

The Prophetic Promise of the Land in the Land Covenant of Deuteronomy

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Introduction

In a recent article Robert W. Nicholson discusses the rising trend of anti-Israel/pro-Palestinian views in the evangelical community. Its major source is the Bethlehem Bible College with its "Christ at the Checkpoint" conferences that have attracted evangelical leaders from around the world. Interviewing the Bible College Arab-American professor, Alex Awad, Nicholson found him sympathetic to replacement theology. Awad claimed, "There doesn't necessarily need to be a 'state' of Israel for the re-gathering of the Jews to be fulfilled. . . . Sometimes I think replacement theology has a bad name and is misunderstood."¹ The biblical land promise to Israel as the corollary to its national existence thus continues to occupy debate four millennia after it was first given.

This paper examines Israel's land promise in context with biblical covenant structure, chiefly with the renewal of the Mosaic covenant described in the book of Deuteronomy. The methodology used is the unabashed adherence to a biblical view of language and meaning that marks the hermeneutic of traditional dispensational theology. A central feature to be examined using that methodology is the interplay between the provisional, conditional nature of that covenant and the prophetic, unconditional nature of the land promise. To show that the land promise cannot be separated from Israel's mission to the world, the paper examines the often overlooked relationship between a nation and its land in general and between Israel and its land in particular. A careful analysis of Deuteronomy shows that an ultimate Land covenant is in view regardless of how one interprets the word "covenant" in Deuteronomy 29:1.

The Interrelationship of the Noahic, Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants

Covenant as a Contract. Because the land promise involves several biblical covenants, it's necessary to remind ourselves about the nature of covenants between God and man. It behooves us to consider the wonder that the God of the universe would come down to our human level on this planet and enter into a covenant with us. Unfortunately because the word "covenant" has become a much-used title for doctrinal controversy by theological specialists, the wonderment in ordinary Bible readers is too-often missed.² It might be better translated as "contract" since it refers to a formal agreement between two parties (e.g., Abraham made a business contract with Abimelech in Gen 21:22-34). What is stunning about this term in the Bible is that it refers to contracts between God and man. In his discussion of the term, Albright wrote: "Contracts and treaties were common everywhere, but only the Hebrews, so far as we know, made covenants with their gods or God."³

¹ Robert W. Nicholson, "Evangelicals and Israel: What American Jews Don't Want to Know (but Need to)," *Mosaic Magazine*, October 2013, pp. 9,12.

² "Covenant" occurs over 300 times in the English Bible generally translating the Hebrew *berith* and the Greek *diatheke*.

³ He noted the provisional nature of his claim, but his discussion of the cultural milieu clearly shows the ordinary commercial meaning of the term *berith*: "Being prevalingly caravaneers and so ethno-political intruders in the West, the early Hebrews were in constant need of contractual and treaty protection." William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (Garden City, NY:

Several implications follow from this unique form of revelation that directly apply to the biblical land promise. First, it reinforces the point that the transcendent Triune God condescends to come down to man's level to bargain (Gen 18), to argue (Job 38-41), and commit Himself to defined behavior for the duration of such contracts.⁴ Specification of future behavior by parties to a contract is the very reason for contracts. However, that does not imply a mechanistic, legalistic interpretation of how a contract works because prior to contract origination a personal relationship exists between the parties. Thus the relationship between the God of grace and those to whom he enters into a contract has a describable content but that relationship always remains personal and can therefore adapt to changing circumstances as with any contractual agreement. Second, it presupposes positional sanctification since there must exist righteousness on the part of man adequate to enter into a personal relationship with the God of absolute righteousness.⁵ Third, it establishes the legitimacy of a literal hermeneutic since all contracts necessarily are interpreted in terms of ordinary language for validation of the parties' behaviors. Finally, it assumes that the meaning of the contract terminology must be conserved throughout the duration of the contract. Terms cannot be reinterpreted later in the relationship. Defined land boundaries, for example, must remain as stated for the entire duration of the contract unless that contract is explicitly amended or terminated.⁶

Covenant Interactions. Since the land promise occurs in both the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, we need to look at how biblical contracts are built upon on another and how they interact. The first clearly explicit biblical divine-human contract is the Noahic covenant. It provided the basis for civil authority to use lethal force to execute some of God's judgments to protect human life (Gen 9:5-6); it defined the variability limits of the post-flood geophysical environment until the end of mortal history (Gen 8:21-22, 9:11-15; Isa 54:9-10); and it laid out the biological relationship between man and animal life (Gen 9:1-4, 8-17). The parties to this contract included not only all humanity but also those animals whose DNA was preserved in the ark of Noah (Gen 9:9-10). These social and environmental features by formal divine agreement continue through history into the millennial era when the New covenant becomes functional.

Doubleday & Co., 1968), 106-108. Of course, we biblicalists would insist that it was God that made the contracts with man, not the other way around.

⁴ The technical use of the term "condescension" is explained well in K. Scott Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 2006), 232-255. God's condescension also answers the challenge of "open theology" concerning passages like Genesis 18 that depict God involved in "fact-finding" conversations with man. When He appears at our creature level, it should not be surprising that He converses with us as any person would. After all, with the ultimate condescension, the Incarnation, He had a fully human nature. Such condescension sharply contrasts with Islam's Allah. Condescension by such a transcendent deity in binding himself to any contract with man is seen by Muslim theologians as an impossible contradiction. The price paid for denying such condescension is a deity that can never be known personally. Thus biblical contracts by revealing God's interest in personal relationships can play a key role in Muslim evangelism.

