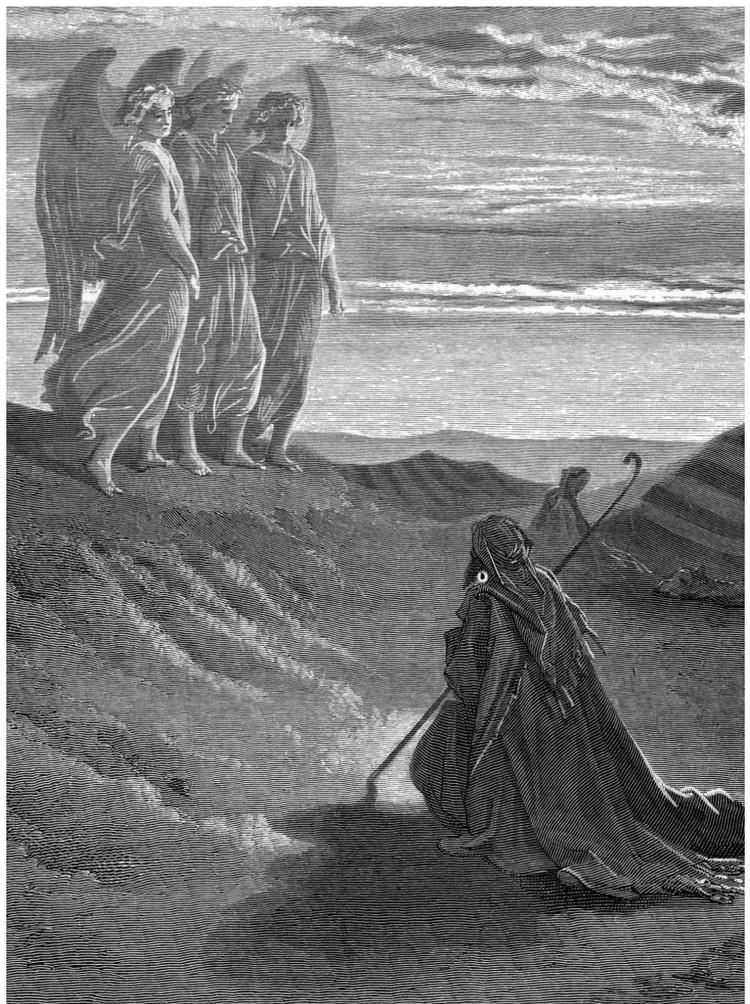


THE PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

Yesterday,
Today
and
Forever

By Brian Godawa



The Three Angels and Abraham — Gustave Dore

Matt. 21:43 “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it. “And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.” And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them.



Many Christians, above all the Dispensationalists (a prophetic school arising in the mid-1800s), believe that the Jews of today are still God’s “chosen people.” Yet most of these same Christians maintain that personal salvation can only be received through faith in Jesus Christ. They hold to the belief that God still has a special

plan for the geographical entity of Israel and those they believe are the physical descendants of Abraham.

Every day, prophecy pundits in the media exegete newspapers, tirelessly proclaiming that current world events “are all prophesied right in the Bible” and are now being fulfilled “right before our eyes.” They’ve been doing this for over 170 years with most of their cries of wolf going unfulfilled. Failed prophecies are then reinterpreted for the next go-round. The merchandisers of prophecy know that sizeable financial rewards can come from the right kind of alarming message in what has become a business. The connection to money is especially problematic, blurring motives from the start and creating a need for constant sensationalism. This not only vulgarizes the real intent of prophetic passages, but can actually cause misdirection; diverting the people to look one way, thereby missing what is going on in another direction.

Christian Zionism believes that Israel is still the focus of God’s ultimate plan for the future, despite the fact that the New Covenant brought with it the international Body of Christ and the emphasis on salvation through faith, not ethnicity. The Christian Zionist believes that the modern ethnic people called Jews and their modern geopo-



The Sacrifice of Abraham—Andrea Del Sarto

litical land called Israel is still the focal point of God’s redemptive plan because, after all, God made a promise to Abraham about multiplying his descendants and giving them the Promised Land and God isn’t about to change his mind. They cite Exodus 32:13 where God says to Moses:

“Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Thy servants to whom Thou didst swear by Thyself, and didst say to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’”—Exodus 32:13

This verse says that God’s promise of inheritance is “forever,” so it logically follows that it is still in effect, right? After all, God doesn’t renege on his promises. So, He must still be intent upon giving so-called racial Israel that physical land He promised so long ago, or else God is a liar, right?—WRONG. This Dispensational viewpoint is not merely unbiblical, but it is a serious negation of the glorious New Covenant that God established with the coming of Messiah.

Dispensationalists advanced the novel belief, after 1800 years of church history, that God has two separate plans, one for Israel after the flesh and one for the New Testament Church after the Spirit. So they attempt to maintain special status for Israel while also affirming the New Covenant. It's as if God has two covenants, one with the Jews and one with the Church. But this attempt at simultaneous plans for different "people of God" is ultimately a repudiation of the very concept of the international New Covenant with all nations that God has given us in Christ—the very fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. To say that the physical descendants of Abraham are God's chosen people *after* Messiah has come and fulfilled the Old Covenant types and shadows is to negate the New Covenant itself and replace it with a return to the types and shadows that it has replaced.

At about this point, a common knee jerk reaction assumes that such a viewpoint is "anti-Semitic," bringing on some future persecution of the Jews, a "road to holocaust" as one merchandiser of prophecy even proclaimed. I know. I used to have these thoughts myself. Well, nothing could be further from the truth. Let me state at the outset that I support the modern state of Israel's right to assert their military force against terrorists whose sole intent is to "drive the Jews into the sea," (obliterating them as a people and nation). I believe this, not because the Jews have some "divine right" to the land, but because they have every moral right to self-defense. But just because I support Israel as a nation surrounded by Muslim tyranny and oppression does not mean that they are beyond moral criticism for their own brand of oppression. They are also accountable to God's Law, like everybody else, and do not have the right to engage in human rights violations. But that is another issue altogether, so let's get back to the theological issue at hand.

The Promise

Exodus 32:13 is really a reference to the original promise God made to Abraham in Genesis. Let's take a look at it and see what we can learn:

Gen 17:4 "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, And you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 "No longer shall your name be called

Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations...7 "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. 8 "And I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."9 God said further to Abraham, "Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. 10 "This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised.

