Abraham, Issac & Jacob: Was the Land Promise Fulfilled?

Canaan Land: Promise Unconditional or Conditional?

In Genesis 17:8 and Genesis 48:4, God promises the land of Canaan as an **“everlasting possession”** to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants. However, this “everlasting” promise appears to contradict historical events such as the exile of the northern kingdom, Judah’s Babylonian captivity, and ultimately the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, which dispersed the Jewish people across the known world. This tension deepens when examining the dispensationalist claim that the modern establishment of Israel in 1948 is a divine fulfillment of this promise. To address these themes, we must explore the meaning of “everlasting,” the conditional nature of the covenant, the warnings Christ gave, and its ultimate fulfillment in Him.

The Importance of Sound Hermeneutics and Exegesis

Before diving into the specifics, it is essential to emphasize the **critical role of proper hermeneutical principles and exegetical methodology** when interpreting Scripture. The Bible must be understood in its historical, linguistic, and covenantal contexts to avoid reading into the text assumptions or doctrines that were never intended by the original authors.

- **Hermeneutics:** The art and science of biblical

interpretation requires examining the **original language**, **context**, **genre**, and the unity of Scripture as a whole. Misinterpretations often arise when isolated passages are interpreted apart from their broader biblical context.

- **Exegesis vs. Eisegesis:** Exegesis draws meaning *out of the text*, respecting its original context and intent. In contrast, eisegesis imposes preconceived ideas or modern agendas *into the text*. A sound exegetical approach is vital to uncovering the true meaning of passages like Genesis 17:8 and Genesis 48:4.

By adhering to these principles, we can better understand how the land promise fits within God's redemptive plan and avoid errors like conflating political events with biblical prophecy.

God's Promise of the Land and Its Fulfillment

The land promises began with God's covenant to Abraham in Genesis 12:1, 12:7, and 13:12-15. These promises were extended to Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 26:3; Genesis 28:13) and defined in detail, including specific territorial boundaries (Genesis 15:18-21; Numbers 34:5; Joshua 15:4).

However, Scripture also records that God fulfilled these land promises. For example:

- **Joshua 21:43-45 (KJV):** *"And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And the LORD gave them rest round about, according to all that he sware unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of*

all their enemies before them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass."

King Solomon also reigned over the promised land, even extending his territory beyond its original boundaries:

- **1 Kings 4:21 (KJV):** *"And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life."*

Furthermore, the Levites and Psalmists acknowledged the fulfillment of God's promises:

- **Nehemiah 9:8 (KJV):** *"And foundest his heart faithful before thee, and madest a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites… and hast performed thy words; for thou art righteous."*
- **Psalm 105:42-45 (KJV):** *"For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham his servant. And he brought forth his people with joy… and gave them the lands of the heathen."*

The Conditional Nature of Land Retention

While the initial grant of the land was unconditional (Deuteronomy 9:5), the retention of the land was conditional upon obedience:

- **Joshua 23:15-16 (KJV):** *"Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all good things are come upon you, which the*

LORD your God promised you; so shall the LORD bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you."

God explicitly warned that disobedience would lead to exile:

- **Deuteronomy 4:25-27 (KJV):** *"When thou shalt beget children… and shalt corrupt yourselves… ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it. The LORD shall scatter you among the nations."*

Yet, God also promised restoration for repentance:

- **Deuteronomy 30:1-3 (KJV):** *"And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee… and shalt return unto the LORD thy God… that then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee."*

Warnings of Judgment for Rejecting Christ

Throughout His ministry, Jesus issued numerous warnings to the Jewish people and their leaders about the consequences of rejecting Him as the Messiah. These warnings make it clear that forgiveness, restoration, and covenant blessings would only come through repentance and faith in Him. Here are some notable examples:

1. **The Warning of Destruction for Unbelief**
    - **Luke 19:41-44 (KJV):** *"And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy*

day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

- Here, Jesus explicitly warns of the coming destruction of Jerusalem (fulfilled in 70 AD) because they failed to recognize Him as their Savior.

