

Israel: Past, Present, and Future #12

Romans 4:13

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Israel's present claims to the land in which she dwells are not the realization of the promise made by God to Abraham and His collective seed (in Genesis 17:7-8). For the promise of dwelling securely and at peace within the land will only be biblically realized when Israel turns in faith and repentance to Jesus Christ and is brought into the Visible Church of Jesus Christ (Romans 11:23-24).

Though there is a future national salvation promised to Israel through faith in Jesus Christ, and though there is a future national restoration of the land to Israel in which she will dwell in peace and safety with all of the nations of the world, the constant bloody battles in which Israel has been engaged since 1948 (when it was constituted as a nation) is rather an indication of God's continued judgment upon her for her rejection of Christ and His gospel than an indication of God's present blessing upon her. Let us always seek to maintain this inspired balance (Romans 11:28).

We should, therefore, be careful to earnestly pray for the conversion of Israel to Christ, and yet we must not stand with Israel (or any other nation, including our own) unconditionally, but only in what is just according to God's Moral Law. Any nation has a right to defend itself against hostile attacks (including Israel), but no nation that makes itself the enemy of Christ (whether Israel or our own) has a right to our loyalty. God promised the land to Israel, but the privilege of enjoying that promise comes only when Israel turns in faith to Jesus.

We have in recent sermons considered God's promise of the land to Israel which will be realized yet in the future when she turns in faith to Christ, and we have begun considering sincere objections by fellow Christians to this view. This Lord's Day we continue with more objections.

I. Objection: The promise of the land to Israel in the Old Testament is enlarged in the New Testament to encompass the whole earth, thus indicating that God is finished with any particular promise of the land to Israel in the New Testament age.

A. Romans 4:13.

1. In the inspired Letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul engages both Jewish and Gentile Christians in important matters related to sin and condemnation of both Jews and Gentiles by God's Law; and justification by faith alone in Christ alone (apart from the works of the Law) for both Jews and Gentiles; and the national salvation of both Jews and Gentiles alike through Jesus Christ. Jews and Gentiles in Christ are not bitter enemies but mutual brethren in the household of God. And though at the time that Paul penned this inspired Letter to the Romans, the unbelieving Jews were enemies of the gospel (Romans 11:28) and persecutors of Christ, the apostles, and the Church, nevertheless, Paul's earnest and constant prayer was for the salvation of unbelieving Israel (Romans 10:1). Paul was not bitter and vindictive toward unbelieving Jews, but rather broken over the rebellion of Israel. He left judgment in God's hands, and prayed for Israel's salvation (and so should we).

2. In Romans 4, Paul establishes that Abraham was not justified on the basis of the Law or his efforts in keeping the Law (he believed in Christ and was justified before he was circumcised), but on the basis of God's promise of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone—the promised Seed. The righteousness which justifies comes not from our imperfect law keeping, but through the perfect law keeping of Jesus. God promised that Abraham would be the father of Jews and Gentiles that trust in Jesus Christ (Romans 4:11-12).

3. As we then come to Romans 4:13, the promise of God to Abraham is said to be that "he would be the heir of the world." Is Paul saying that the promise of the land made to Abraham and to his

posterity as an “everlasting possession” in Genesis 17:8 and the boundaries of that land specifically given in Genesis 15:18 never meant the Promise Land, but meant the whole earth? According to this objection, the promise of the land to Abraham has been replaced or superseded by the promise of the whole earth.

4. When Paul uses the word “world” (*kosmos*), does he mean the geographical world (the land and water of the earth) or does he mean the Gentile people/nations of the world? In other words, is Paul referring to the geography of the world or to nations of the world?

5. I submit that Paul has the Gentile nations of the world in mind who would come to trust in Christ. For the promise that Abraham should be heir of the world is a few verses later stated in another way: Romans 4:17. This was the very promise of God to Abraham in Genesis 17:4-5. A few verses later in Genesis 17:8, the Lord then promises the land to Abraham and his seed as a distinct blessing and an “everlasting possession”. Thus, both promises (of many nations and of the land) were made together to be as it were friends alongside one another. These dual promises are not hostile to one another—the nations will come to Christ and the Promise Land will be possessed by a converted Israel?

6. In fact, Paul uses the words “world” and “nations” (i.e. Gentile nations) parallel to one another in Romans 11:12.

7. Therefore, I submit that Romans 4:13 does not mean that God has replaced the promise of the land to a converted Israel for an earth promised to all of the converted nations of the world. God will fulfill both promises to make Abraham the father of many converted Gentile nations (who will fill the whole earth), but He will also give the earthly Promise Land to a converted Israel (as He has promised to Abraham and to a converted Israel).

B. **Ephesians 6:1-3 (Exodus 20:12).**

1. It is likewise objected that the Apostle enlarges the promise for obedience beyond the borders of Israel to the borders of the whole earth, implying (according to this objection) that the earthly Promise Land of Canaan no longer applies to Israel—God is not concerned any longer with a little piece of real estate (the Promise Land), but has replaced the earthly Promise Land with the whole earth.