⁵ Note the occurrence of sacrifices with biblical contracts: the ecological Noahic contract (Gen 8:20-9:17), the land-seed-global blessing Abrahamic contract (Gen 15), the theocratic Mosaic contract (Exod 24:1-8); and the New contract (Matt 26:26-29). It is precisely with the first redemptive contract that revelation of justification based upon imputed righteousness occurs which the Apostle Paul so carefully later expounds (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:1-8). Modern contract law faintly reflects this truth in the doctrine of "legal capacity" which requires that all parties to a contract must be legally competent to enter into such a relationship.

⁶ Imagine, for example, that after a tornado destroyed your house (but allowed you and your family to survive), your insurance company read back a "deeper meaning" into your homeowners policy that the term "house" really meant "family."

The Noahic covenant is a preservative, but not a redemptive contract, and establishes the geophysical environment of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. God's relationship with the geophysical environment and animals continues through each of these later covenants.

In sharp contrast to the Noahic covenant the Abrahamic contract defined God's plan of post-Babel world redemption through God's promise of progeny to Abraham. It spelled out His land allotment to that progeny, and His exclusive selection of that progeny as the means of blessing all humanity (Gen 12:1-3). Since this contract was established by an unconditional divine oath (Gen 15) and has never been explicitly amended or terminated, both its land and its progeny provisions must remain through all subsequent contracts with their original literal meaning. Also it is important to note that when God established this formal agreement with Abraham and his progeny, it made a fundamental change in His relation with the rest of mankind that continues through today until the end of time. Before this agreement, post-flood civilization had access to previous special revelation given from Adam to Noah much of which was directly available from the long-lived patriarchs who could pass on the "Noahic Bible" (see Appendix A). After this agreement special revelation comes only through Abraham's progeny. God's redemptive relationship with all mankind that had shown the human race universally corruptible at Babel thus began anew with a prophetically-administered revelational exclusivism. All subsequent redemptive activity is channeled through the Jews (cf. Deut 4:19-20; John 4:22; 14:6; Acts 4:12).⁷ Biblical religion compared to all pagan religions and counterfeit cults is thus fundamentally unique not only because it alone has God-man contracts as Albright pointed out but also because it has prophetic contract "follow up" through millennia of time. As Kaufmann has noted,

"The role of the apostle of God is what sets the Israelite prophet apart from all pagan analogues. And what makes the history of Israelite prophecy *sui generis* is the succession of apostles of God that come to the people through the ages. Such a line of apostle-prophets is unknown to paganism. . . .Paganism does not know of a continuous, generations-long succession of prophets."⁸

The Abrahamic contract revealed God's global redemption strategy. It would center on one particular tribe of mankind in a specific geographic location. Nevertheless, it would have to rely upon the social and geophysical structures of the prior Noahic contract. And important for the argument of this paper once the nation of Israel emerges from Abraham's progeny, its promises will be expanded and explained by a line of Jewish prophets.

Unlike the Noahic and Abrahamic contracts the Mosaic contract was neither preservative nor redemptive. It was a test for a kingdom relationship with God and therefore provisional. Merrill puts it well:

The Mosaic [covenant] is subservient to the Abrahamic, a special arrangement with Abraham's seed to put it in a position to become the means of blessing which the Lord

⁷ Religious exclusivism angers religious egalitarians who presume all religious dogma originates in man's imagination with the conclusion that no religion can claim absolute truth. Of course, that presumption begs the question of whether or God has verbally spoken in history which is precisely the claim the Bible makes. Forgotten is the *cause* of this exclusivism: the apostasy of Babel when mankind collectively rejected Noahic revelation that had been universally available to every postdiluvian people group (Gen 11:1-9).

⁸ Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, trans. Moshe Greenberg (New York: Schocken Paperback Books, 1972), 212f. Biblical counterfeits such as Islam, Mormonism, and all other similar cults also suffer from the same "one-prophet" syndrome.

had promised to his descendants. . . .For Israel to be a holy nation called for a deportment that would cause the peoples of the earth to see in Israel's behavior a reflection of the God they professed to serve. . . .Theirs would be an inestimable privilege, but at the same time the commitment they made would entail enormous responsibility. Should they refuse God's gracious overtures, he surely would work out his redemptive program by some other means, the nature of which defies human imagination.⁹

It challenged an elect portion of Abraham's progeny to bring into existence the Kingdom of God on earth.¹⁰ As such it spelled out the details of what loving God and neighbor actually should have looked like in the second millennium BC. Had the challenge been met, the Kingdom of God would already be here.

The Yahweh-Israel Relationship Behind the Mosaic Covenant. Not often acknowledged, however, is that when the Mosaic covenant/contract was originally established at Mt. Sinai (hereinafter MC-S1), it made a fundamental advance in God's redemptive program. It created for the first time an elect nation from the tribes of Jacob, a subset of Abraham's progeny. God established a new kind of relationship, a Yahweh-Israel relationship. This new relationship is a national relationship, not a family relationship. It is a relationship with the tribal derivatives of Jacob's family collectively organized as a nation. Dispensationalists rightly have emphasized the conditional character of the Mosaic covenant and how that conditionality is parallel to the suzerainty-vassal treaties of the ancient pagan world. However, we must remember that those treaties were constructed out of a pagan worldview that denied the Creator-creature distinction. Pagans have never had the notion of an infinite-personal God coming down to initiate a contractual agreement with anyone, leave alone an entire nation. The Mosaic covenant must be viewed within the biblical worldview where God establishes relationships of His choosing. That means that while the covenant is itself conditional, it is an expression of a genuine personal relationship between Yahweh-God and the nation, a relationship that exists in the background of the Mosaic covenant. This truth is crucial to understanding the land promise in Deuteronomy 29-30.

