

Romans

Romans 4: 16-22

Romans Four

November 29, 2009

This is lesson number 17 in our exposition of the Book of Romans.

The Theme of the Letter

Romans 1:16-17

“For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is the **power** of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the **righteousness of God** is **revealed** from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ ” Romans 1:16-17

Title: “The Promise to Abraham”

Read Romans 4:16-22

Our time ran out last week and we did not finish looking at three aspects of the **promise**, viz. a land; a seed {nation}; a blessing to all nations.

In each aspect of the promise we will answer two questions?

1) In what respect has the promise already been fulfilled, and 2) in what respect is the promise yet to be fulfilled?

SEED The easiest aspect of the promise to explain from Scripture pertains to the “seed.”

The birth of Isaac to Sarah was the first natural fulfillment of the specific promise of “seed.” Indeed there are many children who trace their genealogy to Abraham. The number of Abraham’s children is compared to the number of stars in heaven and the grains of sand on the seashore.

So there is a **natural** fulfillment to the promise of seed.

But we can more fully understand what God revealed to Abraham.

We have a clear statement in the word of God, so we don’t have to struggle with the exegesis or interpretation.

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Galatians 3:16-19

16 Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. 17 And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. 18 For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise. 19 What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.

So the natural fulfillment of the promise in the aspect of seed, in the normal manner is seen in the multitude of physical offspring, but more fully in the single object to whom the promise was made, even to Jesus Christ, the Seed!

BLESSING TO THE NATIONS

The Jews laid an exclusive claim to Abraham as their father and tried to shut out everyone else. The source of their error was a misunderstanding and a misinterpretation of why God had chosen out a people to be separated unto God and to receive the oracles, or the word of God and to preserve it for hundreds of years.

They confused that important role with an exemption from the wrath of God and worse that they were justified. That misinterpretation prevails unto this very day.

Deuteronomy 7:6-11

6 "For you are a holy {set apart} people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. 7 The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; 8 but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 9 Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; 10 and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. 11 Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them.

God had instructed Israel to share the blessing of His word with the nations of the earth; the Jews were to be "as a light to the Gentiles."

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Isaiah says to the Israelites: Isaiah 42:6

"I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness,
And will hold Your hand;
I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people,
As a light to the Gentiles,

But alas, the Jews failed miserably in this aspect of the promise,
i.e., to be a blessing to the nations.

The promise of God **did not fail** because of the unbelief of the Jews because the ultimate fulfillment of the promise to be a blessing to all nations is in Christ. Cf. Romans 3:1-3

Isaiah says concerning Messiah:

Isaiah 49:6

6 Indeed He says,
'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,
And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;
I will also give You as **a light to the Gentiles,**
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

And Paul affirms this prophecy: Galatians 3:6-9

6 just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." 7 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "**In you all the nations shall be blessed.**" 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

Cf. Romans 9:6

Having dealt with the aspects of the promise as to the "seed," and to "all the nations of the earth," we will look at what is, perhaps, the most difficult aspect for many if not most people to grasp, i.e., regarding **land**.

LAND

It is a serious error of interpretation to make the promise, especially as it pertains to LAND, apply only to the Jews. But dear friends, that is exactly what Dispensational eschatology teaches.

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In a previous message I mentioned a passionate encounter I had with a preacher that I met at the Southern Baptists Founders Conference, which Cora and I were privileged to attend, in Kentucky.

He was of the Dispensational eschatological persuasion and his primary assurance of the truth of that system hung on the fact of the present existence of the nation of Israel in the Middle East.

To him, that proved that God's promise to restore Israel to the land was being fulfilled before our very eyes. He was as certain of his position as I was of mine; yet we have very different interpretations of Scripture.

Is there a nation in the Middle East which calls itself "Israel?"

Of course! But by what measure is it the Israel of Scripture?

In 1948, following WWII and the Holocaust, a nation was constituted in the middle east and named itself "Israel." Every day the news media carry stories of the ongoing conflict between the Arabs and the Jews. Are we to understand that this nation is the fulfillment of the promise by God to restore Israel to the land?

Many will answer, "yes!"

The majority, in fact, would answer in the affirmative.

