

The Land Is Mine!

A Question of Israel and the Land

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Sometimes small details mean a lot, when we see a bit closer at what they really mean. What might otherwise seem to be an unimportant historical fact, has, in reality, a world of theological meaning to it. Here is what I mean. In Acts 4:34, Luke says something that too often fails to impress the modern reader because we are so far removed from the concept of a Covenant Land. Luke tells that members of the nascent body of Christ in Jerusalem, “For all who were possessors of lands and houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid the at the apostles’ feet.” (Acts 4:34). So what is the big deal? What is so important about the Christians in Jerusalem selling their homes and lands? Real estate transactions are a commonplace event, aren’t they? Well, not in Israel, and not in the manner described in Acts! Why is this?



It is because the Land of Israel never belonged to Israel in the first place. Now, this should not be construed to mean that God never fulfilled His promises to give Israel the land promised to Abraham, for He most assuredly did fulfill those promises (Joshua 21:43f-See my Israel, 1948: Countdown to Nowhere book for a discussion of whether God fulfilled His land promises to Israel.

Well, if God gave the land to Israel, how can it be said that the land never belonged to them, and what does this have to do with the Christians in Jerusalem selling their land? (Incidentally, we have no record of Christians outside of Judea selling their land as they did in Jerusalem and Judea. So, another question, why did this happen with the church in Jerusalem and Judea and not in the wider Roman Empire? Let’s answer these questions in order).

First Question: How can it be said that the land never belonged to Israel? The answer to this is simple. Read Leviticus 25:23: “The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me.” The land never belonged to Israel as perpetual possession because they were merely tenants on the land. The land belonged to Jehovah! The entire question of **Israel and the Land** can be focused to a great extent on this text.

This clearly implies that the possession of the land was conditional. Just as Deuteronomy 4 and chapters 28-30 detail, Israel’s right to dwell in the land was dependent solely on their obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. Disobedience to that covenant would result in banishment

from the land. Since Jehovah has forever removed the Mosaic Covenant, Israel does not even have that Covenant right to the land. We cannot develop this further here, but this is important! Okay, so the answer to the first question is that the land never belonged to Israel, independent of Jehovah and the Mosaic Covenant. The land belonged to Jehovah, and the Mosaic Covenant was their tenant contract for dwelling there.

Second Question: What does the fact that the land never actually belonged to Israel—and thus they were forbidden to sell their allotment— have to do with the Christians in Jerusalem selling their land? It has everything to do with it!

In Matthew 23-24, Jesus predicted the utter desolation of the Temple and city. All the blood of the righteous, all the way back to Creation was to be demanded of Jerusalem in Jesus' generation (Matthew 23:34f). Her house was going to be desolate (Matthew 23:37).

When Jesus warned that their hallowed city and Temple were to be destroyed, he gave his disciples fair warning: "When you see the Abomination of Desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, whoso reads let him understand, then let those who are in Judea flee." The disciples of Jesus knew that real estate values in Jerusalem and Judea were going to take a major hit! They knew that the Romans were going to desolate their city and lay their land waste. However, although this is directly related to the issue, this alone is not enough to explain why they were willing to sell their lands and houses. Jerusalem was desolated in B. C. 586 and the Jews never sold their land at that time, as they did in Acts 4.

As a matter of fact, in Jeremiah 32, Jehovah instructed Jeremiah that one of his kinsmen wished to sell his property and told Jeremiah to purchase it, and record the sale carefully. What happened in Jeremiah 32 bears no resemblance to Acts 4 in this regard. Under the Old Law, property was supposed to stay "in the family" which is precisely what happened with Jeremiah. Land allotments were not supposed to be sold to "strangers" because the land belonged to Jehovah, and Israel was His chosen.

Jeremiah did as he was told, but objected to Jehovah that he did not understand why he should do this in light of the impending destruction at the hands of the Babylonians (Jeremiah 32:24f). Why bother buying a piece of property when the city was about to be destroyed?

Jehovah's response was that the city was going to be re-inhabited, and life was going to go on as usual when He restored them to the land (Jeremiah 32:37f). Israel would once again enjoy the land! Thus, the reason for the careful recording of the "redemption" of the land from Jeremiah's relative.