2. **The Parable of the Vineyard**
   - **Matthew 21:33-43 (KJV):** *"The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."*
   - In this parable, the vineyard represents Israel, and the wicked tenants symbolize the Jewish leaders. Their rejection of the landowner's son (Jesus) results in their removal from the vineyard, which is then given to others. This underscores the conditional nature of Israel's covenant blessings.

3. **The Withered Fig Tree**
   - **Matthew 21:18-19 (KJV):** *"Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away."*
   - The fig tree, symbolizing Israel, withered because it bore no fruit, reflecting the nation's

spiritual barrenness and rejection of Christ.

4. **The Coming of False Messiahs and Judgment**
    - **Matthew 24:1-2 (KJV):** *"There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."*
    - Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple as part of God's judgment. Later in the chapter, He warned that false messiahs and prophets would arise, leading many astray.

5. **Unrepentance Leads to Condemnation**
    - **John 8:24 (KJV):** *"I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."*
    - Jesus made it clear that forgiveness and reconciliation with God required faith in Him. Without repentance and belief, judgment was inevitable.

The Meaning of "Everlasting Possession"

The term **"everlasting"** (Hebrew: □□□□□□, *ʿolam*) does not always mean "forever" in the infinite sense. Instead, it often refers to a **long duration determined by God's purposes**. In Genesis 17:8 and 48:4, *ʿolam* signifies that the promise of the land is tied to God's covenant plan, but this promise is not unconditional. While the land was granted to the patriarchs and their descendants, the ability to remain in the land depended on Israel's faithfulness to the covenant:

- **Leviticus 26:27-33** and **Deuteronomy 28:63-64** outline

blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, including exile.

The historical exiles of the northern and southern kingdoms underscore this conditionality. The ultimate judgment came when the Jewish leaders rejected Christ, fulfilling Jesus' prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction in 70 AD. Thus, the "everlasting possession" was never an eternal guarantee of uninterrupted physical occupation.

Modern Israel: Human Effort or Divine Fulfillment?

Dispensationalists often claim that the establishment of modern Israel in 1948 was a miraculous fulfillment of biblical prophecy, citing passages like Ezekiel 37 and Isaiah 66:8. However, from a covenantal perspective, this event is seen as a geopolitical occurrence rather than a divine restoration. Key considerations:

1. **Spiritual Fulfillment in Christ:**
    - The Abrahamic promise finds its fulfillment in Christ, who unites Jews and Gentiles into one spiritual family (Galatians 3:28-29; Ephesians 2:14-22).
    - The true "Israel of God" is the church, composed of all believers in Christ (Galatians 6:16).

2. **Historical Context:**
    - The establishment of Israel in 1948 was facilitated by human efforts, such as the Balfour Declaration and international political agreements, not a direct divine act. This stands in contrast to God's supernatural interventions in

the Bible.

Conclusion: The Everlasting Covenant in Christ

The warnings of Christ demonstrate that God's promises are not separated from the necessity of repentance and faith. It is unconscionable to think that Jesus would forgive their rejection of Him without genuine repentance. **Forgiveness only comes when one confesses sin with a repentant spirit before God (1 John 1:9).**

The "everlasting possession" of the land of Canaan was part of God's redemptive plan but served as a **type and shadow** pointing to Christ. The historical removal of Israel from the land—culminating in 70 AD—demonstrates that the physical land was never the ultimate goal. Instead:

- The "everlasting covenant" is fulfilled in Christ, whose death and resurrection bring about the new covenant.
- The true inheritance is spiritual and eternal, encompassing all who come to God through faith in Christ.

By interpreting Scripture through **exegetical standards and sound hermeneutics**, we can uncover God's intended meaning without distorting the text through human assumptions. This approach not only honors the integrity of Scripture but ensures that our understanding aligns with God's overarching redemptive purpose.