

Is The Church Israel? Session 3

Turn in your Bible over to Jeremiah 31

Introduction:

PPT: Our series on New Covenant Theology is arranged around the question, **What's so new about the New Testament?**

The Bible is a book full of covenants between Jehovah God and various people. We've already seen that the New Testament made the Sinai Covenant old and obsolete.

Review: The new covenant is predicted **Jeremiah 31:31-34** (read)

- 1) The word new implies the Sinai covenant is old in comparison, **31:31**.
- 2) The new covenant would be made between Jehovah God and Israel, **31:31**. However, physical Israel and physical Judah *en mass* rejected the new covenant. For 2000 years the new covenant has been 99% composed of Gentiles. This suggests the church is the true Israel. This is not replacement theology it is fulfillment theology
- 3) The Lord stated that physical Israel had broken the Sinai covenant, **31:32**.
- 4) Under the new covenant, God's law will be written on human hearts, not tablets of stone, **31:33**. This is the Law of Christ, not the Law of Moses.
- 5) The new covenant will establish a God/people relationship, the fulfillment of one of the primary goals of the old covenant, **31:33**.
- 6) Unlike the old covenant, everyone in the new covenant will actually know the Lord, **31:34**. The new covenant is personal, the old covenant was national. It was quite possible for an ancient Israelite to live in the Promised Land under the administration of the old covenant and yet not know the Lord (to be an unbeliever). Ex: American communists.
- 7) Unlike the old covenant, the New Testament offers forgiveness of sins, **31:34**.

Today we'll explore the relationship the New Testament has to a different covenant recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures: God's covenant with Abraham.

Turn to Genesis 12.

God's Promises to Abraham Genesis 12:1-3

PPT: 1. What promises did God make to Abram (Genesis 12:1-3)? *See also 12:7a, 13:14-15.* Theologians generally boil all this down to three basic promises made by God to Abram:

PPT: a.) To show (give) him the "land", 12:1. *See also 13:14-15.*

ESV **Genesis 13:14-15** The LORD said to Abram . . . "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever.

This is roughly the land occupied by the modern nation of Israel

PPT: b.) To make him into a great “**nation**” of people (“**offspring**”), 12:2a. *See also 13:16.*

Note: Elsewhere God promised Abraham would have many “offspring”; thus the reference to the promise of offspring. This wording is important due to New Testament quotations of this passage. For example:

ESV **Genesis 13:16** I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.

This nation was of course Israel and the people were the Israelites.

PPT: c.) To bless Abraham personally plus somehow to bless all peoples on earth through Abram (“**blessing**”), 12:3b.

Abraham was blessed by a relationship with God and material possessions.

PPT: These three (land, offspring, blessing) are very important throughout the OT and the NT.

PPT: What's So New About the New Testament?

Fact: Historically, it is a fact that Abraham's descendants became a great nation of people (the ancient Israelites) who lived on the Promised Land (Canaan) for over a thousand years. Abraham was blessed with great material wealth, as were all the patriarchs. Yet:

2. What unexpected declaration does Hebrews 11:13, 19 make about these promises to Abraham?

Mystery: Even though Abraham moved to and lived in the Promised Land, even though Abraham had the promised son (Isaac) and even though God blessed Abraham with both great possessions and protection, the New Testament says this about Abraham (and other all Old Testament people of faith):

PPT: ESV Hebrews 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

PPT: ESV Hebrews 11:39 And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

PPT: Shadow: things promised to Abraham are mere shadows compared to the substance that is in the New Testament. Which is better, the girl or her shadow?

What's So New About the New Testament? It is the difference between shadow and substance.

Shadowlands: God promised Abraham land, offspring and blessing. These promises are clearly a central theme throughout Genesis and indeed, the whole of the Old Testament: Genesis 18:16-19, 22:15-18, 26:1-6, 26:24, 28:10-15, 35:11-13, 46:1-4, 48:3-4, 50:24-25, Exodus 2:23-25, 6:2-8, 32:13, Joshua 14:9, 1 Chronicles 16:17-18, Psalm 105:10-11. The exciting part is the insight that the New Testament writers give us concerning the ultimate fulfillments of the land, the offspring and the blessing. The physical things promised to Abraham were just shadows of something much better, much greater coming in the New Testament. Abraham got shadow, we get substance. In coming sessions we will explore the physical promises made, along with the physical fulfillments, and also the metaphysical promises behind the literal promises.

