

The Church Part Six: God's Holy Nation in the Promised Land

Joshua 21:43, 45; Judges 21:25; 2 Chronicles 36:15-20; Psalm 78:56-72; Isaiah 6:4, 7-8

Rev. Nollie Malabuyo • August 6, 2023

Dear Congregation of Christ: Here's a quote from one of the most popular preachers and theologians in our time, declared that there is "a future salvation of a generation of Jews that will fulfill all divine promises given to them by God." He asserted this in a lecture outrageously entitled, "Why Every Self-Respecting Calvinist Is a Premillennialist" Why is this title outrageous? Because the great Reformer John Calvin would have been rolling in his grave if he heard it. He wrote in his magnum opus that this popular teacher's teaching about Israel still being God's chosen nation today, "This fiction is too puerile (childish, foolish) to need or to deserve refutation."

The Bible is clear that God's chosen people and nation has always been his elect from Genesis to Revelation from all nations, peoples, and languages, Jews and Gentiles alike. The Apostle Paul writes that our Lord Jesus Christ has broken down the wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles and now there is one people of God (Eph 2:14-17). And in Galatians 3:29, all true Christians are the true children of Abraham and heirs of all the promises God gave to him. And in our text in Joshua, we read that God has already fulfilled all his promises to the Israelites, *"Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass"* (v 45).

In their 40-year wilderness wanderings from Egypt to Canaan, the Israelites were unfaithful, disobedient, and malcontent. In spite of these, God allowed the second-generation Israelites to inherit the Promised Land. They conquered it and settled in it, but the cycle of unbelief, judgment, restoration continued for nine centuries from the time of the conquest to their destruction by the Babylonians. God was extremely patient with them for many, many generations. But Israel as God's holy nation was merely a foretaste of the church, God's holy nation throughout Biblical history. And the ultimate Promised Land for God's people is not earthly, but heavenly.

Therefore, our theme this Lord's Day is, **The Church Part Six: God's Holy Nation in the Promised Land**, under three headings: first, **The Holy Nation Received All of God's Promises**; second, **Yet They Tested and Rebelled Against God**; and third, **Still, God Has Prepared Yet A Final Promised Land**.

The Holy Nation Received All of God's Promises

When we studied God's covenant with Abraham, we learned of God's covenant promises to our forefather. In Genesis 12:1-7, God made three promises. First, The Lord will make Abraham's descendants a great nation coming all peoples, tribes and languages on earth, so his name will be forever known (2). Second, God will cause Abraham to be a blessing to all the families and nations of the earth (3). And third, God will give Canaan, the land on which Abraham dwelt, to his descendants (7).

When God first called Abram, he lived with his father and their household in Haran (present-day southeastern Turkey). Their household consisted of many men and their families as servants (Gen 14:4; 17:12). But Abram's own family consisted only of himself, his wife Sarah, and his nephew Lot. Although Abraham also had a son by Sarah's maidservant Hagar, his only covenant son given to him by God was Isaac. Abraham most likely survived his two sons, his grandsons Jacob and Esau, and his twelve great-grandsons, who became the twelve tribes of Israel.

When Jacob and his whole household settled in Egypt during a great famine, his household consisted of 70 people. After 430 years in Egypt, Jacob's descendants grew to 600,000 men! God's first promise to Abraham of a multitude of descendants as numerous as the stars in heaven and the sands on the seashore has been fulfilled. When the Israelites finally escaped slavery in Egypt, they gathered before the LORD at Mount Sinai, where God declared the inauguration of Israel as his holy nation, *"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."* (Exo 19:5-6a).

In a repeating cycle of disobedience, punishment, and restoration, the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years before reaching the gates of the Promised Land at the River Jordan. Before they crossed the river, the LORD renewed his covenant with them, promising them that he would give the land to them, *"a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you"* (Deut 27:3). He is true to all his covenant promises to Abraham.

Therefore, after the Israelites entered Canaan, God gave them victory after victory over all the nations in the land. They met defeat only when they were disobedient to God's commandments. The whole Book of Joshua is an account of the conquest, division, and settlement of the land God gave to them. Each of the twelve tribes were allotted their inheritance according to God's instructions. Then, in our reading on Joshua 21, there is this summary of the LORD's faithfulness to his promises, *"Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass"* (43, 45).

The LORD will never forget not even one word of his covenant promises to his people from his good promises to Abraham to his promises to Moses and Joshua and to all Israelites.

Yet They Tested and Rebelled Against God

In Psalm 78, the psalmist recounts all the good things the LORD God did for them and provided for them in Egypt, in the wilderness, and in the Promised Land. The LORD God performed wonders for them when they were still slaves in Egypt. When they were wandering in barren deserts for 40 years, God provided food and drink for them, shielding them from the heat of the day by a pillar of cloud, and guiding their way through the darkness of night by a pillar of fire. But they "still sinned" and "rebelled" against God (17, 32, 40, 56). They easily forgot how God was loving, merciful and patient with them over and over again. They were a stubborn lot.