However, in Acts we find no such promise. We find no commands to carefully record the sale of the land. We find no promise of a return to the land. In fact, in direct contrast to the record of Jeremiah, we find that in Acts, there is no record as to who purchased the land. This may seem insignificant, yet it may actually be very important, because the land was not supposed to be sold to strangers at all. When land was sold, it was to be sold on the basis of the Year of Jubilee and, ideally, it was to be sold only to a family member (Leviticus 25). Interestingly, houses within a walled city, when sold, could only be redeemed for a one year period of time. After a year, they could not be redeemed (Leviticus 25:29).

Why are there no records of God instructing the Christians to carefully record the deed transactions, as in the case of Jeremiah? There is not a word about the importance of **Israel and the land**. Why do we find no record of any of the Christians seeking to redeem their houses in Jerusalem—a walled city—anywhere in scripture? The answer is simple, but profound. In contradistinction to Jeremiah where we find the emphatic promise of restoration to the land, in the New Testament we have not one promise of Israel ever being promised to return to the land! The Christians, even at an early stage, were being told some very important things that allowed them to freely sell their long cherished houses and land.

They were told that in fulfillment of prophecy, the geo-centric Jerusalem would no longer be the theological center of the world (Jeremiah 3:14f), and their own Lord had told them that time was now present (John 4:20f). They were being told that the Temple and City was about to perish. (Matthew 24). They were being told, “This Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change (allexei, third person, singular, future) the customs Moses delivered to us” (Acts 6:14).

Some try to negate the force of this passage by saying that the witnesses were false witnesses. The only reason they were false witnesses is because they charged Stephen with blasphemy! He was not guilty of blasphemy, he told the truth! Did not Jesus say that the Temple was going to be destroyed? Would Stephen have not been a false minister if he said the Temple was not going to be destroyed? And, it is important to note that Stephen said that Jesus was going to change the customs of Moses.” Very clearly, Stephen did not believe that the Law had already been abrogated. He believed it was yet future and associated with the passing of the Temple.

They were being told that they should no longer give heed to genealogies (1 Timothy 1:4). Remember that the genealogies were vital to any and all land transactions of redemption. They were hearing the message of a heavenly city and country (Hebrews 11:13f) in direct contrast to the earthly, carnal city that was not going to endure much longer (Hebrews 13:14). They were, in fact, placing their emphasis on their “citizenship” in the heavenlies, instead of emphasizing the city “that is in bondage with her children” (Galatians 4:22f).

Thus, the Christians in Jerusalem, in light of the realities in Christ they were coming to understand, felt willing to divest themselves of their ancestral homes, houses and properties. Such actions would only have been viewed with consternation to say the least, and probably disdain, by their neighbors. For literally centuries emphasis had been focused on **Israel and the land**, but not now! In fact, the Christians could have been, if they were not in fact, viewed as law-breakers by selling their houses as they did! Remember, they were evidently selling their houses unconditionally. They were, so far as the record is concerned, not selling them in light of the Jubilee redemption or in anticipation of restoration. They were just selling them, period! The implications are incredible.

There is another element in the New Testament that impacts this discussion, and that is the doctrine of circumcision. In 1983 I debated a Dispensational minister, and used the NT doctrine of circumcision as a major part of my argumentation against his views. The results were devastating. He was totally unprepared for what I presented, because when properly considered, what the NT says about circumcision totally refutes any idea of a future restoration

of national Israel, her Temple and cultus. I have utilized this same argument repeatedly and have yet to have a substantive response offered.

For brevity consider that without circumcision, a person was not considered a member of the covenant community (Genesis 17). Circumcision gave Israel the “title deed” to possession of the land (Joshua 5). The uncircumcised could not enter and worship at the Temple. See Acts 21 and the violent reaction of the crowd when they mistakenly believed that Paul had brought a Gentile into the Temple. In short, no circumcision no promises, no blessings!