But I want to remind you that everywhere in Scripture the promise of land is contingent on obedience. The overthrow of the Northern Kingdom of Israel by Assyria and later the capture of the Southern Kingdom of Judah by Babylon was as a direct result of idolatry and disobedience. The return of the Jews from the exile in Babylon {which by the way included only a small number of those who were then in Babylon} was a fulfillment of specific prophecy, and it too had limitations.

So, as we have seen with the aspect of the SEED, and as a BLESSING TO ALL NATIONS, we will see a natural fulfillment and a broader spiritual fulfillment of the **promise** regarding the LAND.

The record of the specific fulfillment of the promise of land made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob came before the Babylonian captivity:

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Joshua 21:43-45

43 So the LORD gave to Israel **all the land of which He had sworn to give** to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. 44 The LORD gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. 45 **Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.**

“The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away.” Job 1:21

The LORD gave the land and the LORD has taken it away!

Jeremiah 18:1-10

18:1 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying: 2 "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words." 3 Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. 4 And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. 5 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: 6 "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the LORD. **"Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!** 7 The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, 8 if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. 9 And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, 10 if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.

So the question for those of the Dispensational persuasion to deal with is what is left regarding the land that is yet to be fulfilled when Joshua says that God has already given the land: So the LORD gave to Israel **all the land of which He had sworn to give** to their fathers, and **“All came to pass.”**

And Jeremiah says that God has the right regarding a nation
“to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it...”

God is faithful to keep His word, and in my understanding, He does not have anything yet to do regarding a literal restoration of the Jews to the land.

The following is an excerpt from my sermon:

“What the Prophets had to Say.”

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One of the most significant things that I have learned about OT prophecy is from John L. Bray. Writing about prophecies of the restoration of national Israel:

“As to the Old Testament, I have already pointed out how that any promises made as to a restoration to the Land, were fulfilled when they returned from Babylon, etc., as recorded in the Bible, and that after that no more such promises were ever made. All the prophecies used by the Bible teachers today to try to prove a future or present restoration of Israel to Palestine, are prophecies made prior to their restoration as God promised in the past. And many of the prophecies included future fulfillment in the sense of spiritual blessing found in Christianity, couched in highly symbolical language that are best understood as God intended them to be.”

John L. Bray, “Israel in Bible Prophecy” [Page 54]

After I read that claim I was stunned at the **simplicity** and the **profundity** of his point. I took the time and read again through the prophets before and after the return of the Jews from Babylon and learned for myself that Mr. Bray was exactly correct.

There are no prophecies of restoration **after** the return from Babylon. And there is not a word in the NT about a restoration of national Israel. Be careful with your prooftexts because you have to impose your preconceived notions on the NT text in order to make it say what you think it does.

Prophets before the return to Jerusalem from Babylon from 870 to 540 B.C.: The Babylonian Captivity was 586-539 B.C.

Obadiah, Joel [Elijah & Elisha], Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Nahum, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Daniel and Ezekiel.

Prophets after the return to Jerusalem from Babylon from 540 to 500 B.C.:

Zechariah, Haggai and Malachi make no prophecies of restoration.

And there is absolutely nothing about a restoration of national Israel in the NT!

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Hold on until we get to Romans 11:26: “And so all Israel shall be saved.”

But there is yet a future fulfillment regarding LAND.

Hebrews 11:8-19

8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. 11 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude--innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. 13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18 of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," 19 concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones: “The promise referred not only to the Jews possession of the land of Palestine but to that great day which is coming, when the ‘kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.’ It is the promise concerning the great and glorious day when ‘there shall be new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness,’ and Christ and His people shall reign in glory in this glorified world.”

Psalm 37:9 ***“For evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the LORD, They shall inherit the earth.”***

And Jesus in Matthew 5:5

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

God’s **promise** to Abraham involved
SEED, BLESSING TO ALL NATIONS, and LAND.

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It seems to me that God has kept His promise to Abraham in natural ways and the ultimate fulfillment of the promise is sure in Jesus Christ and in the Church of the Redeemed of the Lord.

“Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.” Romans 4:16

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The next lesson will deal with how the promise is carried over to the Church.

This precious passage of Scripture that we examined today {4:16-22} was meant for every age is shown in the verses that follow {4:23-25}.

We have a few minutes left this morning and I want to give you a copy of a chart that came to me via email.

I do not know who created the chart but it is an excellent correlation of the Gospel to the Five Points of Calvinism.

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