Now, what we see here are several elements to the one promise made to Abraham by God: One, He will be a father of many nations (v 5; Two, the Promise is to Abraham and his descendants, which is stressed over and over throughout the passage (v 7); Three, it is an everlasting covenant,



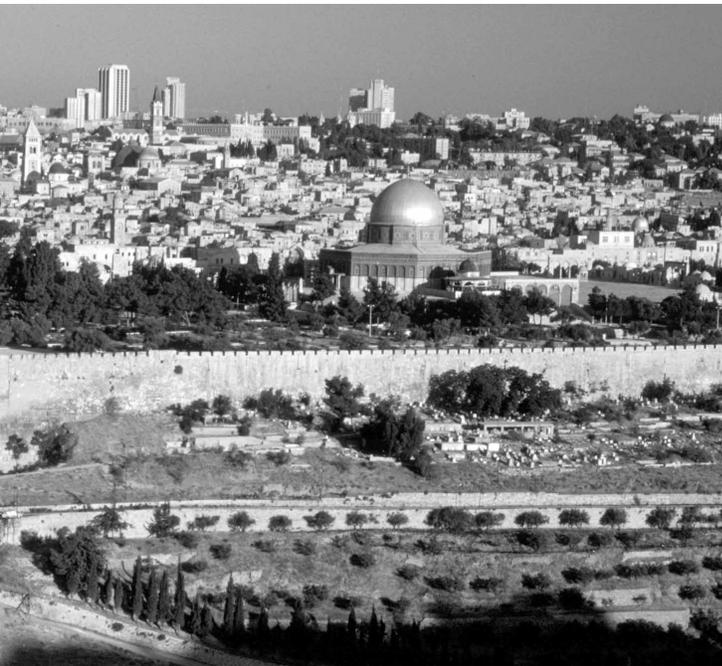
Old and new Jerusalem

one that does not change (v 7); Four, Abraham's descendants shall inherit the land of Canaan, the land of Promise (v 8); Five, the covenant is conditioned upon their obedience (v 9); Six, the covenant is sealed by circumcision (v 10). There is a whole scholarly exposition of this covenant following the suzerainty treaty of Middle Eastern kings by Meredith Kline that is very helpful and enlightening, but I will not go into it here. Suffice

it to say that there are at least these six components to the covenant:

- 1) Father of many nations
- 2) Children of Abraham
- 3) Everlasting covenant
- 4) Land Promise
- 5) Conditional Covenant
- 6) Circumcision as the seal of the Covenant

What I want to show is that each and every one of these elements of the Promise made to Abraham is shown in the Scriptures to be fulfilled, *not in a geographical nation of Israel*, but in the international spiritual body of Christ. And it's not so much that God changed application of this Promise from physical to spiritual with the change of Testaments, but rather that spiritual Israel, the



in the present era

believers in Messiah, the faithful remnant, are the ones to whom God was referring to *all along from the very beginning!* God never meant that mere physical descendants of Abraham would be his chosen people, but that those who are of faith would be:

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God. 2 Corinthians 1:20

1) Father of Many Nations

“As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, And you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.” 5
 “No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations.” Gen 17:4-5

When God promises Abraham he will be the father of many nations and that all the nations shall be blessed in him, God was referring to the fact that ultimately other peoples would be part of the family of God. He was not referring to the physical generation of peoples from Abraham’s loins, but to the spiritual regeneration of peoples through faith. Look at how the New Testament declares how this promise was actually fulfilled:

Romans 4:13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. 14 For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; 15 for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there violation. 16 For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants, 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. 17 (as it is written, “A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE ... In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, “SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE.”

Notice that Paul is saying that the promise to Abraham’s descendants is fulfilled “through the righteousness of faith,” *not* through the Law. In Romans 3 and 4, he makes the case that the physical Jew who received the Law of God and circumcision is not at an advantage over the Gentile because *all* are under sin, and the Law cannot make the Jew righteous, but can only reveal sin and drive one to faith in Christ. By the time he gets to Abraham in chapter 4, he shows that even Abraham himself was not made righteous through the act of circumcision, but through his faith which he had *while uncircumcised*. Therefore, God’s promise of ***multiplying descendants and being a father of many nations*** is explicitly declared by Paul to be fulfilled through the righteousness of faith (the New Covenant), not through physical generation. He goes so far as to say in

4:14 that if the inheritance was through the Law made to the physical Jews, then the promise would actually be nullified! “Those who are of the faith of Abraham” (v. 16) are the inheritors, not mere physical descendants.

The complaint may arise that verse 16 indicates God maintains separate relations or two different covenants with the physical Jews and Gentile believers. Doesn't the verse say, “in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants, *not only* those who are of the Law, *but also* to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all”? So are there not two lines of descendants, physical and spiritual? Not in context. Don't forget Paul's main point that just because the physical Jews received the Law and were circumcised, this does not make them righteous or even Abraham's children. He is trying to show that *faith* is the common denominator between the Jewish believer and the Gentile believer.

Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.
Rom 3:29

So Paul is trying to explain that just because one is a physical Jew and has been circumcised, does not mean he is righteous or saved. The circumcised *must also have faith*. So in the verse just before the controversial one we are discussing, he explains what he means by saying,

and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised. Rom 4:12

So he is not talking about two plans in verse 16, one for Jews and one for Gentiles, but rather that the circumcised Jew must not only have the Law (circumcision) but *must also have faith*, or Abraham is not his father.

2) Children of Abraham

“And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. Gen 17:7

The second part of God's promise to Abraham

“and your descendants after you throughout their generations...” is really another aspect of the first element of Abraham being the father of many nations. But I have separated it out because it is the basis of the concept “children of Abraham” that is frequently referred to in the Older and Newer Covenants. What I want to prove here is that the Abrahamic “descendants” God is referring to were never the mere physical descendants of flesh, but have always been the spiritual descendants of faith. The New Testament makes this clear.

In Galatians, Paul is writing about the Judaizers, or the “party of the circumcision” (Gal 2:12). These men were saying to Gentile believers that they must become Jews in addition to their faith by being physically circumcised or they would not be saved (Gal 2:4; 16; 5:1-6). The Judaizers were affirming the special status of the physically circumcised Jews as sons of Abraham, sons of the Promise, the receivers of “the blessing.” But Paul violently disagreed by explaining that *it is faith that makes one a son of Abraham, not genetic or outward physical Jewishness*.