To see into this relationship and how it works within the contracts it makes, observe the incident that happened as MC-S1 was being written on Mt. Sinai as recorded in Exodus 32-34 (also recounted in Deut 9-10). Moses is receiving revelation of the contract terms. The people on the ground below, however, having physically come out of Egypt have not culturally come out of Egypt. They slip back into their former and familiar pagan ways of interpreting life and make an idol. God confronts Moses with a proposal to destroy Israel and begin anew: "*let Me alone that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. and I will make of you a great nation*" (Ex 32:9-10).¹¹ Speech-act theory helps us to see the significance of this dialog. God's utterance was the locutionary act, i.e., a straightforward statement, but it had an intended function in mind--to challenge Moses the Levite to become an intercessory priest for the nation,

⁹ Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 327, 271-272.

¹⁰ I use the term "Kingdom of God" in the way Alva J. McClain used the term "Mediatorial Kingdom" to distinguish it from the universal, ever present Kingdom reign of God over all His creation. See his book, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), 41-51.

¹¹ All quotations of the biblical text are from the *New King James Version* by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

the so-called illocutionary act. And as we read in Exodus 32:11-13 Moses did indeed choose to intercede and thereby save the nation--the end result of the challenge, the so-called perlocutionary act. A second set of tables was then prepared so that what we call the Mosaic covenant is actually a second edition of the original contract (Ex 34:1-28) which we could call MC-S2. Whereas Israel violated the conditions of MC-S1 and therefore legally deserved abandonment by God, God graciously continues the relationship and initiates this second contract. This incident introduces an element not found in pagan treaty analogs, lacking as they do any notion of the Creator God and gracious Lord of history.

This passage of scripture must not be taken casually. It shows from the very start of the Yahweh-Israel relationship there was a sophisticated interplay of God's sovereign program of world redemption through the nation and that nation's behavioral response. Because of that response MC-S1 was terminated even before it was inaugurated, and the nation's existence was truly threatened. Yet in an amazing way through His threatened judgment God actually initiated reconciliation. His threat provoked the necessary intercessory response of Moses the Levite. And Moses' successful intercessory plea shows yet another dimension to this interplay. First, he argued that destroying the nation after such a supernatural start would demean the reputation of Yahweh-God in the eyes of the Gentiles: "*Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth?'"* (Ex 32:12). Second, Moses argued that destruction of the nation would negate the Abrahamic covenant; "*Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. . .to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendents. . .and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendents, and they shall inherit it forever.'" Both of these intercessory pleadings rely upon a powerful doxological appeal--God's glory would be tarnished were He to destroy Israel. In the first appeal Moses points to the false impression that would be given to pagan outside observers. In his second appeal he points to an internal inconsistency in God's treatment of His people that violates a divine maledictory oath.*

This second appeal warrants further examination because it is stated in everyday language which for simple economy of words assumes that certain facts are true without stating so. Arguments with such unstated propositions are called enthymemes. If we unpack the logic of Moses second appeal we get the following sequence of propositions:

1. God promised to Abraham a land, a seed, and a worldwide blessing through that land and seed--the Abrahamic covenant sworn with an oath of malediction (Gen 12:1-3; 15).
2. God subsequently reaffirmed that promise to Isaac as Abraham's miraculously-born, only begotten son (Gen 17:21).
3. God subsequently reaffirmed that promise to Jacob (Ex 2:24).
4. All of Jacob's twelve sons and their children went to Egypt to form the nucleus of what would become the nation Israel--so named because of this family link.
5. All of Jacob's living descendents are present at Mt. Sinai as the nation Israel.
6. Therefore, if the nation is destroyed, Jacob's progeny will be destroyed.
7. Therefore, the Abrahamic covenant that was sworn unconditionally with a maledictory oath will be broken.

Moses' second appeal, therefore, confirms the existence of the Yahweh-Israel relationship as one that is unconditional. Then regardless of the conditionality of the Mosaic covenant in its

original form (MC-S1) or in any future renewal form (MC-S2), the destiny of the nation is assured. How exactly that final state comes about through Yahweh's interactions with Israelite responsibility will only be known as history unfolds. In Deuteronomy 29-30 Moses provides the outline. The take-away truth from Exodus 32 is that Yahweh-God has begun a relationship with the new nation Israel from which there is no turning back. Although the founding contracts at Sinai were provisional and could be terminated, God would continue the relationship somehow accomplishing His sovereign plan through the human responses of Israel. He will finish what He has begun.¹²

Because Yahweh's call in MC-S1 and MC-S2 for submission to His Kingdom rule covered all facets of daily life, it inescapably pierced to the fallen hearts of the Israelites. It brought out into the open more clearly than all previous revelation the need for repentance and a heart change because it brought out more clearly what true social justice in a fully functioning nation actually looks like (in contrast to the Marxist-socialist and Muslim superficial counterfeits today that totally ignore depravity and the resulting need for regeneration). From the beginning Yahweh expressed the problem: *"Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments"* (Deut 5:29 NKJV). Having watched the exodus generation fail to properly respond to Yahweh, Moses, in his address to the second generation just prior to the conquest, reiterated the need for them to internalize the ritual of circumcision: *"Circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer"* (Deut 10:16 NKJV). In calling for spiritual circumcision of the heart Moses implied that the natural state of the heart was incapable of fulfilling the Kingdom imperatives of Yahweh. Surgery was needed to correct the problem. To circumcise their hearts and participate as a national society and culture in the stipulated blessings of the Mosaic contract, Israelites nationally had to believe like their father Abraham. They had to join the special elect line within his natural progeny.¹³

