

**Entrust Eschatology The Divine Restoration of Israel – Part 2**  
**Fulfillment of the Covenants 2/8/24**

**III. The Fulfillment of the Biblical Covenants**

This question of when, how, and in whom the Covenants of Promise will be fulfilled has been answered in a variety of ways.

**A. Fulfillment in the Book of Joshua**

1. The Case for Final/Complete Fulfillment

Some Supersessionists assert that all the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant were completely fulfilled in the nation of Israel in the Book of Joshua and therefore will not be fulfilled in the future.

Joshua 11:23 “So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord had spoken to Moses, and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. Thus the land had rest from war.”

Joshua 21:43-45 “So the Lord gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. 44 And the Lord gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the Lord gave all their enemies into their hand. 45 Not one of the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.”

Joshua 23:14-16 “Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth, and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the Lord your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed. 15 And it shall come about that just as all the good words which the Lord your God spoke to you have come upon you, so the Lord will bring upon you all the threats, until He has destroyed you from off this good land which the Lord your God has given you. 16 When you transgress the covenant of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, and go and serve other gods, and bow down to them, then the anger of the Lord will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from off the good land which He has given you.”

## 2. The Case for Initial/Partial Fulfillment

There is much stronger evidence, however, that Joshua speaks only of an initial/partial fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham.

An initial/partial fulfillment would indicate that the final/complete fulfillment is yet future and awaits a time when, following her dispersion, Israel will be restored to her land with a circumcised heart that loves the Lord.

The following points argue that the fulfillments mentioned in the above passages from Joshua were initial and partial.

- a. The Difficulty of the Dilemma Joshua 21:43-45 makes it clear that Israel possessed "all the land" promised to her, and yet other passages indicate remaining land that had yet to be conquered and possessed:

- Much of the Land Not Yet Possessed  
(Josh 13:1-7; 17:17-18; 18:3; 23:4-5, 12-13)

Joshua 18:3 So Joshua said to the sons of Israel, "How long will you put off entering to take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you?"

- Much of the Land Not Yet Conquered  
(Josh 15:63; 16:10; 17:12-13; Judg 3:5-6)

Judges 3:5-6 The sons of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; <sup>6</sup> and they took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

- John Calvin: "A second point...raises some doubt, namely, how the children of Israel can be said to have been settled in the possession of the land promised to them, and to have become masters of it, in such a sense that in regard to the enjoyment of it, not one syllable of the promises of God had failed. For we have already seen that many of the enemy were intermingled with them. The divine intention was, that not one of the enemy should be permitted to remain; on the other hand, the Israelites do not drive out many, admit them as neighbors, as if the inheritance had been common to them; they even make pactions with them. How then can these two things be reconciled, that God, as he had promised, gave

possession of the land to the people, and yet they were excluded from some portion by the power or obstinate resistance of the enemy?"

b. The Remainder of the Covenant

- The promise of land was only one component of the Abrahamic Covenant (the others include the blessing of the nations through the promised seed).
- Is it even possible to entertain the idea that all of God's "Abrahamic obligations" were already fulfilled at the time of Joshua?

c. The Permanence of the Promise

- The promise given to Abraham (in the Abrahamic Covenant) was that his descendants would receive all the land of Canaan as "an everlasting possession" (Gen 17:8).
- The land that Israel possessed in those days certainly was not an everlasting, permanent possession.
- Therefore, the final fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise of land must await a future time.

d. The Reiteration of the Promise

- Even after the time of Joshua, the OT prophets continued to reiterate the promise of the land as a future possession for the nation of Israel (e.g., Isa 2:2-4; 11:1-16; 14:1-2; 27:1-13; 35:1, 10; 43:5-6; 49:8-13; 59:15b-21; 62:4-7; 66:10-20; Jer 3:11-20; 12:14-17; 16:10-18; 23:1-8; 24:5-7; 28:1-4; 29:1-14; 30:1-3, 10-11; 31:2-14; 32:36-44; 42:1-22; 50:17-20; Ezek 11:14-20; 20:33-44; 28:25-26; 34:11-16, 23-31; 36:16-36; 37:1-28; 39:21-29; Hosea 1:10-11; 2:14-23; 14:4-7; Joel 3:18-21; Amos 9:11-15; Obad 17, 21; Mic 4:6-7; 7:14-20; Zeph 3:14-20; Zech 8:7-8; 10:6-12; and 14:11).
- Therefore, God's promise of land must not have seen its final fulfillment in the days of Joshua, and thus we would not conclude that the Abrahamic Covenant had experienced fulfillment.

e. The Significance of Deuteronomy 30

- In Deuteronomy 30, prior to the Jews' entrance into the Promised Land, God declared that the nation of Israel would eventually be dispersed from the land because of her unfaithfulness to the Mosaic Covenant (v. 1; Deut 31:20).
- He also declared that some day after that, Israel would return to the Lord with all of her heart and therefore be restored once again to the Promised Land (Deut 30:2-10).
- In light of Deuteronomy 30, the promise of the land extended not only beyond the initial fulfillment in Joshua, but also after the nation had been dispersed hundreds of years later.

CONCLUSION: Joshua speaks of an initial/partial fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, in which Yahweh proved Himself faithful to His word. But the final/complete fulfillment is yet future and awaits a time when, subsequent to her dispersion, she will return to the land with a circumcised heart that loves the Lord.

IMPLICATION: The case for initial fulfillment is a case for future fulfillment.

