

The Church of the Servant King

Prophecy Series **(Proph7_The Land Covenant)**

Introduction – The Background for the Issuance and Confirmation of the Land Covenant

In our last lesson, we studied the Abrahamic Covenant to include some background information and its reaffirmation in Genesis 15 and 17. In chapter 15, Abram had just declined the offer from the king of Sodom of the spoils of victory associated with Abram's defeat of Chedorlaomer, the leader of the alliance that had oppressed Sodom and others. Abram did not want the king of Sodom to ever be able to claim any responsibility for Abram's wealth or success because Abram was very aware of God's covenant with him. God reaffirms His covenant in chapter 15 as a means of reassuring Abram that he was on the right path. In chapter 17, God's covenant with Abram is ratified again after Abram's act of unbelief, i.e. the attempt to obtain an heir to the promise through Sarah's handmaiden, Hagar. God reaffirms that the promise would be carried forward through a miraculous event – the birth of a child through Abram and Sarah when they were well beyond child-bearing years.¹

Isaac, the child of promise, is born of Abraham and Sarah (21:1-7) and God tests Abraham and Isaac's faith. Abraham is faced with the decision to obey God's strange command to sacrifice Isaac while at the same time reconcile this strange command with his knowledge of God's promises. Abraham knew that God had promised a seed through whom Abraham would have many descendants to be blessed (12:3 & 15:4). Abraham was also aware of the promise of Genesis 3:15 and knew that this promise would be fulfilled by one of his descendants. Therefore, if God had specifically promised these things and had specifically stated that Isaac was the child of promise, then surely God had a means of bringing it to pass even in spite of this strange command to sacrifice Isaac. The writer of Hebrews clarifies the picture for us. Hebrews 11:17-19 indicates that Abraham (and presumably Isaac) believed that God would resurrect Isaac.

Principle from Abraham's Offer of Isaac: Once you've experienced God's provision in an impossible situation, you are then in a position to turn everything over to Him with the confident assurance (i.e. biblical hope) that He will provide even in the face of adversity and opposition. *Corollary:* This type of faith-rest is evidenced by a peace, stability, poise, calm and joy that only the believer who has been in such a position can understand. This believer understands the principle of Romans 8:28 and has seen it come to pass in his/her life.

Isaac continues the new race that God has begun with Abraham. Following the birth of Jacob & Esau, the covenant is reaffirmed with Isaac (26:2-4). Jacob journeys back to Haran in Syria to find a wife. On his way, he sees a vision of a ladder with the angels of God ascending and descending on it (28:12). The Lord stands at the top of the ladder and reaffirms His covenant (28:13-14). Jacob eventually marries Leah and Rachel and stays in Syria for a period of 21 years (29:18, 27, 30; 31:28). He then returns to the Land after Rachel's womb was opened giving birth to Joseph (30:22-24). Joseph is sold by his brothers (37:12-36) and becomes a slave in Egypt (39:1-40:22) before being promoted to a position 2nd only to the Pharaoh himself.

¹ A miraculous birth was necessary to ratify God's promise to Abram's contemporaries, as well as subsequent generations of Jews and Gentiles. This was especially important since Satan was proving to be very effective at introducing counterfeit religions during a period of oral tradition as we have seen. Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 when Isaac was born (Ge 17:1, 7; 18:1-15; 21:1-7). The promise had been initially given to Abram when he was 75 years old (Ge 12:4).

Principle from Joseph's slavery to promotion experience: the best leaders are those who have at one point experienced the same conditions as the follower. God had to insure that Joseph was equipped with the proper humility before God could promote Joseph. Later, this proves especially important, otherwise Joseph might have used his position and his knowledge that he was the descendant of promise through whom God would fulfill the seed portion of the Abrahamic Covenant in a way that harmed Israel's future as a whole – e.g. he could have ordered the killing of his brothers when they journeyed to Egypt. *Corollary:* God uses prepared believers. Prepared believers are those who have humility. True spiritual humility is accompanied by the realization of God's grace in light of our sinfulness so that any boastfulness or pride is quashed. Joseph had been humbled through his slavery experience so that he could treat his brothers in grace just as he had been treated in grace.

Joseph rises to power and Jacob and his brothers journey to Egypt (chps. 41-45) circa 1876 B.C. A period of 430 years elapse (see Ge 15:13) and Israel endures slavery in Egypt.² God raises up Moses to lead Israel out of slavery and back to the Land of Promise. In circa 1446 B.C., Moses leads Israel from Egypt through the Red Sea and toward the Land of Promise. The journey of Israel is documented in the book of Exodus.

