

DID JOSHUA 21:43-45 FULFILL THE ABRAHAMIC LAND COVENANT?

As a precursor to reading this article, I suggest you read my earlier posts on the subject of the significance of the modern state of Israel and the Jews being back in the land of Israel—Eretz Israel. Those articles are [Israel, Back from the Dead](#), and [Did the Church Replace Israel in the Plan of God?](#)

In the last article, [Did the Church Replace Israel in the Plan of God?](#), posted earlier this month, which was some fifteen pages long, I thought I covered enough of the questions on Replacement Theology to convince anyone of the validity of the current state of Israel and the Jewish people in the overall prophetic scheme of God, except for old die-hard Replacement Theology Amillennialists, like R.C. Sproul, Sr. However, as is always the case, the one Scripture you don't address is always the one somebody will bring up, usually out of context, to prove how invalid all of your other argumentation is. Then on top of that, I get criticized for how much Scripture I use to back up my arguments. Imagine that. So those of you from the school of nice please excuse me while I have a mini sarcastic rant. I suppose some would prefer I default to the Rob Bell or Tony Campolo method of using no Scripture, or at least no Scripture left in its context to determine its literal meaning. Sorry, but I won't do it. So deal with it! There I feel better now.

So, did Joshua 21:43-45 fulfill the Abrahamic Land Covenant? (Genesis 12:7; 15:18; 26:3-4) Again, the answer is no. Now let me show you why it did not fulfill the land covenant.

Again, the first reason I would give for rejecting this idea is that Joshua only partially fulfilled the land covenant. Remember, in the context of the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, and the life of Joshua as the servant of Moses, he was fulfilling what Moses had been shown on Mount Nebo, immediately prior to his death, which land was only part of the total land God promised to Abraham (Deuteronomy 32:48-52; 34:1-4).

Another factor is that the Book of Joshua seems to repeatedly indicate they had already conquered all the land God promised to Abraham, even though we know this is not the case (Joshua 10:40; 11:16,23). Yet, if you leave those verses in context, it simply shows they conquered all the land in a given area. Even after the campaigns of Joshua 10 and 11, God said to Joshua, "You are old, advanced in years, and there remains very much land yet to be possessed." They were taking it piece by piece.

We see in the Book of Judges that Israel did not take all the land and put out all the pagans, and it was because of their disobedience to God (Judges 1-2). The Israelites had been commanded to destroy all the nations, and to completely possess the land (Joshua 6:17-24; 7:11-15; 8:8; 10:28-43; 11:8-23). However, we are also told they did not obey God to do so (Joshua 15:63; 16:10; 17:12-13), and it would become a major snare to the Israelites throughout the Old Testament. So Joshua sternly rebuked them for their failure to obey the God of Israel. Joshua 18: 3 says, "Then Joshua said to the children of Israel: "How long will you neglect to go and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers has given you?" Clearly they had failed to take the whole land promised to them by the Lord.

Although Joshua 21:43-45 seems to suggest the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Land Covenant, Joshua 23:4-8 indicates something quite different.

Joshua 23:4-8

4 "See, I have divided to you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from the Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, as far as the Great Sea westward.

5 "And the LORD your God will expel them from before you and drive them out of your sight. So you shall possess their land, as the LORD your God promised you.

6 "Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left,

7 "and lest you go among these nations, these who remain among you. You shall not make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause *anyone* to swear *by them*; you shall not serve them nor bow down to them,

8 "but you shall hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day.

Clearly, in this passage, Joshua speaks of the complete fulfillment of the land covenant as something still future. While God is faithful to His people, their disobedience delayed the complete fulfillment of all God had promised to them, and they are still waiting for the complete fulfillment of those promises, which will come only in the Millennial Kingdom (see [Did the Church Replace Israel in the Plan of God?](#)). Therefore, the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Land Covenant remains in the future after Israel has been called out of every nation back to the land God promised to them (Ezekiel 20:33-44).

Ezekiel 20:33-44

33 " *As I live*," says the Lord GOD, "surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you.

34 "I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out.

35 "And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face.

36 "Just as I pleaded My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will plead My case with you," says the Lord GOD.

37 "I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant;

38 "I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I *am* the LORD.

39 " *As for you*, O house of Israel," thus says the Lord GOD: "Go, serve every one of you his idols -- and hereafter -- if you will not obey me; but profane My holy name no more with your gifts and your idols.

40 "For on My holy mountain, on the mountain height of Israel," says the Lord GOD, "there all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, shall serve Me; there I will accept them, and there I will require your offerings and the firstfruits of your sacrifices, together with all your holy things.

41 "I will accept you as a sweet aroma when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered; and I will be hallowed in you before the Gentiles.

42 "Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the country *for* which I raised My hand in an oath to give to your fathers.

43 "And there you shall remember your ways and all your doings with which you were defiled; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight because of all the evils that you have committed.

44 "Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have dealt with you for My name's sake, not according to your wicked ways nor according to your corrupt doings, O house of Israel," says the Lord GOD.' "

In fact, virtually no commentaries take the stance of the Replacement Theology camp that all the land promises to Abraham have been fulfilled in Joshua 21:43-45. For example, one would expect Reformed commentator M. H. Woudstra to raise such an issue, but he does not do so in *The Book of Joshua* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), pp. 314- 15.

Even Colin Chapman, who is an outspoken anti-Zionist, says that there are many indications the land was never fully conquered (Joshua 13:1-32; Judges 1:1-36), and that many of the people the Israelites were supposed to

drive out of the land continued to live alongside them (Joshua 9:1-27) (Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land? The Continuing Crisis Over Israel and Palestine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), p. 119).