Offspring Promise Repeated Genesis 15:5

PPT: **3. What promise did God repeat to Abraham (Ge 15:5)?** God promised Abraham a lot of offspring, as many descendants as there are stars. Earlier God promised something similar:

PPT: ESV Genesis 13:16 I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.

Then later God promised:

PPT: ESV Genesis 22:17 . . . I will surely multiply your offspring . . . as the sand that is on the seashore.

PPT: How many stars are in heaven? I don't know how many stars are in heaven, but they are virtually uncountable.

Do you think there are more stars or grains of sand? Scientists who consider such things say are actually more stars!

4. What does 1 Kings 4:20 declare about God's promise that Abraham would have many offspring? The promise of having as many offspring as the sand by the sea was declared to be fulfilled. This shows how we should read prophecy literarily and not merely literally.

PPT: ESV 1 Kings 4:20 Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. They ate and drank and were happy.

5. How Prophecy Works: How do we know God not literally mean that there would be as many offspring as there are stars, sand and dust (Ge 13:16, 15:5, 22:17)? The statement of 1 Kings 4:20 is clearly hyperbole. Abram did not literally have as many physical descendants as there are stars, grains of sand or dust. We must read the Bible not merely literally but also literarily. One characteristic of prophecy is a literary device call hyperbole, as seen here in Genesis 15:5 and 1 Kings 4:20. Such exaggerated statements certainly have a literal meaning beneath them. However, the prophetic imagery is that Abraham would have a *lot* of descendants. Remember this when you read prophecies such as are found in Revelation.

Shadows: Even though 1 Kings 4:20 states the promise of offspring was fulfilled, the New Testament writers say all the Old Testament saints died in faith without having received what was promised.

Righteous By Faith Genesis 15:6

******6. According to Genesis 15:6, why did the Lord count Abraham as righteous?** It was because Abraham believed God's promise of many offspring.

Salvation by Faith: The earliest inspired writings indicate that salvation comes by faith (not works). From Genesis to Revelation, salvation is by faith.

Both Sarah and Abraham were people of faith:

PPT: ESV Hebrews 11:8-9 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise . . .

PPT: ESV Hebrews 11:11 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.

7. What problem had Abram and his wife been having that made this offspring promise so significant (15:5)? *See back to 11:30, 12:4.* This is significant because Sarah was barren and past the age of having children. Abraham was 75 years old when God promised this.

ESV Genesis 11:30 Now Sarai was barren; she had no child.

8. How does Romans 4:2-5 apply Genesis 15:6? Paul used Abraham's example to prove the doctrine of justification by faith.

PPT: ESV Romans 4:2-5 . . . if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness . . .

PPT: ESV Romans 4:13 For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.

Contra Catholicism: In 1547 the Roman Catholic Church convened a council in Trent, Italy (NW of Venice).

PPT: Canon 9 states: "If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification . . . let him be anathema."

PPT: Canon 12 states, "If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, let him be anathema."

Who are you going to believe, the Pope or Paul? The Council or Christ?

9. Abraham believed God would give life to his and Sarah's dead bodies. According to Romans 4:18-25, what is it we must believe to be righteous?

PPT a: ESV Romans 4:18-25 In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb . . . he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."

PPT b: But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

We must believe that God the Father gave life to the Jesus' dead body; He caused Jesus to come back to life and rise from the tomb.

NCT: According to Paul, the information in Genesis 15 was written for "our sake" (Ro 4:23-24), for those of us in the new covenant. Everything in the Old Testament points to, leads up to, is fulfilled in, Christ and the New Testament. This emphasis on Jesus as the focal point is the basis for New Covenant Theology.

The Promised Offspring Fulfillments

God's shadow promise that Abraham would have a son through Sarah and that from him would come a whole nation of people was effectively fulfilled. As we have already seen:

ESV 1 Kings 4:20 Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. They ate and drank and were happy.

****10. **According to Galatians 3:16, what is the true substance fulfillment of God's promise to give Abraham offspring (Ge 12:7)?** Using a play on words, Paul stated that the ultimate promised offspring (singular) was the Lord Jesus, who according to the flesh was a direct descendant of Abraham.

PPT: ESV Galatians 3:16 Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.

We must let the apostles interpret the Hebrew Scriptures. The offspring promise to Abraham was a shadow of the substance that is Christ. Jesus is the true ultimate predicted offspring of Abraham.

It was in this substance sense that Abraham did not live to see what was promised. Yes, he had a shadow biological son (Isaac), but the promise of Isaac's birth was merely a shadow of the substance that is Christ coming into the world.