To summarize: The Mosaic covenant (in both the MC-S1 and MC-S2 versions) was provisional and conditional, but it marked God's new relationship with His chosen national instrument of world redemption. The covenant was rooted in the prior and still valid Noahic and Abrahamic contracts. It therefore continued the judicial tool of civil government with capital punishment and functioned within the postdiluvian geophysical environment. The covenant was also designed to advance God's global redemptive strategy of blessing the world by means of Abraham's progeny through Jacob. The twelve-tribe Jewish nation therefore now would benefit from a permanent and unique Yahweh-Israel relationship. Israel alone of all nations has contracts with God and a prophetic line of "contract administrators." With such a unique nation now extant God could show mankind something of his Kingdom that had not been possible

¹² This background relationship between Yahweh and Israel that provides continuity between the conditional Mosaic covenant and the unconditional New covenant (including its Land covenant component) must not be confused with Covenant Theology's method of supplying continuity, viz., the theological Covenant of Redemption. God has relationships with all His personal creations. They are not all the same. His relationship with angels is certainly not a redemptive one. What unites all such relationships is their doxological goal which dispensational theology has always acknowledged. As one among many other relationships the Yahweh-Israel relationship is for Israel alone, not the Church and not the Gentiles.

¹³ Subsequent history of the theocracy gave rise to the concept of the faithful Jewish "remnant." See discussion of 1 Kings 19:18 and ensuing development by the classic writing prophets in Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (rev. ed., San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2001), 601-604.

before. After all, a kingdom requires operational legislative, executive, and judicial functions, or it isn't a literal kingdom! And for those functions to be operative there must be a geographical space available to them, i.e., a nation requires a land.

Land and National Existence

Land and Mankind. A people cannot exist as a nation without occupying land. If they do not occupy land at some geographical location, they cannot be said to be a nation. Land is necessary for national existence not only as living space but also as an economic asset-- fertile soil with favorable climate for agricultural production, buried natural resources for manufacturing, and accessibility to trade routes for commerce. Land can also be a military asset if it has an elevation with terrain that provides defensibility against enemy invasion. Land with its natural resources was originally given to man to subdue (Gen 1:26). In spite of environmentalists' caricature of this passage, its meaning is clear from Genesis 2:8-9 where on the sixth day God illustrates the kind of labor implied by the command to subdue. He plants a garden, bringing the land into fruitful production and thereby decreasing the cost of sustaining life. Because of man's created connection with the land that sustains him, God's judgments against man's sin can include cursing the land under his feet. At the fall God cursed all land everywhere because of Adam's sin. The curse apparently disrupted the earth's original created fertility and the genetics of the seeds in the soil (Gen 3:17-19). It rendered man's labor less efficient and increased the cost of sustaining life. At the flood he again cursed all land. This time it was because of the antediluvian civilization's ubiquitous, self-destructive sin (Gen 6-7). The Bible teaches that the availability and the condition of land derives from its relationship to God as its creator and as the judge of its occupants. Land is polluted by its occupants' sin.¹⁴ Some features of the God-land relationship that continue today can be seen in the geophysical aspects of the Noahic contract (e.g., Gen 8:21-22). The take-away truth is that all nations including Israel derive their existence from God's gift to them of land and their accountability to Him.

Deuteronomy provides several references that illuminate the connection between lands and nations. In the prophetic Song of Moses listeners are called to remember the pre-Abrahamic history of dispersion and re-colonization of the planet after the flood (Deut 32:7-8). The Noahic tribes were given initial grants of land by God when He was known to all people groups as the Most High (Heb *Elyon*).¹⁵ Apparently there were seventy such land grants (Gen 10 Table of Nations)--a configuration that exactly corresponded with the number of the sons of Jacob that centuries later entered Egypt to become the nation Israel (Gen 46:27).¹⁶ This unusual

¹⁴ The modern environmental movement has one tenet that is true--man can hurt the environment--but the movement's neo-pagan commitments prevent it from acknowledging the real cause-effect between human choices and geophysical consequences.

¹⁵ Contrary to nineteenth century, evolution-infatuated anthropology that imagined religious development "upward" from crude polytheism to sophisticated monotheism, Wilhelm Schmidt and others uncovered the evidence of an early monotheism that still survived in scattered parts of the world. Such evidence confirms the biblical narrative that the founders of our Noahic civilization knew very well the God of the Bible. Wilhelm Schmidt, *The Origin and Growth of Religion: Facts and Theories*, trans. H. J. Rose (London: Methuen & Co., 1931).

¹⁶ Biblical critics when faced with this type of numerical order in the text often hastily dismiss it as mere literary form imposed upon what they think is chaotic reality. In doing so they disregard numerous examples of fundamental numerical order throughout creation (e.g., repeated instances of Fibonacci numbers in both botanical

correspondence hints at Israel's future role as the elect nation tasked with redemption of the world. In the early chapters of Deuteronomy Moses recounts the relationship of various land areas to other tribes related to Abraham but outside of the line of Jacob. On its way to claim the promised land Israel could not interfere with the land given to Esau (Deut 2:4-8), the land given to Moab (Deut 2:9-11), and the land given to Ammon (Deut 2:19-23). Significant to Israel's situation imminently facing invasion of the Canaanite occupants, Moses describes how each of the three peoples had to conquer the giant occupants of the lands God had given them. His implication is that if they could do it as peripheral relatives of Abraham, so can the special progeny through Jacob who are led directly by the God of Abraham. The lesson here is that God's gift of land to a people can require a work of conquest to take possession of it.¹⁷

Israel's Promised Land. The land promised to Abraham and the nation Israel are a special case. For Israel to accomplish God's strategy to bless the world it would need a strong economic asset and a strategic location. The land's condition in the fifteenth century, BC, "flowing with milk and honey" (Ex 3:8) provided abundantly for Israel's agricultural economy. Each family (except Levite families) was granted a primary capital asset in its assigned land. This asset was their "social security" and was called their inheritance. Possession of its title could not be lost and was to be cleared each Year of Jubilee (Lev 25). The civil authorities could not take title to inherited land from a family without incurring divine judgment (1 Kings 21). Under Mosaic law civil authorities did not possess eminent domain so that a freedom existed for Israel's citizens that has never been duplicated in any other nation.