Gal 2:6: Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. ⁷ Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “ALL THE NATIONS SHALL BE BLESSED IN YOU.” ⁹ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

So here again, that same Abrahamic promise from Genesis is quoted as being made to those of faith, *not physicality*. He explicitly says that “those who are of faith are sons of Abraham,” “those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham.” He says that it was the New Testament Gospel that was preached to Abraham when he made the Promise of all nations and descendants. There could be no clearer proof that God has always meant faith as the means of sonship, not physical descendency or circumcision. But just in case the Dispensationalist can't see the obvious, Paul goes further to explain that the promise made to the “seed” of Abraham was to the singular person of Christ, not the plural people of the land.

in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of

Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith... 16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. Gal 3:14, 16

The word that we have translated as the plural "descendants" in the Genesis passage is an inadequate translation. It is actually the singular word for "seed." So Paul is saying that all those promises—all six points of the covenant—that were made to Abraham, were really made to Christ (singular), NOT the physical descendants or seeds (plural). He then goes on to proclaim that we are sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ. We partake of that Promise to the individual Christ by being "in Christ" with faith.

Gal 3:26: For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Notice the last line. Abraham's offspring, those who are heirs of the promise, are not the physical descendants, but the faithful in Christ. We believers inherit the Promise made to Abraham! The Promise of inheritance was never intended by God to refer to physical descendants of Israel, but to the faithful in Christ. Now, of course, the faithful Jewish believers in the Old and New Testaments are included in that Promise (The OT believer looked forward to Messiah, the NT believer looks backward to Messiah), but both Jew and Gentile are included in the Promise through faith! The point is that there is no special status for a physical Israel in God's plan. Never was. It was always the faithful to whom God was making the Promise.

Later in the same book of Galatians, Paul takes this dichotomy of faithful versus physical even farther and makes the separation even more stark. This passage is particularly indicting against the Dispensationalist view because Paul talks specifically about the difference between physical Israel and faithful Israel, and stresses that physical Israel is never what God's promise was all about. Paul allegorically likens physical Israel ("according to the flesh") to the physical Jerusalem that was in



slavery in the first century and the physical descendants of Hagar as the symbol of those fleshly descendants. Then he likens the faithful believers to the heavenly Jerusalem that he calls free, and it is these free faithful that are the inheritors of the promise, Sarah's children, the one through whom God fulfilled the "many nations" promise—*the believers*.

Gal 4:22: For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. 23 But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. 24 This is allegorically speaking: for these women are two covenants, one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. 25 Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.

The "children of promise" are here spoken of as definitively being those who are of faith, *not* those who are physical Jews. In fact, Paul writes that the physical Jews who were persecuting the Christians were those "fleshly" slaves of Hagar:

Gal 4:29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also.

And then he concludes by saying that the physical Jews who do not have faith in Christ will not inherit the Promise along with the faith-

ful:

Gal 4:30 But what does the Scripture say? "CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON, FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN." 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.

There could be no stronger denial that the physical Jewish descendants will inherit the Promise of Abraham. According to Scripture, it isn't going to happen. The physical descendants "shall not be an heir" with the faithful sons of Abraham. There are not two plans, one for believing Gentiles and one for physical Jews. Only Jews who have faith in Messiah will inherit the Promise *along with* the believing Gentiles. **Believers alone** are the "children of promise." God's promise to Abraham is not to Israel of the flesh, but to Israel of faith.

Gal 4:23 But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise... 28 And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.

And this brings us to another passage, Romans 9, which also speaks of Isaac and the continuation of the Promise to Abraham's descendants. Here again, the distinction is made that God's Promise to Abraham was not to physical descendants of Abraham, but to faithful believers like Abraham:

Rom 9:3 ...my kinsmen according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, 5 whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. 6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel: 7 neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." 8 That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

Paul notes that physical Israel ("according to the flesh") was given the adoption, the glory, the covenants, Law, Temple AND PROMISES. But then he states that nevertheless, not all physical descendants of Israel are actually Israel. Just because people were born in the physical line of Abraham does not make them Israel. Why?

Because "children of the flesh are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants!" And who has Paul established are "children of the promise" in Galatians and elsewhere? Believers!! Believers are the descendants of Abraham and Isaac, and children of the promise, NOT physical Jews.

It seems to be a theme of Paul to hammer home this idea that God's promises were never made to physical descendants of Abraham, but rather to a spiritual remnant of true believers *within* the community of physical descendants. With the inauguration of the New Covenant, the "other sheep not of this fold" (Gentiles who also believe) are *now included* in that Promise. The righteous have always lived by faith. God's promise was never made to physical Israel, but to "spiritual" Israel, or those with faith. This is why the Gentile believer is a true Jew, and a circumcised *unbelieving* fleshly Jew is not:

Rom 2:28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

To conclude then, we see the New Testament goes out of its way to stress that the descendants of Abraham, the "children of Abraham" to whom God made his promises, **are not** the physical Jews in the geographical land now called Israel, but are in fact all believers not bound by any land (internationally), both Jew and Gentile. This is what Paul means when he says in Ephesians 2:14 that Christ "made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man." We simply cannot divide Jew from Gentile in God's promise or plan as the Dispensationalist would want. Jew and Gentile are one in Christ and cannot be separated because that which separated them (The Laws of separation in the OT) has been abolished. To say that God has a separate plan for unbelieving physical Jews is to deny the very fulfillment of God's promise to true Israel, the spiritual unity of believing Jew and Gentile.

3) Everlasting Covenant

“And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.” Gen 17:7

This third element of the Abrahamic Promise made by God is often a lynchpin for Dispensationalists because it appears to them that this substantiates the fact that even though the New Testament has arrived, it does not change a promise that is made “forever” to Abraham’s descendants. This is why the Dispensationalist believes that there are two plans, one for the New Covenant and one for the “eternal promise” of the Old Covenant. Well, by now it is clear that this article is fully in support of the eternity of God’s promise. In fact, the New Covenant believers are precisely those children of Abraham to whom God is still eternally fulfilling those promises. The New Covenant *is* the continuation of God’s eternal promise of inheritance:

Heb 9:15 "And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that ...those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."

