lord said to the Jews:

“Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God [i.e., their reign as God’s special people] shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Mt. 21:43).

The inspired apostle Peter unquestionably declares that the “nation” to be henceforth so blessed, is God’s “holy nation,” the church (1 Pet. 2:7-10). The Bible is exceedingly clear; Christians are the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:26-29), the “Israel of God.” (Gal. 6:16).

For further study,
see: [Archives](#),
“God and the Nation
of Israel”
([December 14, 1998](#)).

Restoration “Proof Texts”

The millennialist purports to have a whole repertoire of proof texts to substantiate his claim of Israel’s restoration. An examination of several of them will reveal misappropriation of the Word of God.

1. It is argued Isaiah 2:2-4 will be fulfilled with the establishment of the “millennial kingdom.”

“2 And it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of Jehovah’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. 3 And many peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem. 4 And he will judge between the nations, and will decide concerning many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

Actually, it is a prophecy of the establishment of the church, which is the “house” under consideration (cf. 1 Tim. 3:15). This was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), which was the beginning of the “last days” (Acts 2:16-17).

The truth is, if there is a dispensation yet to come, namely the millennium, then Peter was wrong, and we are not in the “last days” but in the “next-to-the-last-days.” Isaiah 2:4 does not predict a time of universal world peace, rather, it characterizes the peaceful disposition of those formerly hostile nations which “flow unto” the house of God.

2. In chapter 11:1-16, Isaiah prophesies regarding Christ (1-5), and the establishment of his divine government in the church. Again, the peaceful atmosphere thereof is beautifully described (6-9), as being in God’s “holy mountain” which is the church (Dan. 2:35, 44). And to cinch the matter, verse 10 is quoted in the New Testament (Rom. 15:12) by an inspired writer, and shown to be applicable to the reception of the Gentile nations into the church.

To suggest that it applies to some future age is to totally disregard the inspired interpretation of the prophecy and to reflect upon the credibility of a New Testament writer.

3. Hosea's prophecies (2:14-23; 3:5) are frequently said to point to Israel's restoration in the "millennium."

Again, however, an inspired New Testament writer says otherwise. Paul quotes Hosea 2:23 and 1:10 in his letter to the Romans (9:25-26), and thereby shows that the restoration foretold by Hosea was of a spiritual nature, including both Jews and Gentiles. Such is accomplished in the church.

Hosea 3:5 speaks of Israel returning and seeking Jehovah and "David their king" (certainly not David literally) "in the latter days." This is another indication that the Christian era, the reign of Christ, is in view (cf. Lk. 1:32-33; Acts 2:30-36; 2:16-17; see Theo Laetsch, **The Minor Prophets**, St. Louis: Concordia, 1956, p. 40).

4. Amos 9:11-15 is a favorite Old Testament prophesy of the premillennialists. C.I. Scofield, alluding to James' citation of this passage in Acts 15, called this "the most important passage in the N.T." for dispensationalists (**Scofield Reference Bible**, New York: Oxford Press, 1945, p. 1169). It is argued that the rebuilding of the "tabernacle of David" refers to the restoration of national Judaism in the "millennium," at which time Solomon's temple literally will be rebuilt, and the Jewish economy reinstated.

In Acts 15 a question was raised among the early disciples as to whether Gentiles were obligated to circumcision. Peter, who had preached first to the Gentiles, denied such.

James utters an inspired oracle corroborating Peter, and in connection, he cites the words of Amos concerning the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David. The rebuilding of David's tabernacle was the enthronement of Christ and the establishment of his church! And a part of this design was that the Gentiles might have the privilege of seeking the Lord. It thus would follow, if the tabernacle of David is yet in the future (as premillennialists contend), that all Gentiles are still lost! (Acts 15:16-17).

The claim that Judaism will someday be restored, in view of the books of Galatians and Hebrews, is, quite honestly, absolutely incredible.

There are, of course, many additional prophecies which, according to the premillennialists, predict Israel's restoration; but none of these demonstrate a restoration of national Israel in a future millennium. It may be suggested in summation that the Old Testament prophecies which speak of a restoration for Israel pertain either to:

- a. A return to Palestine from the confines of the Babylonian Captivity (605-536 B.C.), in the time of Cyrus of Persia (cf. 2 Chron. 36:22-23). For example, a number of passages in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel are of this nature. Or,
- b. The restoration of Israel to Jehovah's favor spiritually through the church. Peter affirmed that a major thrust of Old Testament prophecy was concerning salvation, which "the prophets sought and searched diligently," and which has now been announced through the preaching of the gospel (1 Pet. 1:9-12).

(partial article www.christiancourier.com/feature/february2001.htm by Wayne Jackson)