The land also put Israel at the center of world commerce so that it was geographically positioned to reach all nations. Located at the juncture of Europe, Africa, and Asia the promised land sat on the major intercontinental trade routes. In fact computations by the Institute for Creation Research forty years ago demonstrated that the general region of Jerusalem, Mt. Ararat, and Memphis (capital of ancient Egypt) -- the so-called "Bible lands" region-- has the shortest mean distance to every part of the earth's land surface of any other comparably-sized region.¹⁸ That Israel's promised land boundaries in Genesis 15:18-21 include most of this region abutting the post-flood disembarkment location, Babylon, and Egypt, shows its strategic location as the literal center of the earth's land surfaces. It is, therefore, strategic with respect to the ancient past as well as to the prophesied future (Isa 2:2). The location thus has a timeless significance that is commensurate with the Abrahamic covenant's global redemptive strategy. Unlike any other land and nation this land is necessarily linked to the existence of one nation all the way to the end of

and zoological realms, the DNA 4-letter alphabet in the human genome, etc.). If God has a coherent plan for history, why should we be surprised to find instances of numerical order?

¹⁷ Christian devotional writers have repeatedly used the theme of the conquest of Canaan as analogous to the Christian's spiritual battles with the principalities and powers. See, for example, the work written during the Welsh revival at the beginning of the twentieth century by Jessie Penn-Lewis, *The Conquest of Canaan* (Poole, Dorset, England: The Overcomer Literature Trust, 1911).

¹⁸ Andrew J. Woods, *The Center of the Earth* (San Diego: Institute for Creation Research, 1973). The algorithm used was to divide all the earth's land areas into small, equal, unit areas. Then select one of these unit areas as a possible center and compute the distance from this unit area to every other unit area. Repeat this calculation for every unit area. Select the unit area that has the minimum distance. The exact center by this algorithm is near Ankara, Turkey at latitude 39° and longitude 34°. See Appendix B for further discussion of the computational results proximate to Jerusalem. Perhaps the Scripture hints at this feature when it uses the term "navel" (of the earth) (Heb *tabbur*) in Ezek 38:12 for Israel or Jerusalem.

history when God through this nation blesses the world. The extent of Israel's occupation of the promised land and its geophysical "health," has always been and will always be contingent upon Israel's spiritual condition before God.

Land and Culture. Two additional features of Israel's link with its land must be mentioned. Throughout the eight centuries of Israel's theocracy life outside that land was described as "serving other gods." The pre-Abrahamic Semite family was said to serve other gods in Joshua 24:2. David complained that exile from the promised land meant that he had to serve other gods and not share in the LORD'S inheritance (1 Sam 26:19). In 2 Kings 5:17-18 the Syrian official Naaman asks for two mule-loads of earth from Elisha to take back to Damascus so he could worship the God of Israel. The link between land and worship is asserted. While serving other gods within the land of Israel was voluntary and therefore sin, it seems to have been taken for granted that anyone living outside the land would have to in some sense serve other gods. If land and national existence are linked, then life outside the promised land would include unavoidable participation in the religious faiths of the nations occupying those lands. Why would this occur? Because culture inevitably expresses metaphysical and epistemological presuppositions that define the character of how it conceives of reality and social justice. A nation's laws and social structures unavoidably embody those beliefs. Anyone, therefore, having to live within a pagan nation necessarily submits to pagan faith in various areas of everyday life. The link between religious faith and laws is expressed in the prophetic explanation of why the northern kingdom was going into exile in Assyria: 2 Kings 17:7-8 "*The children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God. . .and they had feared other gods, and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the LORD has cast out. . .*" The northern kingdom culture including its law and customs had become so completely paganized that worship of other gods was written into the social and political rules and so was unavoidable. For Israelites to live in exile outside the promised land meant they would have to struggle with how far they followed pagan laws and lose out on the economic assets of the land granted to their families.

Land and Gentile Eminent Domain. Another factor involved in Israel's link with its land is the implication of the sixth century BC exile. When Daniel gave the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he included an important statement about land. "*The God of heaven has given you a kingdom. . .and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of heaven, He has given them into your hand. . .*" (Daniel 2:37-38). The domination of the Gentiles began with the potential given to each of the four kingdoms for global imperialism. The Gentiles were given eminent domain over all the earth including the land of Israel. A major change thus occurred. Prior to the exile Israel had been given domain over all the land promised to Abraham (Deut 28:1, 13). Alva McClain notes the change:

"During that long period the power and authority of the Theocracy was never in question. No nation, regardless of its size or strength, could stand successfully against Israel as long as that people followed the will of its divine king. . . Israel went down in defeat only when she turned aside from the divinely written charter of her kingdom."¹⁹

For Israel to once again enjoy full occupation of the promised land, all of the Gentile kingdoms must be broken in pieces and their eminent domain dissolved by God's fifth supernatural kingdom to come. The Gentile occupation, unlike Israel's occupation, generally lacks divine assurances of permanence.

¹⁹ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968 ed.), 125.

To summarize: To exist a nation requires the economic, military and commercial aspects of land. The boundaries of land promised to Abraham for Israel's national existence encompass a vast portion of the middle east where three continents join. The geographical location at the center of the continents is obviously established with the strategic goal of world redemption through this nation. There must be a physical place where law and custom at last fully harmonize with worship of the biblical God. Only in such a political and physical existence with God-defined social justice can man truly serve God throughout every area of life. Although temporarily during the times of the Gentiles Israel cannot exercise undisputed control over its land, it must do so one day for there to be the functioning core for the Kingdom of God on earth. And for that to happen Israel must be rightly related to God.