Numerous pro-Israel theologians mention that Joshua is recording the historical facts that God was faithful, even when the Israelites were not. Keil and Delitzsch explain this matter in this manner:

Notwithstanding the fact that many a tract of country still remained in the hands of the Canaanites, the promise that the land of Canaan should be given to the house of Israel for a possession had been fulfilled; for God had not promised the immediate and total destruction of the Canaanites, but only their gradual extermination (Ex. xxiii. 29, 30; Deut. vii. 22). And even though the Israelites never came into undisputed possession of the whole of the promised land, to the full extent of the boundaries laid down in Num. xxxiv. 1- 12, never conquering Tyre and Sidon for example, the promises of God were no more broken on that account than they were through the circumstance, that after the death of Joshua and the elder his contemporaries, Israel was sometimes hard pressed by the Canaanites; since the complete fulfilment of this promise was inseparably connected with the fidelity of Israel to the Lord (C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I & II Samuel*, 10 vols., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), Vol. II, p. 216).

Therefore, Joshua 21:43-45 must be viewed in the overall context of the Book of Joshua. Otherwise, it can be used erroneously as an argument for the fulfillment of the land covenant, or as an argument of disinheritance of the land from Israel.

Although at the end of the two major campaigns (Joshua 10-11) a summary is given that Joshua took all that land, and the hill-country (Joshua 11:16-20), indicating his work was done, and the Conquest was completed, it is an idealistic summary. It is further confirmed to be idealistic, as seen in chapter 13:1-6, which says, "There remains yet very much land to be possessed," and then describes a list of unconquered cities (cf. Judges 1:27ff.). This is similar to Joshua 21:43-35, which indicates that Israel possessed all the land, all their enemies were defeated, and all that the Lord promised came to pass. Yet the Book of Judges makes it plain that this was not the case. So, the command to dispossess all the enemies in the land and to occupy their territory (Genesis 15:18; Exodus 23:23-31, Numbers 34:2, Deuteronomy 1:7, 8, etc.) has a similar implication. Ideally, Israel was to dispossess all their enemies, but in actuality many were left behind, and these became a snare to them. In fact it is indicated that this was part of the will of God in order to, discipline them (Joshua 23:12, 13, Judges 3:1,2) (Adrian Jeffers, "Ideal Versus Real History in the Book of Joshua," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Summer 1969), p. 183).

As much as the Israelites sinned, rebelled against God, and repeatedly failed Him, His faithfulness to them and to the covenant He made with Abraham remained intact. This should give us great consolation, as New Testament believers. Not to give us the idea we can do anything we want and get away with it, but to remind us that God is faithful, and we are secure in Christ (Romans 8:38-39), even though He will discipline us when we need it. While ours is not without conditions (John 15:1-17) like the covenant God made with Abraham, we still have great security (1 John 1:5-10).

Although some theologians insist that the statement in Joshua 21:43 means that the land promise of the Abrahamic Covenant was fulfilled then, this cannot be true because later the Bible gives additional prophecies about Israel possessing the land after the time of Joshua (Amos 9:14-15). Again, Joshua 21:43, refers to the extent of the land as outlined in Numbers 34, and not to the ultimate extent it will be in the messianic kingdom (Gen. 15:18- 21). Also, though Israel possessed the land at this time it was later dispossessed, whereas the Abrahamic Covenant promised Israel that she would possess the land forever (Gen. 17:8) (Donald K. Campbell, " Joshua," in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1985), pp. 364-65).

In fact, many passages written after the time of Joshua promise a future for Israel (Isaiah 60:18, 21; Jeremiah 23:6-6; 24:5-6; 30:18; 31:31-34; 32:37-40; 33:6-9; Ezekiel 28:25-26; 34:11-12; 36:24-26; 37:1-14, 21-25; 39:28; Hosea 3:4-5; Joel 2:18-29; Micah 2:12; 4:6-7; Zephaniah 3:19-20; and Zechariah 8:7-8; 12:10-13:1; 13:8-9). In addition, Deuteronomy 30:3-6 speaks of a still future restoration in belief. According to Zechariah 12:10. it appears that Israel, as a nation, turn to Christ at His Second Coming.

Amos 9:14-15, it is one of the clearest, future restoration passages promising the future restoration of Israel.

Amos 9:14-15

“I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; They shall build the waste cities and inhabit *them*; They shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; They shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them. I will plant them in their land, And no longer shall they be pulled up From the land I have given them," Says the LORD your God.”

In conclusion, as I demonstrated in my previous blog, **Did the Church Replace Israel in the Plan of God?**, Israel has a national future in which the Jews will be dwelling in the land under the blessing and favor of God. That occurs, or at least begins, during the Millennial Kingdom. By that time, Israel will have been converted to believe in Jesus as Messiah. At the present time, the current regathering of Israel in unbelief is for the purpose of putting God's covenant people through the fire of tribulation (Jeremiah 30, especially verse 7; Daniel 9:27; Revelation 6-19), which will result in the salvation of the remnant. Unfortunately, Zechariah 13:7-9 makes it clear that only a remnant of national Israel will be saved, that two-thirds of them will die. It is difficult to miss the clear message of this remnant teaching, unless one has a preconceived bias against the future fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham and the Jews. Such is the case with those who hold to Replacement Theology, and I would call some of them blatantly anti-Zionist Evangelicals who have abandoned any pretense of the normal, literal approach to interpreting prophetic Scripture, and instead eisegete their Replacement Theology back into these passages. And some like Steven Sizer are flat-out anti-Semites. Some have even adopted what is called the “Palestinian Narrative,” which totally perverts the Scripture, and some in this camp even go so far as to make Jesus a Palestinian. If their Jesus is a Palestinian, they have a different Jesus who cannot save. The Jesus of the Bible is a Jew, of the House and lineage of David, and the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Any other Jesus is an imposter and an abomination who also stands in need of salvation.

By Jess Leeper