After they settled in the Promised Land, their cycle of rebellion, punishment, and restoration did not end. Their depravity came to an ultimate wickedness when men of the tribe of Benjamin violated a Levite's concubine, cut her into pieces, and sent the pieces to all Israel. So all the other tribes of Israel destroyed the tribe of Benjamin in a civil war. Therefore, at the end of the Book of Judges, we read this conclusion, *"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes"* (21:25).

After the judges, God appointed kings over his people. But exactly the same sins beset Israel under their kings. In fact, most of their kings were also evil, leading the people into depravity. During the time of the prophet Amos, we read a litany of Israel's wickedness that all the prophets condemned. Israel had peace and prosperity, with an extremely wealthy class (6:4-6). But the rich and powerful abused and oppressed the poor (2:7; 8:6). The people committed sexual immorality, including incest (2:7; Ezk 22:11). The culture was about corruption, greed and consumption, so that even the Sabbath was desecrated for business and trade (8:5). Places of worship became places of idolatry (4:4). They even offered their children as burnt sacrifices to pagan gods (2 Kgs 23:10). Their shepherds—the priests and kings—fatted themselves while the flock starved and scattered. They ruled the sheep with harshness and violence (Ezk 34:1-10).

All of these religious and social sins are familiar with us in our own nation. We have peace and prosperity that no other nation in the world enjoys, with an extremely wealthy class of movie and sports celebrities, businesspeople, and politicians. According to *Forbes Magazine*, there are over 700 billionaires in the United States, but there are about 12 percent of Americans in poverty, which means 38 million people do not have enough food on the table. Sexual immorality is off the charts and beyond our wildest imagination. Rich and poor alike regard the Lord's Day as nothing, wallowing in idolatry by worshiping celebrities, money, pleasures, and possessions. Children as burnt sacrifices to this idolatry? Yes, and not merely a few like the Israelites did, but over 600,000 every year, with over 63 million since 1973! The holocaust is as nothing compared to this wicked murder and idolatry.

The prophets of the LORD warned the Israelites throughout their tenure in the Promised Land that judgment is coming to them unless they repent of their sins and turn back. But the warnings fell on deaf ears. Finally, judgment day came in the form of the Assyrians and Babylonians who destroyed the nation and the temple and exiled the people as slaves. As our nation continues to wallow in sin, would God's patience finally run out on us?

Still, God Has Prepared Yet a Final Promised Land

Two of God's promises to Abraham has been fulfilled. He had a multitude of descendants from his son Jacob. And God gave them the land of Canaan, the Promised Land, a land of milk and honey. What about the third promise that he will cause Abraham to be a blessing to all the families and nations of the earth?

This promise was not fulfilled until the fullness of time when the Son of God came into the world clothed in human nature. Paul says in Galatians 3:16, *"Now the promises were made to Abraham*

and to his offspring... who is Christ.” Only through Christ will God fulfill his promises to Abraham of a multitude of descendants in all nations. Those who are saved by faith alone in Christ alone will come from all nations, peoples and languages. Only then will God’s promise to Abraham that he would be a blessing to all the nations of the world be fulfilled. Therefore, in Galatians 3:29, Paul declares, “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.” All of us who are united to Christ in his death to sin and resurrection to eternal life, Jews and Gentiles alike, will receive our eternal inheritance.

This eternal inheritance is what the Promised Land looks forward to. Canaan was merely a foretaste and a shadow of the heavenly land that awaits all of his people, the true church, the true “Israel of God” (Gal 6:16). Paul says in Ephesians 1:11, *“In him [Christ] we have obtained an inheritance.”* This inheritance is the new heaven and new earth that Jesus has prepared for his holy kingdom after he ascended into heaven (Rev 21:1-4; John 14:2). On Judgment Day, our Lord will be seated on his throne and gather all people before him, the sheep and the goats. Then he will say to his sheep, *“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Matt 25:34).

Dear friends: You, the church of all true believers in Christ, are God’s holy nation and treasured possession among all the peoples of the earth. You have been chosen to inherit his kingdom before the foundation of the world. Even in this sinful vale of tears full of afflictions, sufferings and persecution, we have the Holy Spirit to help us, to comfort us. This is our own pilgrimage even in this age when we see only a glimpse of your kingdom from afar, just as Abraham saw only a glimpse of the true Promised Land while he already dwelt in Canaan. Let us fully hope and trust in God that he will soon reveal his glorious, eternal kingdom that awaits us when Christ, our blessed hope, appears to us a second time.