The Deuteronomic Covenant Modification and Renewal

The Deuteronomy 29:1 "covenant." Among commentators a debate has persisted over whether Deuteronomy 29:1 belongs at the end of chapter 28 (as verse 69 in the Hebrew and LXX text) or at the beginning of chapter 29 (English text) ("*These are the words of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them in Horeb.*"). Those who hold to the 28:69 rendition see it as a summation of Moses' preceding expositions all the way back to chapter 5. Driver, for example, argues that the expression in the verse, "words of the covenant" must refer to specific details of the law which obviously occur throughout the previous chapters but which do not occur in chapters 29-30.²⁰ Others who support this view point out that 28:69 forms an inclusio with Deuteronomy 1:1 since both begin with "these are the words. . . which Moses" and both locate the action at Moab. Moreover, the very next verse is itself an introductory verse for Moses' exhortations ("Moses spoke/called all Israel. . .").²¹ Deuteronomy 28:69 thus is viewed as a summary of the preceding chapters. Those who favor the latter 29:1 rendition see it as referring to Moses' exhortatory address that follows in chapter 29. As an example, the Keil and Delitzsch commentary states that "the words of the covenant" consist "in a solemn appeal to all the people to enter into the covenant which the Lord made with them that day, . . . a renewed declaration of the covenant."²² Neither Driver nor Keil are claiming that the covenant in 29:1 is a covenant separate from the modified Mosaic Covenant.

Since the entire book of Deuteronomy looks forward to Israel's conquest of the land, since it consists of expositions that appear to follow a unified suzerain-vassal treaty form, and since it includes specific covenant renewal ceremony protocols that were later followed after the initial conquest, most commentators understand the covenant in Deut 28:69 (Heb)/ 29:1 (English) as the Mosaic covenant modified for existence inside the conquered land. This version of the Mosaic covenant articulated by Moses at Moab--different from the previous versions given at Mt. Sinai--was intended to be entered into by the nation at the conclusion of Moses' exhortation (Deut 29:10-15). We can designate it as MC-M. After the initial land conquest, this

²⁰ S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1895), 319.

²¹ Merrill, E. H. (1994). *New American Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Vol. 4, p. 373). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

²² C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Pub Co., n.d.), III, 446.

covenant was to be ceremoniously renewed at Shechem using Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerezim as props (compare Deut 27 and in Joshua 8:30-35).

The Land Promise. Some who attach Deut 29:1 to chapter 28 not only consider it as summarizing Moses' third oration, but they also tend to deny that a formal Land covenant exists in the following text of chapter 29. Deere in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, for example, writes concerning Deut 29:1:

"Some see this verse as an introduction to the fourth address of **Moses** beginning in verse 2, but probably it concludes the covenant renewal ceremony in Moab. This preference is reflected in the Hebrew text which numbers this verse as 28:69 rather than 29:1. The words, **the covenant ... in Moab, in addition to the covenant He had made with them at Horeb**, have led some to posit the existence of a separate covenant (i.e., a Palestinian Covenant) in addition to the Mosaic Covenant. The wording, however, was not meant to reflect the making of a new covenant, but the renewing of the Mosaic Covenant made at Horeb. Moses' fourth address introduces no new covenantal provisions that were not already made explicit in his other speeches. So Deuteronomy 29:2–30:20 recapitulates the covenant details laid down in the preceding chapters"²³[Emphasis original]

If, as Deere and others claim, Deuteronomy 29:2-30:20 is a call for the nation to enter immediately into the MC-M version of the Mosaic covenant, what can be said about a Land covenant (LC) in the book of Deuteronomy? Clearly in this exhortation Moses assures the nation of fulfillment of the land promise. But, if his overall exhortation is a call for entry into a revised version of the conditional Mosaic covenant, how can there be assurance of any final fulfillment? How do an assurance and a conditional covenant fit together? And if the covenant in view refers to the Mosaic covenant, where is the evidence of a Land covenant in this passage?

At issue here, at least among dispensational premillennial commentators, is not the land promise of the Abrahamic covenant itself. As Paul affirms in Galatians 3:17, the Mosaic covenant cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God. The previous discussion of covenant interrelationships has already shown that in God's grand strategy of progressive revelation biblical covenants are structured upon their predecessors. What is at stake here is whether Moses is urging Israel to enter into a Land covenant (LC) separate from the modified Mosaic covenant MC-M, or is he urging the nation to enter into MC-M itself. Does the exegetical choice of the latter necessarily deny the existence of LC? I think it does not.

The Land Covenant Inference. I propose that a LC can be inferred from Deuteronomy 29:2-30:20 even accepting the majority view that the covenant in Deuteronomy 29:1 is MC-M. A number of details justify such an inference. In the reference above Deere claims that Moses' address in Deuteronomy 29:2-30:20 "introduces no new covenantal provisions that were not already made explicit in his other speeches." That is not quite true. This passage may not have introduced new provisions within the Mosaic covenant itself, but it certainly expands on previous brief references to Yahweh's sovereign intent to bring His Israel project to a completed finish. Moses remarked in his 1st exposition that Israel would turn back to the LORD after experiencing all the curses because of His adherence to the Abrahamic covenant (4:30-31). He made a similar

²³ Deere, J. S. (1985). Deuteronomy. (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Eds.) *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

remark in his 2nd exposition (7:8). Verses 29:2-30:20, therefore, repeat and expand on these previous remarks.