The book of Exodus ends with Moses petitioning God to retain a presence with the people as they moved toward the Land of promise (see Ex 35:1-5). The details of the tabernacle designed to house the Shekinah glory of the Lord is contained in the final chapters of Exodus. The book of Leviticus details the activities of the priests and gives extensive instructions for the sacrificial system for Israel. The book of Numbers recounts the march of the 1st generation including census information as well as the continued march of the 2nd generation including census information. Due to their rebellion against God and Moses, Israel wanders in the Wilderness for forty years until 1406 B.C. As this 2nd generation of Israel is poised to enter the Land, Moses leaves what is in effect his last will and testament – the book of Deuteronomy.

The Land or Palestinian Covenant is expressed in Deuteronomy 29:1-30:20 (specifically 30:1-10). The book of Deuteronomy is a second explanation of the Mosaic Law that was originally given to Israel through Moses at Mt. Sinai. The second explanation in Deuteronomy was necessary because a new generation of Jews had arisen since the original transmission of the Law. All of the first generation (except Caleb, Joshua and Moses) who were older than twenty years of age when the Law was first received by Moses at Mt. Sinai had died (see Num 14:29-35). Moses relays God's covenant promises regarding the Land that this second generation would possess. Therefore, the Land Covenant is expressed in the context of encouragement for this generation of Jews who would enter the Land.

The Provisions of the Land Covenant

There are eight specific items in the Land Covenant. All are prophetic and some are prophecies of Israel's failure and others represent unilateral promises from God. The eight items are:

- Moses prophesies regarding Israel's disobedience to the Mosaic Law and subsequent scattering over all the world (29:2-30:1).
- Israel will repent (30:2).
- The Messiah ("Lord your God") will gather Israel (30:3).
- Israel will be restored to the Land (30:3-4)
- Israel will possess the Promised Land (30:5)
- Israel will be regenerated (30:6)
- The enemies of Israel will be judged (30:7)

² There is a difference of 30 years between the prophecy of Genesis 15:13 (400 years) and Exodus 12:40-41 (430 years). Apparently, Genesis 15:13 (see also Acts 7:6) used rounded numbers. See John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 370.

- Israel will receive the Messianic kingdom (30:8-10)

The Importance of the Land Covenant

The most important aspect of this covenant is that it reaffirms Israel's title deed to the Land first promised to Abraham circa 2100 B.C. Even though Israel had been and would be unfaithful, God remains faithful to His own essence. He cannot violate His own integrity, i.e. any of His essence attributes. In this specific case, God's immutability and veracity are at issue.

Another important principle gleaned from the Land Covenant is that the conditions of the Mosaic covenant do not set aside the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic covenant. The fulfillment of the unilateral Abrahamic covenant is not contingent upon a specific generation's faithfulness. The Land covenant emphasizes the land aspect of the original Abrahamic covenant.

The Land covenant ensures a final worldwide re-gathering of Israel following a worldwide dispersion. Also, the covenant indicates that the Jewish people would suffer during this dispersion. We have seen Israel dispersed from the Land (e.g. A.D. 70); however, never in Israel's history have we seen Israel possess all of the land of promise. That aspect of the Land covenant is still yet future. Because of the many demonstrations of the faithfulness of God throughout Israel's history, we can rest assured that God will restore Israel to the Land of promise one day. The promise of the Land is reaffirmed by many of the prophets of Israel (Isa 11:11-12:6; 43:5-7; Jer 16:14-15; 23:3-4, 7-8, 31:7-10; Ezek 11:14-18; 36:24; Amos 9:14-15; Zeph 3:18-20; Zech 10:8-12; Matt 24:31; Mk 13:27).

The Land Covenant Reaffirmed to Sixth Century B.C. Israel

Centuries later, the Land Covenant is reaffirmed. Ezekiel 16 compares God's relationship with Israel as that of husband and wife (vv. 8-14). However, Israel was an unfaithful wife and deserving of discipline from Yahweh (vv. 15-52). As is characteristic of most Hebrew prophets, Ezekiel under the ministry of the Holy Spirit, injects encouraging comments regarding the faithfulness of the Lord when announcing impending discipline. Ezekiel reminds Israel that in spite of the Southern Kingdom's (Judea) impending captivity in Babylon, God would be faithful to His promises originally given to Israel in her youth. Israel would one day possess the Land of Promise (vv. 53-63).