FURTHER STUDY: Gregory Harris, "Did God Fulfill Every Good Promise?: Toward a Biblical Understanding of Joshua 21:43-45," MSJ 23, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 55-83.

## **B. Fulfillment in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah**

Some Supersessionists insist that the Abrahamic promises were fulfilled in the nation's returns to the land from exile under Zerubbabel (536 B.C.), Ezra (557 B.C.), or Nehemiah (445 B.C.) and therefore will not be fulfilled in the future.

However, here are 11 reasons why the Abrahamic Covenant could not have been fulfilled during Ezra and Nehemiah:

### **1. The Magnitude of the Dispersion**

The promises of Israel's final restoration portray the Jews being brought back "from all the lands" of their dispersion. This could not refer to Judah's return from their captivity in Babylon alone (e.g., Jer 32:37).

- Therefore, the Abrahamic Covenant was not fulfilled in Ezra and Nehemiah.

## **2. The Reuniting of the Kingdoms**

Several restoration promises speak of the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom being reunited with the two tribes of the Southern Kingdom (Isa 11:11-12; Jer 3:18; 23:5-6; 31:27; Ezek 37:21-22; Hos 1:11; Zech 10:6). However, this reunification of the tribes did not occur under the previous returns from exile.

- Therefore, the Abrahamic Covenant was not fulfilled in Ezra and Nehemiah.

## **3. The Transformation of the People**

Several of the restoration promises speak of the spiritual renewal and wholehearted obedience of the nation (Deut 30:1-3, 6; Jer 3:17; 24:7; 32:38-40; Ezek 11:19-20; 36:26-27). Given the sinful state of the nation during the previous returns, it could not be said that the nation was spiritually renewed.

- Therefore, the Abrahamic Covenant was not fulfilled in Ezra and Nehemiah.

## **4. The Transformation of the Land**

Scripture indicates that when the nation of Israel is restored, her land will be renewed and her cities will be rebuilt (Ezek 36:29, 30, 34-35; 213 36:33, 35-36), and this did not occur under the previous returns from exile.

- Therefore, the Abrahamic Covenant was not fulfilled in Ezra and Nehemiah.

## **5. The Overshadowing of the Exodus**

According to some of the restoration promises, the return of Israel will be so astounding that it will eclipse and overshadow the exodus out of Egypt and make it seem small in comparison (Jer 16:14-15; 23:5-8). During the returns of Ezra and Nehemiah's time, this was clearly not the case.

- Therefore, the Abrahamic Covenant was not fulfilled in Ezra and Nehemiah.

## 6. The Reiteration of the Promise

Zechariah held out the promise of restoration to the land even after the returns under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah (Zech 8:4-8; 10:8- 10; 14:1-21).

- Therefore, the Abrahamic Covenant was not fulfilled in Ezra and Nehemiah.

## 7. The Size of the Population

Several prophecies indicate that at the promised return to the land, the Jews will be as numerous as they were prior to the exile (Ezek 36:37b-38a; Jer 33:22; Zech 10:8), but the population of the post-exilic period was relatively small.

- Therefore, the Abrahamic Covenant was not fulfilled in Ezra and Nehemiah.

## 8. The Destruction of the Nations

Scripture teaches that Yahweh will destroy the nations to which He has scattered the Jews at the time that He restores the nation of Israel (Jer 30:10-11; 46:28). However, this did not happen during those returns.

- Therefore, the Abrahamic Covenant was not fulfilled in Ezra and Nehemiah.

## 9. The Timing of the Restoration

This promised return to the land is presented as an integral part of the New Covenant (Jer 31:27-40; Ezek 36:24-36). However, the NC was not inaugurated until the first coming of Christ.

- Therefore, the Abrahamic Covenant was not fulfilled in Ezra and Nehemiah.

## 10. The Permanence of the Restoration

According to the prophets, once God restores the Jews to their land, they will “live in safety” (Jer 32:27) and not be uprooted again from their everlasting possession (Amos 9:15; Jer 23:5-6; Ezek 34:28; 37:25). After the Israelites returned from Babylone, however, this was clearly not the case. Thus, there awaits a future time when Israel will experience permanence in their land.

- Therefore, the Abrahamic Covenant was not fulfilled in Ezra and Nehemiah.

## 11. The Purpose of the Restoration (Ezek 36:16-23)

God's ultimate purpose for the promised return is the vindication of His name among the nations, and this doxological purpose was not fulfilled in the previous returns. This can be seen most clearly in Ezekiel 36, where the divine motivation for Israel's future restoration (vv. 16-23) comes before the promise of restoration itself (vv. 24-38):

- The Moral Defilement of the Land of Israel (Ezek 36:16-17)

Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, when the house of Israel was living on their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds; their way before Me was like the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity."

- The Divine Judgment of the People of Israel (Ezek 36:18-19)

"Therefore, I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they had shed on the land, because they had defiled it with their idols. I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed throughout the lands. According to their ways and their deeds I judged them."

- The Blasphemous Response of the Enemies of Israel (Ezek 36:20)

"When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name, because it was said of them, 'These are the people of the Lord, yet they have left His land.'"

- The Future Vindication of the God of Israel (Ezek 36:21-23)

"But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went. Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'This is what the Lord God says: "It is not for your sake, house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord," declares the Lord God, "when I show Myself holy among you in their sight.'"

- Therefore, the Abrahamic Covenant was not fulfilled in Ezra and Nehemiah.