My proposal relies upon understanding how the previously discussed Yahweh-Israel relationship works out historically. We've already seen how during the Yahweh-Moses dialog in Exodus 32 it was agreed upon that Israel's continued existence is guaranteed by the covenant passed from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob. God's glory would be tarnished if He were to violate His oath of malediction by destroying the seed of Jacob. There is no turning back from the Yahweh-Israel relationship once begun. Even though the founding contract at Sinai (MC-S1) was provisional and terminated, God kept on working with Israel in spite of its treachery and renewed the contract continuing its provisional form as MC-S2. Under MC-S2 individual Israelites would never reach the promised land, but the nation would. As the nation moved from its desert wanderings to a new location in conquered Canaanite territory, God through Moses modified nation's organizational structure and some other features in MC-S2 to create MC-M.

Since scripture shows that the Yahweh-Israel national relationship cannot end for doxological reasons, there is no question that Israel will meet the challenge to be God's functioning priestly nation for the Kingdom of God on earth. But Israel cannot be a functioning nation without possessing and occupying land. And it cannot occupy the whole promised land in a blessed geophysical state as envisioned in the Abrahamic covenant without a right relationship with God. Therefore, it is certain that two historical actions must occur: (1) Israel will one day be spiritually "reconditioned"; and (2) Israel will enjoy all the land in a refurbished environment. These are fundamental and unconditional covenant-type matters that cannot be part of the conditional MC-M. So regardless of how one exegetes Deuteronomy 29:1, Moses' prophetic assurance forces the exegete to face the land promise which transcends the Mosaic covenant.

Prophets and Contracts. To understand the significance of Moses' earlier remarks in his 1st and 2nd expositions and his expended announcement in Deuteronomy 29-30, it is necessary to ponder the role of the Old Testament prophet in the Yahweh-Israel relationship. Like all relationships that spawn contracts between participating parties, it always remains personal and can adapt to changing circumstances. Because it is a dynamic, non-mechanical, non-legalistic relationship, it involves various agents concerned with what could be called "contract administration." The book of Deuteronomy testifies to these agents. Moses himself acts as a contract administrator, and God announces that others will follow him: *"I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command him"* (Deut 18:18). We must not forget the two historically unique characteristics of ancient Israel. As Albright pointed out, it alone of all nations had a contract with God, and, as Kaufmann noted, it alone of all nations had a long line of prophets.²⁴ These two characteristics are interrelated. The prophets were the connecting agents between Yahweh and the nation. Through these prophets Yahweh shared His mind with Israel over and beyond the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant. In real time they were given the Word of the LORD (Heb: *db'r yhv'h*) that both applied the covenant blessings and cursings and also simultaneously explained why Yahweh was applying them.

²⁴ See footnotes 3 and 8.

When the Word of the LORD came to a prophet concerning the Mosaic covenant's cursings, the prophet would sometimes indict the nation for contract violations. In Deuteronomy 32, the so-called Song of Moses, the prophetic Word of the LORD calls non-human witnesses of contract performance to add their testimony to the indictment (Deut 32:1). Yahweh's faithful behavior is contrasted at specific points with Israel's misbehavior. This lawsuit pattern (Heb: *riv*) occurs with later prophets Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah who call on the same witnesses when they, too, indict the nation (Isa 1:2; Hos 4:1; Mic 6:1-2). The prophets would also announce the implementation of specific covenant sanctions without the lawsuit format. Elijah announced the drought curse of the Mosaic covenant (1 Kings 17:1). Jesus announced the AD 70 destruction and exile (Matt 23-24) and He gave the precondition of His return: "*You shall see me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'*" (Matt 23:39).

Obviously the prophets were deeply involved in administration of the covenant sanctions, but because of their close link with Yahweh they also revealed matters transcending the contract stipulations. Moses, for example, while revealing MC-M announced the eventual rise of the monarchy and that Israel's chief executive officer was to be different from his pagan counterparts: "*When you come in to the land. . .and dwell in it, and say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,' you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses, one from among you brethren you shall set as king over you. . . .*" (Deut 17:14-20). The monarchy would differ radically from the tribal confederacy envisioned in MC-M as the Lord would later explain through Samuel (1 Sam 8:4-22). As the first in the line of Israel's prophets Moses here divulged a matter that would certainly come to pass that lay beyond the scope of the covenant. The prophets coming after Moses would receive God's choice for the king and anoint him with oil (giving rise to the terms "messiah" and "christ"). The prophets were "king-makers" from Samuel to John the Baptist. So here one observes an "extra-[Mosaic] covenant" feature in the Yahweh-Israel relationship that was announced and administered by the prophets. This feature eventually was called a covenant when it became fixed to David's line some four centuries after Moses' announcement. Even then it was not formally recognized in the text of scripture until years after it had been initiated (2 Sam 23:5). As a divulgence from God's mind to Moses, however, the Israel's monarchial office that would culminate in the Incarnate Son of God was implicit in that announcement. The certain plan of a special covenant-established monarchy was already in motion at the time of MC-M.

Extra-covenant announcements were also included in the prophet-mediated lawsuit indictments. The Song of Moses concludes with a warning to the Gentiles whom God will have used to chastise His nation to be aware that He can likewise judge them (Deut 32:41-43). In it Yahweh promises to "*provide atonement for His land and His people.*" That promise was not a part of the conditional Mosaic covenant's stipulations. The later prophets repeatedly shared Yahweh's extra-covenant assurances of eventual permanent restoration of Israel--a restoration founded upon a yet-to-be revealed new covenant (e.g., Jer 31; Ezek 16, 36). None of these extra-covenant assurances would have been possible were it not for the ongoing Yahweh-Israel relationship and the sharing of that relationship with the nation through Israel's prophetic line. This is a supernatural feature that is unique to Israel and must be accepted in any historical interpretation of the Old Testament. The Mosaic covenant versions were all carried along within a divinely-commissioned prophetic oversight.