It has already been demonstrated biblically that the physical descendants (“seeds”) of Abraham *are not* the true children of Abraham, but Christ (“seed”), and by extension, those who are in Christ, are the children or descendants of

Abraham by faith. So according to the Scriptures, we New Testament believers are the ones receiving God’s everlasting promise made to Abraham. Yes, the promise is eternal; it’s just not inherited by physically circumcised Jews, but by believers in Christ.

4) Land Promise

“And I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” Gen 17:8

This fourth part of the Promise made to Abraham by God is an interesting one. I believe that there are two things that need to be considered when looking at it. First, the Israelites did inherit the land in a physical sense back in Joshua’s time:

Josh 21:43 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.

So we see here that Israel did in fact inherit the Promised Land and then lost it through disobedience, so it is not as though they never had it, and God has yet to fulfill that “eternal” promise. He did fulfill everything he promised,



Coastline of Modern Israel

including taking the land away from Israel because of her disobedience.

Heb 3:18 And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief...4:1 For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

Secondly, because of the New Covenant, the localized nationalistic land inheritance has necessarily been redirected by God into spiritual fulfillment in Christ because of the international land without boundaries created by the “breaking down of the dividing wall” between Jew and Gentile. There can no longer be a geographical land that God is promising to his people because his people are international, from every tongue and nation. To affirm a nationalistic plan of God is to reinstitute the Laws of separation between Jew and Gentile that Christ abolished. It is to split the “one man” back into two, which is what the Dispensationalist is trying to do by positing two “promises” of God, two “chosen peoples,” two “children of Abraham.”

Eph 2:14 [Christ] made both groups [Jew and Gentile] into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, 15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man...6 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.”

Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.

“Abolish” is a very powerful word. In the original Greek, it is the word, *katargeo*; which means “to render inoperative.” Elsewhere in the Bible it is translated variously as “bring to an end,” “nullify,” “remove,” and “render powerless.” Abraham’s descendants (“offspring”), the heirs of the promise, are not separated from other nations. This is a very important key to understanding the nature of the New Testament: Those *laws of separation between Jew and Gentile* have been abolished, “put to death,” nullified, removed, rendered powerless! And what is the biggest expression of separation between nations? LAND! In the Old

Testament, God was separating a national people unto Himself and giving them a separate piece of land to have among the nations. But with the New Covenant, that separation of land and people has been abolished. This is why Christianity claims there are no more Holy Wars in this New Testament era, because the Holy Wars of Jehovah were tied directly to inheriting the geographical land in the Old Testament, separation of Jew from Gentile. Since there is no more national distinction made by God. He has no specific national or geographical interest in a parcel of land.

Actually, God does have a geographical interest in land. That is, He wants *all the earth* as the possession of the people of God, not a mere parcel of land in the Middle East! His meek ones shall inherit the earth! The kingdom of God is spreading like a mustard seed and leaven through *all the earth*! (Matt 13:31-33); the cornerstone of Jesus Christ and His kingdom is growing to be a mountain that fills *all the earth* and crushes *all other kingdoms* (Daniel 2:35), not a mere tract of sand and rock in the desert!

Colossians 1:15 And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation....all things have been created by Him and for Him.

In this verse, we see that Jesus is the first-born of all creation. Biblically, this is not a reference to Jesus being born or created, but rather an indication of status. That is, the first born son in the Old Testament economy was the primary inheritor of the father’s estate. In fact, the first born had the birthright, (Gen 43:33) the place of preeminence and power (Gen 49:3); he received a double portion of that inheritance (Deut 21:17). So the purpose of this verse is to indicate that Christ is actually going to inherit all of creation, not merely that parcel of it. The land promise is merely a metaphor for a creation-wide inheritance. And Christians are described as joint heirs with Christ. Christians will inherit *all things* of that creation with him:

Rom 8:17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...

1 Cor 3: 21 So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, 22 whether ... the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you...

The serious error of Dispensationalism becomes crystal clear: the proposal that God still

maintains a promise of physical land to a nationally separated chosen people of race is to deny the entire concept of the New Covenant. The land laws and separation laws are abolished in Christ; the promised land is now all the earth in Christ. God's chosen people are Jewish and Gentile believers in Messiah, not physically circumcised unbelieving Jews. The promotion of nationalistic ethnic interest is a negation of God's New Covenant interracial internationalism. In short, Dispensationalism is a kind of racism.

Related to this geographical promise are the terms, 'Mount Zion' and 'Jerusalem.' In Scripture, these terms are used, very often together, as symbolic references to the Kingdom of God, and the city of God, or God's reign. There are literally hundreds of such references, but here are just a few to get a taste:

Zec 1:17 "Again, proclaim, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "My cities will again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem."

Zec 8:3 "Thus says the LORD, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain.'

Mic 4:2 And many nations will come and say, "Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD And to the house of the God of Jacob, That He may teach us about His ways And that we may walk in His paths." For from Zion will go forth the law, Even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Zec 9:9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

As you can readily see, we have some specific verses that use Zion and Jerusalem in reference to Messiah, which of course, is Jesus Christ. Dispensationalists claim that these are all literal

references to literal Mount Zion and Jerusalem. But the New Testament defines the concepts of Zion and Jerusalem as *transcendent*, which means they are terms that use literal locations as a metaphor for a more important spiritual idea. Sometimes they are references to the literal geographical sites in context; but in general, they are spiritual references to the Kingdom of God.

In Hebrews 12, the writer talks about Moses and the Old Covenant and how he received the Law on the mountain with blazing fire and God's glory. But then he shows that the Newer Covenant is not merely greater than the Older, but it is the true spiritual fulfillment of the "types and shadows" of the Old.

Heb 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly



Good Friday on the Via Dolorosa

Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant

Here, we see that the New Covenant *is* Mount Zion spoken of in the Old Covenant. Coming to Jesus *is* coming to the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the true spiritual reality that the Old Covenant types pointed to. There can be no physical Jerusalem or Mount Zion that God is promising to do anything with, because His promise was



The City of Nazareth

fulfilled in Christ and His Kingdom! This is the theme of Hebrews: that the Old Covenant was a *physical* type or shadow of the spiritual reality which is in Jesus Christ:

Heb 8:5 [The priests of Old Covenant Law] serve a copy and shadow of heavenly things. Heb 9:23 Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these [physical sacrifices], but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24 For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us

This heavenly Jerusalem corresponds to the “New Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven” in Revelation 21. The heavenly Jerusalem is the true Jerusalem, not the physical one. And the true Jerusalem is populated by believers in Christ, not mere circumscribed racial Jews. And if there is any doubt left about this, the Apostle Paul, in a passage we exegeted earlier, emphasizes this true Jerusalem of promise as the Church of Christ consisting of believers in Christ:

Gal 4:22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. 23 But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. 24 This is allegorically speaking: for these women are two covenants, one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. 25 Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. 28 And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. 30 But what does the Scripture say? “CAST

OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON, FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN.” 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.