**** 11. God's initial shadow promise to Abraham was that he would have physical offspring. **According to Galatians 3:7, who are Abraham's true substance offspring?** *See also Galatians 3:29.* Any one from any ethnic group who has the faith of Abraham is a true offspring of Abraham.

PPT: ESV Galatians 3:7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

PPT: ESV Galatians 3:29 . . . if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Thus, the shadow fulfillment of the promise to give Abraham descendants was found in Abraham's **physical offspring**, the Hebrew race.

The substance physical fulfillment was the specific offspring named Jesus who was a direct physical descendant of Abraham.

Through the salvation that Offspring Jesus made possible, all who follow Abraham in faith (i.e., true believers) are Abraham's **true offspring**.

PPT: Can you see why NCT holds it is the church that is the true Israel, spiritual Israel, the new Israel?

PPT: What's So New About the New Testament?

The fulfillments of the New Testament changed many things. We saw that the New Testament made the Old Testament Sinai Covenant obsolete. **What impact might it have had on the shadow fulfillments of the promises to Abraham?**

******12. What does Romans 4:11-12 imply about the physical offspring of Abraham who lack the faith of Abraham?** *See Romans 2:28-29, John 8:39.*

PPTS: ESV Romans 4:11-12 He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Romans 4:12 states Abraham is actually not the father of the circumcised (Jews) who do not believe.

PPT: ESV Romans 2:28-29 . . . no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.

PPT: ESV John 8:39-44 If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did . . . You are of your father the devil . . .

Theological Reality: Unbelieving Jews are not Abraham's true descendants.

PPT: ESV Revelation 2:9 I know . . . the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

PPT: ESV Revelation 3:9 . . . I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie - behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet and they will learn that I have loved you.

13. Based on Galatians 6:15-16, what is the true Israel of God?

PPT: ESV Galatians 6:15-16 For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

Neither being circumcised (Hebrews) nor being uncircumcised (Gentiles) counts for anything with God. What does matter is being made into a new creation in Christ. Abraham's true and promised descendants are those who have the same faith that Abraham did.

PPT: The word “and” (6:16) is from *kai*, which is also the Greek word for “even”. Thus Paul could have meant “even the Israel of God.” If so, this means the church, the new creation, is the true Israel of God.

PPT: **ESV Matthew 21:43-45** . . . the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits . . . When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them.

New Covenant Theology holds that Old Testament Israel was a shadow of the church and the church is the true Israel.

Physical Israel in Prophecy

Now that the ultimate fulfillments of the promises to Abraham have come about, the question arises about the fate of the initial physical fulfillments.

Romans 11 reveals that God still has a plan for the literal, physical descendants of Abraham:

PPT: **ESV Romans 11:1** I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!

PPT: **ESV Romans 11:11** So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means!

PPT: **ESV Romans 11:25-26** . . . I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved . . .

PPT: **ESV Romans 11:28** As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers.

New week we will study in depth exactly what the New Testament predicts about the future of physical Israel.

So What?

PPTS: **What are the big three promises God made to Abraham?**

- 1.) “Land” (Canaan).
- 2.) “Offspring” (the Hebrew race).
- 3.) “Blessing” (to Abraham personally and also to all families on earth through Abraham’s offspring).

PPTS: 14. Based on Abraham's example, how can a person be declared righteous by God (what will move God to credit righteousness to your account)? *See Romans 4.*

Like Abraham, we too can be justified by faith, but faith that Jesus died for our sins and then rose bodily from the tomb.

15. What was the offspring promise initially, literally, physically all about (in a shadow sort of way)? God promised **Abraham** that he would have many descendants: The Israelites or the Hebrews (or practically speaking, the Jews). **Isaac** was Abraham's firstborn child through Sarah. Isaac's son of promise was **Jacob** (alias Israel). Jacob had twelve sons (hence, the twelve tribes of Israel).

16. What is the New Testament substance fulfillment of the offspring promise? The ultimate fulfillment is Jesus. A secondary fulfillment is that all who have the same faith as Abraham are his true children.

Summary: John Reisinger (pronounced re-singer) *Abraham's Four Seeds*: natural physical seed (any physical descendant of Abraham, not matter if Israelite or Arab); special physical seed (physical descendants from Isaac: Israelites), true unique physical seed (Jesus), spiritual seed (those of any ethnic background who have the faith of Abraham: believing Israelites and believing Gentiles).

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.

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