Consider then what Paul, faithful Jew, said about circumcision: “If any man is circumcised, Christ shall profit him nothing...for in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails, but faith that works through love” (Galatians 5:4-6). For Paul, who once placed all of his hopes and expectations on the literal promises to Abraham and Israel, the central icons of Israel’s identity had now become moot and meaningless! (See N. T. Wright’s *Jesus and the Victory of God*, for an excellent discussion of how Jesus, in his personal ministry, challenged and redefined the defining icons of Israel, i.e. Sabbath, Temple, family, etc. (Minneapolis; Fortress, 1996). By redefining Israel’s historical and traditional icons, the things that made her Israel, Jesus redefined Israel herself. This is what Paul did in his discussion of circumcision).

Circumcision, the sign and seal of covenant relationship with Jehovah was now, not only being fulfilled in that “circumcision not made with hands” (Colossians 2:11-2), but, because it was fulfilled “in Christ,” the physical act was now abrogated and meaningless for those in Christ.

We are told of course that in the millennium Israel will be restored to the land, and the Temple and cultus, including circumcision will be restored. However, if circumcision is restored, the only way to do that is to nullify and abrogate the blood-bought gospel of Jesus Christ! If circumcision causes one to fall from the grace of Christ, and lose the blessings of Christ (Galatians 5:3-6), then the only way to restore circumcision as a mandate of God, is to destroy the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Couple the doctrine of the meaninglessness of circumcision with the selling of homes and houses. The Judean Christians knew that the destruction of Jerusalem was to occur in their generation. They also were being instructed that Old Jerusalem, with all the emphasis on “land” was giving way to the “Jerusalem that is above.” (See my book *Misplace Minds* for a powerful exegesis of Colossians 2-3, wherein Paul told the Colossians not to put their minds on “the land” (Colossians 3:2). He was not, as the vast majority of commentators claim, simply giving a homiletic paranesis to be “heavenly minded.” He was telling them not to place their eschatological and soteriological hopes in circumcision (2:11-12), in the Feast Days and Sabbaths (2:14-16) – which found their focus in the Temple – or on the Land of Israel itself!

The Messiah was about to come and destroy the Old Temple, and establish his true Tabernacle, one not made with hands (Hebrews 8:1f), in its place. They were being instructed that while the Old Temple and everything it represented and foreshadowed was indeed glorious, it was temporary by nature and intended to pass (Hebrews 9:6-10). They were being told that since Messiah had come, in the Incarnation, and fulfilled the requirements of the genealogies, that they were no longer to give heed to those endless discussions. The point was moot. Everything

that hinged on the genealogies, Messiah, priesthood, circumcision, the Land, was now, or about to shortly be, fulfilled!

God once placed tremendous significance on the land of Israel. It was “His land!” However, that land was chosen, not because it was intrinsically holy, or inherently important, but because God chose it to bring Messiah and his kingdom to a reality. The land, with its Temple, its priesthood, its worship, was only intended to hold a central place of importance until the Messiah came and established his kingdom, not on earth with a geographical center, but to rule from the throne of David, in heaven (Acts 2:29-36). When God fulfilled all of His promises to Israel, that land became nothing more than any other piece of real estate.

The land of Israel today has no special meaning. It is no longer “the holy land,” and the people inhabiting the land are not Biblical Israel. The land never belonged to them exclusively in the first place. It belonged to God as a “loan” to them until His determinative purpose for the Messiah was fulfilled. The Jerusalem Christians knew that God was fulfilling His promises and those promises are spiritual not earthly. If they were so willing to abandon their physical birthright in the capital city of Jerusalem, they surely believed that they were now about to receive the fulfillment of God’s promises concerning the heavenly city and country (Hebrews 11:13f). The fact that Acts records that the Christians in Jerusalem were willing, so gladly, to sell their land allotments can mean only one thing, they knew that literal city was doomed, and they also knew they were now citizens of a greater, heavenly Jerusalem. It is that New Jerusalem that is now open for all nations of the world to enter, and there to find healing! Let whosoever will come!



For More on Israel and the Land, get a copy of my book, [Israel 1948: Countdown to Nowhere](#). This book proves that modern Israel has no right to the land!