Physical Jerusalem is correlated with physical Jews and they are in slavery and *will not be heirs of God’s promise* because *they are not* the children of promise. Believers in Christ are the free ones who will be heirs of God’s promise to Abraham and Isaac. Mount Zion and Jerusalem are simply metaphors for the kingdom of God which is the Kingdom of God in the Church!

5) Conditional Covenant

God said further to Abraham, “Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. Gen 17:9

Now we come to the part in the covenant that Christian Zionists do not like, the conditional clause. On the one hand, Zionists claim the everlasting nature of the covenant, but on the other hand seem to miss its expressed conditionality. Yes, the covenant is eternal, but to whom does it apply, the physical or the faithful? And what price does disobedience to the covenant bring? Well, Jesus said it clearly in the verse that began this entire article:

Matt. 21:43 “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it.”

The Kingdom of God has been taken away from physical Israel and given to the Church of believing Jews and Gentiles. This kingdom of God is no longer tied to a geopolitical state inheriting physical land (remember we said earlier that God was dealing with the believing remnant *within* the physical nation). The important thing is that He says this after a parable likening the ancient Jews to vinegrowers who reject the landowner and forfeit all rights to the land:

33 “Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT AND DUG A WINE PRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers, and went on a journey. 34 “And when the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. 35 “And the vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. 36

“Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. 37 “But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ 38 “But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and seize his inheritance.’ 39 “And they took him, and threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. 40 “Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?” 41 They said to Him, “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers, who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons.””

The point of this parable is not to justify so-called 20th century anti-Semitism by saying, “Jews killed Christ.” The point is that within the redemptive history of God, the physical Jews would so constantly reject Him, even to the point of killing His Son, that He would take away His Kingdom from them to give to another people (the Gentiles) who were not originally His people, to be the inheritors of his Kingdom. Modern Jews are not judicially guilty of killing Christ; the first century Jews were guilty of this crime and therefore were judged by God in the destruction of the Temple and holy city and the spreading out of salvation to the Gentiles.

Acts 7:51 “You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. 52 “Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become;

1Thess 2:14 For you, brethren, ...also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they {did} from the Jews, 15 who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, 16 hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.

As these verses show, wrath has come upon the Jewish nation “to the utmost” because of its rejection of Messiah. The Jews have not obeyed the conditions of the Abrahamic covenant, so they are judged to the utmost by God.

The classic passage on the conditional nature of the covenant and how believing Gentiles now fulfill God’s promises to Abraham is in Romans 11.

Rom 11:1 I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? 3 “Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED THY PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN THINE ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE.” 4 But what is the divine response to him? “I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL.” 5 In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice. 6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. 7 What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;

This passage is *not* saying that God has kept his promise to *physical descendants* of Israel. It is saying that God has kept his promise to the *remnant* of Israel who are true believers. Israel as a national entity did not obtain God’s promises, but *chosen individuals* within that nation did. So God’s promise was never to the physical many but to the faithful few. The physical many simply benefited from being outwardly aligned with the faithful few. The people who God *is not rejecting* in this passage are the remnant believers. The rest are hardened and do not receive the promise.

Rom 11:11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. 12 Now if their transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! 13 But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14 if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. 15 For if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? 16 And if the first piece of dough be holy, the lump is also; and if the root be holy, the branches are too. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” 20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your

faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; 21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. 22 Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more shall these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?

The key to understanding this passage is that the root of the tree is true Israel of Promise. And true Israel of Promise is not physical Israel, the land or the natural descendants. True Israel is simply the term for God's People—whoever they are. The natural branches represent physical descendants of Israel, while the wild olive branches represent Gentiles who believe. The conditional nature is emphasized here, as Paul says that the Jews were cut off because of their unbelief. *Faith is the root, not physical descendency*. Jews are rejected by God and cut off for disobeying the covenant. They are grafted back in *by faith*, just as Gentiles are grafted on *by faith*. A Jew gets saved, becomes God's chosen, the same way as a Gentile does: through faith in Christ, not physical descendency. No physical or geopolitical Israel is here in mind. True Israel is the faithful, not the physical. Always was, always is, always will be.

The following conclusion of the passage has, in the eyes of some, reinforced that God still has a special plan for physical Israel:

Rom 11:25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." 27 "AND THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." 28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; 29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so these also now have been disobedient, in order that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. 32 For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show

mercy to all.

Even if one takes this to be a reference to physical Israel, the context of the whole passage necessitates that God will show his electing mercy on the physical Jew the same way He does on the Gentile—through faith in Christ, not through an Old Covenant that is obsolete. God may very well cause a major revival of faith in the Jewish community in the future, but he will not do it apart from faith in Christ. He will not reinstitute ceremonial laws of Jewish separation and with it, physical land promise and Temple sacrifice, because these have already been fulfilled in Christ and there is no longer Jew or Gentile separation in Christ. Once the old is gone, it is gone forever. There is no returning.

Heb 8: 13 When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete."

If this passage means that God will save a mass of Jews in the future, He will do it through faith in Jesus Christ, not through a land grab which has been fulfilled already in Christ, or returning to an obsolete understanding of physical land promise and national separation. To return to a nationalistic prejudice would be to negate the entire internationalism of the New Covenant.

But in point of fact, I do not believe that this future revival of ethnic Israel is what the passage is teaching anyway. Paul is simply explaining the nature of the Gospel under the New Covenant. Notice earlier in this same passage, Paul again differentiates between ethnic Israel and true Israel of faith:

Rom 11:1 I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? 3 "Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED THY PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN THINE ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE." 4 But what is the divine response to him? "I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL." 5 In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice ["election"]. 6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. 7 What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but

those who were chosen ["elect"] obtained it, and the rest were hardened;

Paul says that God does not reject his people, Israel, but then he defines just exactly *who* those people are, and they are not the ethnic descendants, but rather those *within ethnic Israel* who are true believers! The *remnant* are true Israel who God does not reject. The remnant are the "elect" or "chosen" faithful. Ethnic descendency is the outward vehicle by which God created the line for Messiah to come, but only the elect within that covenanted group obtain salvation by God's grace. *The rest are hardened* and do not receive it. So when Paul writes about the root and the branches with the branches being broken off because of unbelief, he is saying that faithless ethnic Israel rejects Messiah so that God can offer the Gentiles [nations] the same faith salvation that *true* faithful Israelites had.