2. In the original commandment (Exodus 20:12) the promised reward for faithful children in Israel (to whom this moral commandment was originally given) pertained to dwelling long in the earthly Promise Land. But wherever the gospel goes and changes the hearts of children to cheerfully submit to their parents, the promised gospel blessing for obedience likewise follows.

3. A moral commandment (like the Fifth Commandment) is not limited to Israel living in the earthly Promise Land (though it was in the original context given to Israel). This promised blessing for faithful children applied to Israel when living in the land of Israel or when living outside the land of Israel (when in Babylonian exile). The moral commandment and its promise followed God’s people wherever they lived. And so likewise, this moral commandment and its promised blessing (which is not limited to Israel, but is given to all nations) will be realized by faithful children dwelling in all portions of the earth.

4. Nothing here either denies or contradicts the promise of the earthly Promise Land to a future converted Israel as an “everlasting possession” in the “everlasting covenant” made with Abraham. The Lord will fulfill His promise to a converted nation of Israel to dwell safely in their land while at the same time blessing children with long life upon the earth who faithfully submit themselves under God to their parents. Nothing here requires the promise of the land to Israel to be replaced or superseded. This is a moral commandment that always applied to all nations as did the blessing for faithful obedience.

II. **Objection:** There is no longer a distinction between Jew and Gentile (**Galatians 3:28**). Thus, there cannot be distinctive blessings of land given to Israel as a nation in this New Covenant age.

A. When Paul states that there is neither Jew nor Greek in Christ, Paul also teaches that there is neither male nor female in Christ. Are we then to understand that there are no distinctions between the

sexes? To the contrary, there are distinct duties God gives to men as opposed to women in marriage (Ephesians 5:22-28) and in the Church (1 Timothy 2:11-12) with corresponding blessings for each of them for faithfulness to His commandments. Thus, it should be clear that Paul is not saying that all distinctions between Jews and Gentiles or between men and women have been removed in Christ.

B. What Paul is teaching by inspiration of the Holy Spirit is that Jews and Gentiles, men and women, bond and free, are all equally members of the Church of Jesus Christ, and as such are all entitled to the same spiritual blessings of being united to Christ—that is the oneness that we all have in Christ.

1. Israel as a Christian Nation will not be treated differently in matters of salvation or in matters of Christ's Church from all the other Christian Nations of the world. She will be grafted into the same olive tree (the same Visible Church) as all other Christian Nations that come to Christ when the fullness of the Gentiles comes in and all Israel is saved (Romans 11:25-26).

2. The fact that Israel has been promised a particular land by God as an "everlasting possession" neither denies nor contradicts the oneness Jews and Gentiles have in Christ. For there may be oneness in Christ, and yet distinct and different material blessings that God bestows on individual Christians and upon Christian Nations (all nations will be blessed with their own land and with peace and prosperity—Psalm 72:11,17). How God chooses to bless individual Christians and Christian Nations is not uniform—one mold does not fit all and yet God loves us all equally in Christ. God sovereignly blesses as He chooses (to some God graciously gives more and to others God graciously gives less of this world's material blessings—to some more afflictions, to others less).

3. Because God has promised to bless Israel with that earthly Promise Land does not deny that Jew and Gentile are one in Christ (per Galatians 3:28) and that all the promises of God in Christ are Yea and Amen (per 2 Corinthians 1:20).

4. Thus, though God will fulfill His promise to Israel as a Christian nation in causing her to trust Christ, to repent, and to dwell safely in the earthly Promise Land, God will also give to all Christian Nations a land in which to safely dwell (for "nations" implies each Christian nation will have its own government and its own land graciously bestowed upon it by the Lord—Egypt in Isaiah 19).

III. Application

A. Abraham believed the promise of God that He would be the father of all nations and that all nations would be blessed in his Seed—Jesus (Galatians 3:16). Paul labors to make clear in Romans 4 that God justifies those not who work to be righteous in His sight, but those who trust in the righteousness of Christ alone (the Parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector). Paul even says in Romans 4:5 that God justifies the "ungodly" who look in faith to Christ. Let no one within the sound of my voice either think you are too ungodly to be declared righteous by God or too righteous to be declared righteous by God. Let us with Abraham receive the promise of salvation looking in faith alone to Christ alone.

B. Children, your faithfulness and cheerful obedience to your parents in all things lawful is an outward sign of God's work of grace and faith in your life. There is a rich reward attached to the commandment—a blessed life rather than a miserable life. Sincere and faithful obedience is not natural, but a supernatural act of God's grace to those who trust in Christ (whether it be to Christ, to parents, to husbands, and to all who have lawful authority in church and state). It's not always easy, but it is right before God (especially in a world that is telling you to do what you want—not what God commands you to do). Remember the promise!

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