



CPC QUARTERLY

A Quarterly Publication of Christ Presbyterian Church: Meeting at 2210 Hawk Creek Road, London KY
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From the Pastor's Pen

The Promised Land

In Genesis 12, Abraham was promised a land, a nation (many descendents), blessing, and to be a blessing to the world ("in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"). So as Abraham leaves Ur, and dwells in Canaan as a stranger, he does so as one waiting expectantly and confidently for his promised inheritance. He obeys and continues to obey because by faith he is looking to the future. Faith is the evidence or conviction of things not seen (Heb. 11:1). This same faith was emulated by Isaac, Jacob and Joseph (see Hebrews 11).

Though all of these men looked forward to the promised inheritance, none of them received it before they died. Heb. 11:13: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises..." The "these all" refers back to the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) mentioned in vv. 8-9; but Joseph can be included as well.

Now in one sense Abraham did receive the promise (6:15): a partial fulfillment in the birth of Isaac. The same could be said concerning Isaac and Jacob with the birth of their sons. But none of them received the Land, the multitude of descendents or became a blessing to the world. Therefore the author rightly says they did not receive the promises but only saw them from afar off (11:13).

From one perspective, albeit a wrong one as we shall see, this state of affairs is most tragic. Abraham leaves his family and country on the basis of great and glorious promises, yet he never enjoys them. Prov. 13:12 says that hope deferred makes the heart sick. Surely a hope unfulfilled crushes the heart.

It would seem then that Abraham gave up everything for nothing. He followed a pipe dream! Now it could be argued that he sacrificed his life for his descendents because they did become as numerous as the stars in heaven and occupied Canaan (Deut. 1:10; Neh. 9:23). But that still doesn't solve the problem that God promised these things to Abraham himself, and not just his descendents.

Now if Abraham and the others had their hopes and dreams fixed upon a piece of real estate in the Middle East, then their lives would have been sad and pathetic. As Philip Hughes says, it would have made "a mockery of their faith." But

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were not ultimately waiting and looking forward to owning Canaan. Rather, they were anticipating with absolute confidence the city of God (Heb. 11:10, 16b), a better, heavenly country (vs. 16a). In other words, they were looking ahead to Jesus (John 8:56) and his kingdom.

Since the Patriarchs were looking ahead to the city of God, the Promised Land was only a token of their inheritance and therefore has no continuing relevance in the NT era. The Land of Canaan was a type, token and symbol of God's promised inheritance and not the inheritance itself. Heb. 11:39 says that the OT saints who occupied the Promised Land did not receive the promise. How could that be true if Canaan itself was the full intent of the promise?

So the Land of Promise ultimately pointed to a future, heavenly, eternal reality in Christ. And it was this future reality that the Patriarchs were waiting for. The wait, however, is and has been over for quite some time now, which is why the token is now obsolete and done away with. The land is no longer holy or special. Now that Christ has come, we worship in the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22), and not in the earthly Jerusalem. Now we worship God in Spirit and in truth (John 4).

Unfortunately, there is deep misunderstanding in the contemporary church on this issue, especially here in America. Many believe that the OT promises pertaining to the Land are to be understood literally. Thus they believe that Israel today has a God-given right to a particular piece of land in the Middle East. But as we have seen, Abraham had a much different outlook on the Promised Land. He was not waiting to dwell in Canaan, but in the city of God. Indeed, he dwells there now as one of the "just men made perfect (Heb. 12:23)."

Therefore, there is no biblical warrant for "the entitlement of any one ethnic or religious group to territory in the Middle East called the 'Holy Land.'" (An Open Letter by Knox Seminary). If anyone desires to inherit the promises first given to Abraham, whether he is a Jew or Gentile, he needs to come to Christ in faith; not regain control of Canaan. Then and only then will he become a true child of Abraham and occupy the city of God.

-Pastor Ramsey

Announcements and Upcoming Events

- There is a monthly bible study in Jellico, TN, at the Boll home. Please contact John Boll for the date and time of the Bible study, which will generally meet near the end of the month.
- Please note the new church phone number: 606-231-9359.
- Pastor Ramsey will be taking a month (2 weeks study leave, 2 weeks vacation) beginning in the middle of February to work on his master's thesis.
- In light of the fact that no nominations were received, the session has decided to not proceed with diaconal training at this time.
- The annual congregation meeting is scheduled for Sunday, January 25th, during the Sunday School hour.
- A new bible study will meet on the first two Wednesdays of the month at the Anderson home, beginning January 7. We will begin with the book of Habakkuk.
- Greenville Seminary in Greenville SC is hosting their annual Spring Theology Conference March 10-12. This year's topic is "John Calvin: 500 Years in Retrospect, A 21st Century Assessment." For more information see their website: www.gpts.edu.
- In order to avoid confusion about what is or is not officially approved and sanctioned by the church, the session requests that members do not place their own personal materials on the table in the foyer that is used for church literature (bulletin, New Horizons, etc.). Thank you for your cooperation.
- Our contribution to the OPC Thank Offering was \$

Significant Sessional Actions

- Approved the 2009 church budget.
- Approved Pastor's two weeks study and two weeks vacation: February 16-March 16.
- Approved Randy and Kathy Corry for church membership.

Book Notes

- We are currently studying the book of Habakkuk in the London area Wednesday

Night Bible Study. Walter Chantry has written a small brief study of this book entitled, *Habakkuk: A Wrestler with God*, published by The Banner of Truth Trust.

- O. Palmer Robertson has written a very helpful book about Israel, addressing the questions "Who is the Israel of God today?" and "What is their relationship to the Promised Land, and to Israel's worship, lifestyle, and future?" His book is entitled, *Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, and is published by P&R.

Financial Report

As of 12/31/08	Actual	Budget
Income:		
Expenses:		
Deacon's Fund:	\$	

Denomination News

- The OPC website has a daily devotional. Go to www.opc.org and click on "daily devotional," which is on the left hand side of the page.

Thought of the Quarter

"Bad Christian theology regarding the "Holy Land" contributed to the tragic cruelty of the Crusades in the Middle Ages. Lamentably, bad Christian theology is today attributing to secular Israel a divine mandate to conquer and hold Palestine, with the consequence that the Palestinian people are marginalized and regarded as virtual "Canaanites." This doctrine is both contrary to the teaching of the New Testament and a violation of the Gospel mandate."

—An Open Letter to Evangelicals and Other Interested Parties: The People of God, the Land of Israel, and the Impartiality of the Gospel.