Rom 11:25 a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles ["nations"] has come in ["enters"]; and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." 27 "AND THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." 28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice ["election"] they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; 29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Paul is referring to true Israel (of faith), both Jew and Gentile, when he writes, "and thus ['in this way'] all Israel will be saved." He is not saying that all ethnic Israel will be saved after God finishes saving all the Gentiles He wants. He is saying that the New Covenant *is* the fullness of the nations, and that "in this way" both Jew and Gentile will be saved by faith. The Deliverer coming from Zion to remove ungodliness and taking away sins is the *first* coming of Jesus, not the second. The second coming is when Jesus brings judgment, not forgiveness.

2 Thess 1:7 when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

Notice in the second part of the above verse in

Romans that when Paul writes about the calling and gifts that are irrevocable, who is he referring to? All of ethnic Israel? May it never be! He refers to "God's election." It is *the elect within ethnic Israel* whose calling and gifts are irrevocable, not mere physical descendants. Remember that we pointed out earlier in this passage of Romans 11 that Paul claims the elect or chosen "remnant" refers to the true believers *within ethnic Israel*. "Partial hardening" does not refer to a *temporary time* of hardening, but to a *portion of the people* being hardened. This means that some of Israel *did* believe in Messiah. And these are the Israel that are saved [which includes believing Gentiles]. A partial hardening has happened to *ethnic* Israel so that God would bring the fullness of the nations (Gentiles), through faith, in with true Israel *of* faith. This is how God saves all Israel, all *true* Israel, as opposed to all ethnic Israel.

Rom. 9:6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel.

"All Israel" is not a term referring to ethnic Israel, but a term that refers to *elect Jew and Gentile* believers in Christ. These elect remnant believers are the "all Israel" that are saved with the coming of the New Covenant in Jesus.

This difficult shifting back and forth that Paul does in reference to ethnic Israel and true Israel may have caused confusion over the years in biblical interpretation, but it is a common biblical device. Jesus moves back and forth in his definition of "descendants of Abraham."

"I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. "I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father." They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. "But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. "You do the deeds of your father [i.e. the devil]". (Jn.8:37-41)

First, Jesus says Abraham is their father, then he says Abraham is not their father, but Satan is. Jesus is not contradicting himself, he is merely making a distinction between ethnic descendency and true spiritual descendency. This kind of switching back and forth in definitions may cause

difficulty, but God never said it would be easy to discern the words of truth. We must study the Bible in its mid-Eastern cultural context to show ourselves approved, not merely interpret things in our 20th century Western literalism.

6) Circumcision as the Seal of the Covenant

Gen 17:10 “This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised.

In this conclusion of God’s Promise to Abraham, we see that He seals the covenant with the act of circumcision. The thing to understand is that the physical act of circumcision was never the guarantee for physical Jews to inherit the promise. It was a physical sign of the *spiritual circumcision* that truly saved a person. In the New Testament, we are going to see that this was the point, but ironically, even in the Old Testament, God already stated that physical circumcision was not what determined a true Israelite, but spiritual circumcision.

Deut 30: 6 “Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.

Jer 4:4 “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD And remove the foreskins of your heart, Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Lest My wrath go forth like fire And burn with none to quench it, Because of the evil of your deeds.”

Jer 9:25 “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “that I will punish all who are circumcised and yet uncircumcised-- 26 Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the sons of Ammon, and Moab, and all those inhabiting the desert who clip the hair on their temples; for all the nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart.”

We see in these Old Covenant passages that God already hints at the fact that to be disobedient to His covenant was to be uncircumcised of heart, which is the same as the uncircumcised heathen around them. In the New Covenant, this distinc-

tion is made more clear by Paul as he tells us in Romans 3 that the circumcision God meant all along was spiritual circumcision of heart. A true Jew is one who is circumcised of heart, which means that a Gentile who believes is a true Jew, and a physical Jew who does not believe is actually an uncircumcised heathen:

Romans 2:28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter

Col 2:11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;

According to the New Covenant, the baptized believing Gentile is circumcised of heart which is what God had meant all along. It is the believer (Jew or Gentile) that is the descendant of Abraham, and who is circumcised and therefore receives the sign and seal of the covenant eternally promised by God. Paul furthers this argument in Romans 4 when he proves that circumcision of heart (faith) is the seal that God was referring to when he declared Abraham righteous and the physical circumcision was an outward sign of the inward reality.

Rom 4:9 Is this blessing then upon the circumcised, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say, “FAITH WAS RECKONED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.” 10 How then was it reckoned? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; 11 and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be reckoned to them, 12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised. 13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Paul’s point is that physical circumcision is not *the deal*, it is *the seal* of a deal already made through faith. To be physically circumcised means that you should be spiritually circumcised of heart and if you are not, then you are not circumcised in truth. So, you see how circumcision of heart actually fulfills God’s original intentions?

It is not that He made physical circumcision the key in the Old Covenant and then changed it with the New Covenant, it is that God *all along* meant circumcision of heart by the Spirit to be the true covenantal sign and seal of circumcision. So the New Covenant does not necessarily *change* the meaning, but rather *illuminates* the true meaning of circumcision.

There is a verse that seems to indicate that God does still have a place in His plan for physical Israel. Right after the verse we examined in Romans 2 about the true Jew being circumcised of heart, Paul adds the following:

Rom 2:1 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? 2 Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. 3 What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? 4 May it never be!

On first blush it may appear that God still holds physical Israel as special in His eyes or that He remains “faithful” to physical Israel. But in context, this is clearly *not* what He is talking about. This exclamation that God’s faithfulness is not nullified by some unbelief is referring to God’s faithfulness *to the remnant believers of Israel*. In other words, God keeps his covenant *because of* the faithful few and *to the* faithful few. Just because some do not believe does not mean that God will then withdraw from the faithful. God remains faithful to physically circumcised *believing* Jews, who are Abraham’s descendants, along with believing Gentiles. This is not an exception for *physical* Israel, this is a definition of *true* Israel, and true Israel does not merely include believing Gentiles, but also believing Jews.

Conclusion

As we have examined the six elements of God’s promise to Abraham and his descendants, we have seen that each and every one of them are not merely fulfilled spiritually in New Testament faith, but that that is what God had intended all along: 1) Abraham is a father of many nations through faith because the Gentiles are included through faith along with the Jews; 2) the Children of Abraham have always been those who believe like Abraham did, not those who are born of flesh; 3) The everlasting covenant remains everlasting because it is fulfilled in Christ who is able to save those who draw near to Him by faith, not because

it is a deed to a piece of land in the Middle East; 4) the Promised Land is fulfilled in Jesus as we rest from our works in faith and inherit the earth. God does not deal with physical plots of land to separate his people from the nations because now, people from every nation are His people and God is international, respecting no land boundaries as all separation laws between Jew and Gentile have been abolished in Christ; 5) the



Christ and the Pharisees: Gustave Dore

covenant was conditional, and physical Israel did not keep it, so it no longer applies to them. The physical Jews kept disobeying their own God up to and including rejecting their own Messiah, so God has given the Kingdom over to the Gentiles; 6) circumcision as the sign and seal has always been spiritual circumcision of heart which is what New Testament faith is. The New Testament believer is the circumcised “child of Abraham” who is party to the everlasting covenant pertaining to all of God’s promises. The promise to Abraham and his descendants are being fulfilled right now in the spiritual universal body of Christ!

The Temple

Another problem with the Dispensational obsession with physical Israel is an equally disturbing obsession with the Temple Mount. Talk of the Red Heifer, the Ark of the Covenant and other political events surrounding Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, reveals the belief that the rebuilding of a physical Temple in Jerusalem will presage the Second Coming of Christ who will, in some hybrid fashion, reinstitute the Laws of sacrifice that were abolished in the New Testament. This scenario does not merely defy imagination, it defies the Scriptures! God is already rebuilding his Temple, and that Temple is the body of Christ! Look at this Old Testament passage about the rebuilding of the Temple:

"On that day I will raise up the tabernacle [Temple] of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, And rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does this thing. Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, When the plowman shall overtake the reaper, And the treader of grapes him who sows seed; The mountains shall drip with sweet wine, And all the hills shall flow with it. 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". Amos 9:11-15,

Is this a prophecy of the Second Coming of Christ? NO! It is a prophecy of the *First* Coming of Christ. In the book of Acts, the Judaizers were troubling people by saying the believing Gentiles had to be circumcised to be saved. The Apostles had a meeting and concluded that this was false. Then James quoted this very same Amos prophecy above to refer to the first advent of Christ and the inclusion of the Gentiles:

"Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to

take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 'After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the Lord who does all these things'. Known to God from eternity are all His works". (Acts 15:13-18)

So the Amos passage *cannot* refer to a rebuilding of a physical Temple, because the Apostles say that it is fulfilled in the *spiritual* rebuilding of God's Temple consisting of Jewish and Gentile believers! And Paul makes this even more explicit. After saying that the dividing line between Jew and Gentile has been abolished in Christ, he then says to believing Gentiles:

Eph 2:19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

God is rebuilding His Temple right now, and the Church of Jesus Christ is that Temple!



Hopes for a Rebuilt Temple—visitors observe a large detailed model of the ancient & future Temple



The Palestinian Plight: dispossessed former land owners are non-citizens in an occupied homeland

Remember the physical Temple being the shadow of the true Temple mentioned in Hebrews 8, 9 and 10? It would be sacrilege to suggest that God would return to an inferior physical shadow after the perfect spiritual one has come. Once Christ has made His once for all sacrifice, it would be an abomination to return to the Old Testament sacrifices. The total desolation of the Temple was God's way of saying the last days of the Old Covenant had arrived, the consummation of the ages was here (Heb 9:26), the Old Covenant and all its sacrificial system was obsolete (Heb 8:13). The New Heavenly Jerusalem and Zion has come out of heaven and replaced the old physical Jerusalem and Zion (Hebrews 12:22-24; Revelation 21).

If the current geopolitical nation of Israel ever does rebuild the Temple, it will be a spiritually dead reminder of an obsolete letter of death, rather than a living reminder of a spiritually alive reality (1 Cor 3).

Blessing and Cursing

So none of the Promise to Abraham can possibly refer to physical Israel in the current national climate because it was all fulfilled in Christ. The physical nation of Israel is not God's Chosen People; the church of Jesus Christ is God's Chosen People from every nation on earth. The promise that Dispensationalists use from the Old Testament to refer to blessing and cursing of physical Israel is actually a promise related to *true spiritual* Israel, the Church of God.

Gen 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

This is part of the same Promise God made to Abraham. The phrase "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" is a connective phrase to the original promise made to Abraham. We have already shown how this has been fulfilled in New Testament Christianity, so the blessing and cursing is not upon those who bless and curse physical Israel, but upon those who bless and curse spiritual Israel, the Body of Christ.

America was founded on Christianity. As it departs from this blessing, so it will lose God's favor as it dismantles its Christian roots. America is not blessed because it has blessed Israel. America was blessed long before the modern state of Israel was founded in 1948. America was blessed because it revered God as the Church followed Christ. Of course, as America departs from its Christian roots, as the last vestiges of Christianity in our judicial, political, social and economic systems disappear, we will learn what it is like to lose God's favor. May God bless America because America has blessed the Lord and His Church. But may God have mercy on us as we depart from His ways.

See the Appendix below for a verse by verse comparison of how the New Testament illustrates that the Church of Jesus Christ is the true Israel of God. Every term used in the Old Testament that Dispensationalists think applies to physical Israel according to the flesh, is actually applied to the Christian Church according to the Spirit. There cannot be two plans or two God's people when one of them fulfills it all.

Brian Godawa

Brian Godawa, among other things SCP's Graphics Design Director, has won multiple screenplay awards. Most recently, he has been hired to adapt two novels to film by best-selling author Frank Peretti for Namesake Entertainment (Nightmare Academy and The Visitation). He has traveled around the world teaching on movies and culture to colleges, churches and community groups. His book, Hollywood Worldviews: Watching Films with Wisdom and Discernment (Intervarsity Press) is in its fifth printing of its first year of release.

APPENDIX A

Terms used in the Old Testament for Israel are fulfilled in Christ and used of the Church of Jesus Christ in the New Testament

Old Testament Physical	Biblical Term	New Testament Spiritual
Gen 17:5 "No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. 6 "And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you. 7 "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. (Also Gen 11:1-3)	Children Of Abraham	Gal 3:6 Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. 7 Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "ALL THE NATIONS SHALL BE BLESSED IN YOU." 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. (Also Rom 4:13-17; Gal 3:29)
Ge 17:19 But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. (Also Gen 17:5-7)	Children of the Promise	Gal 4:28 And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise . Ro 9:8 That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. (Also Joh 1:12; Joh 11:52; Ro 8:16)
Gen 21: 10 Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac." 11 And the matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son. 12 But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named. 13 "And of the son of the maid I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant." Isaiah 54: 1 "Shout for joy, O barren one, you who have borne no child; Break forth into joyful shouting and cry aloud, you who have not travailed; For the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous Than the sons of the married woman," says the LORD. ...3 "For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left. And your descendants will possess nations, And they will resettle the desolate cities.		Gal 4:24 This is allegorically speaking; for these women are two covenants, one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. 25 Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. 27 For it is written, "REJOICE, BARREN WOMAN WHO DOES NOT BEAR; BREAK FORTH AND SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR; FOR MORE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE THAN OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND." 28 And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise . 29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. 30 But what does the Scripture say? "CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON. FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN." 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman .
Ex 19:6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."	Holy Nation	1Pe 2:9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION , A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION...
Ex 19:6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."	Royal Priesthood	1Pe 2:9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD , A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;
De 7:6 "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. (Also De 4:20)	People for God's Own Possession	1Pe 2:9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD , A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION ...
Isa 43:20 "The beasts of the field will glorify Me; ... Because I have given waters in the wilderness And rivers in the desert, To give drink to My chosen people .(Also De 7:6; 14:2; Isa 45:4)	Chosen People	1Pe 2:9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE , A royal PRIESTHOOD , A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION... (Also Col 3:12; Re 17:14)
Isa 24:23 For the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, And His glory will be before His elders. Zec 8:3 "Thus says the LORD, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain .'	Mount Zion	Heb 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant...
Zec 8:3 "Thus says the LORD, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain.'(Also Zec 1:17; Mic 4:2)	Jerusalem	Heb 8:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem , and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, (Also Gal 4:24-26; Re 3:12; 21:2)
Isa 44:21 "Remember these things, O Jacob, And Israel, for you are My servant; I have formed you, you are My servant, O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me.	Israel	Gal 6:15 For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. 16 And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God .
Isa 45:17 Israel has been saved by the LORD With an everlasting salvation; You will not be put to shame or humiliated To all eternity. Jer 10:16 The portion of Jacob is not like these; For the Maker of all is He, And Israel is the tribe of His inheritance; The LORD of hosts is His name.		Ro 9:6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel ;
		Eph 2:12 remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel , and strangers to the covenants of promise, ... But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall , 15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man ,

Old Testament Physical	Biblical Term	New Testament Spiritual
<p>Jer 30: 31 "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. 33 "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 "And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."</p>	<p>New Covenant</p>	<p>Heb 8:6 But now He [Jesus] has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. 7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. 8 For finding fault with them, He says, "BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL...10 "FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM UPON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. 11 "AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL SHALL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. 12 "FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE." 13 When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.</p>
<p>Ps 46:4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, The holy dwelling places of the Most High. Ps 87:3 Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God.</p>	<p>City of God</p>	<p>Heb 8:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels...</p>
<p>Deut 30: 6 "Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God. Jer 4:4 "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD And remove the foreskins of your heart, Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem... Jer 9:25 "Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "that I will punish all who are circumcised and yet uncircumcised...for all the nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart."</p>	<p>Circumcised Heart</p>	<p>Rom 2: 28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. Col 2:11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;</p>
<p>Is 10:22-23 For though your people, O Israel, may be like the sand of the sea, Only a remnant within them will return; A destruction is determined, overflowing with righteousness. For a complete destruction, one that is decreed, the Lord GOD of hosts will execute in the midst of the whole land. Isa 46:3 "Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, And all the remnant of the house of Israel, You who have been borne by Me from birth, And have been carried from the womb; Jer 22:3-6 "Then I Myself shall gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and shall bring them back to their pasture; and they will be fruitful and multiply..."Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "When I shall raise up for David a righteous Branch; [Jesus] And He will reign as king and act wisely And do justice and righteousness in the land. "In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell securely;</p>	<p>Remnant</p>	<p>Rom 9:27-29 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL BE AS THE SAND OF THE SEA, IT IS THE REMNANT THAT WILL BE SAVED; FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS WORD UPON THE EARTH, THOROUGHLY AND QUICKLY." And just as Isaiah foretold, "EXCEPT THE LORD OF SABAOTH HAD LEFT TO US A POSTERITY, WE WOULD HAVE BECOME AS SODOM, AND WOULD HAVE RESEMBLED GOMORRAH." Rom 11:1-7 I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be!...God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew...In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice... What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; [1Pet 1:1Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered...who are chosen]</p>
<p>2Chron 7:14 and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, Ho 1:10 Yet the number of the sons of Israel Will be like the sand of the sea, Which cannot be measured or numbered; And it will come about that, in the place Where it is said to them, "You are not My people," It will be said to them, "You are the sons of the living God." Jer 31:33 "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.</p>	<p>My people called by My name</p>	<p>Ac 15:17 IN ORDER THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME, Ro 9:25 As He says also in Hosea, "I WILL CALL THOSE WHO WERE NOT MY PEOPLE, 'MY PEOPLE,' AND HER WHO WAS NOT BELOVED, 'BELOVED.'" Ro 9:26 "AND IT SHALL BE THAT IN THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS SAID TO THEM, 'YOU ARE NOT MY PEOPLE, THERE THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF THE LIVING GOD." 2Co 6:16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE."</p>
<p>Ex 29:45 "And I will dwell among the sons of Israel and will be their God. 46 "And they shall know that I am the LORD their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them; I am the LORD their God. Lev 26:12 'I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people. Ex 25:8 "And let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them.</p>	<p>Temple God's dwelling place</p>	<p>God's Rebuilt Temple: Eph 2:19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. 2Co 6:16 For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE."</p>