Deuteronomy 29:2-29. Returning to Deuteronomy 29-30, we see Moses exercising the role of a prophet in providing assurance that goes beyond the conditional nature of MC-M. He mentions the basis of that assurance: "*All of you stand today. . .that [the LORD] may establish you today as a people for Himself. . .just as He has spoken to you [Mosaic covenant] and just as He has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*" (Deut 29:10, 13). Here again is the unconditional Yahweh-Israel dimension behind the Mosaic covenant. But that very contractual agreement contains cursings. Moses foresees a terrifying destruction of the land that once flowed with milk and honey: "*the whole land is brimstone, salt, and burning; it is not sown, nor does it bear, nor does any grass grow there. . .*" (Deut 29:23). The terrain will resemble the devastated areas of the Sodom and Gomorrah judgment. Israel's national economic asset will no longer exist not only because it will be occupied by foreigner squatters but because its very soil and climate--its geophysical status--will no longer support an agrarian economy. The dreadful sanctions of MC-M will have come about in what appears to any non-prophetically-informed observer, to be the permanent end of the nation. So, as a prophet in whom Yahweh confides, Moses begins a transition from the destructive covenant cursing with the enigmatic verse 29: "*the secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.*"

Secret and Revealed Things. The "secret things" are contrasted with "those things which are revealed." The revealed things, he explains, are the commandments and statutes he has written in the "Book of the law," i.e., the completed MC-M (Deut 29:21, 27). Not lacking an available transcendental ethical source like the pagans, Israel has readily available contractual stipulations for its national life (Deut 30:11-16). Once known historically these will be recognized by Gentile pagans as model legislation (Deut 4:6). By way of contrast the secret things appear to be the details of how Yahweh will accomplish His goals for Israel amidst the crosscurrents of history. They are the mysterious and surprising features of the Yahweh-Israel relationship that somehow interconnects God's sovereignty with Israel's responses as seen in the Yahweh-Moses dialog in Exodus 32. The proverbial statement of Deuteronomy 29:29 thus forms an important bridge between the previous depiction of the outworking of the Mosaic covenantal curses and a prophetic glimpse of Yahweh's thoughts on the future of His relationship with Israel.

The Implied Land Covenant. As he did in his 1st and 2nd expositions where he assured Israel of its ultimate success and as he did in announcing the coming monarchical reorganization of Israel's leadership, here Moses again exercises the prophetic function. Before he dies he wants to provide the second generation and their successors encouragement through a long-term view of the future. Faced with the daunting challenge to bring the Kingdom of God into the world--a challenge no other nation has ever faced--the Israelites could easily grow weary. People can endure trials only if they have hope. Therefore Yahweh divulges through Moses some of the "secret things." Moses now expands his previous remarks in 4:30-31 and 7:8 with a detailed prophecy of the return of dispersed Jews to the promised land "*which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*" (Deut 30:20).

The sons of Jacob will be gathered within the boundaries of the full expanse of the Abrahamic covenant, not just the tiny area occupied by contemporary Israel, for the first time.²⁵ The land-nation connection, however, requires that a land be cursed for the sin of its occupants. Therefore to attain occupation of its land Israel must be made into a godly nation. Moses includes a warning to individual Hebrews not to assume that they can ride on the coattails of this national assurance (Deut 29:18-21). The prophetic assurance applies to the nation as a whole, not to specific individuals. In this assurance one observes the expression of the Abrahamic-covenant-grounded Yahweh-Israel relationship centering the nation's historical purpose. Simultaneously, one observes Yahweh's demand for individuals to love Him by thinking and doing what His commandments define as genuine social justice that comports with His character. Here occurs the twin prophecies for the nation: (1) Israel will one day be spiritually re-gathered and "reconditioned" (Deut 30:1-2, 6-8); and (2) Israel will enjoy all the land in a refurbished environment (Deut 30:5,9). One cannot occur without the other. Both transcend the text of MC-M. The first is the heart of the New covenant. The second is the Land covenant portion.

With this revelation of some of the "secret things" added to the "things that are revealed" Israel will officially adopt both when it enters into MC-M at Moab and subsequently performs the renewal protocol at Shechem (Deut 27; Josh 8:30-35). Whether Moses' prophetic assurance is here called a Land covenant explicitly or not, the nation is entering MC-M with the understanding that it will survive the cursings and one day will return to Yahweh and all the land promised in Genesis 15:18-21. That Jesus shared this understanding is evident in his prophecy of Matthew 24:31 that echoes Deuteronomy 30:3-4 (*"And He will send His elect angels. . . and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other"*). Deuteronomy 29-30 thus provides the divine overview of Israel's historic purpose and end goal. That purpose and goal cannot be conceived without thinking of the land promise. Therefore I contend that an unconditional Land covenant (LC) must be implied here.

Perhaps the reason that LC is not explicitly labeled as such and offered for formal inauguration flows from the spiritual condition of the nation at that time. Moses' detailed exhortation clearly shows that the spiritual conditions will not soon be met for permanent land occupancy. Those spiritual conditions will not come about until the New covenant (NC) accomplishes national heart circumcision of the entire nation, not just a remnant of it. Only after the nation fails and clearly needs this spiritual surgery will God will make LC explicit. Later Hebrew prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel will amplify details of Moses' prophecy and make clear that it refers to a future [new] covenant (Isa 59:20-62:12; Jer 31; Ezek 16). Inclusion of the implied LC with the inauguration of MC-M serves to assure the generations of Israelites to come that God has committed to work through their choices to secure their nation's final place in history. Once so committed He cannot and will not abandon this goal lest His glory be tarnished.

²⁵ Deuteronomy 30:5 reveals that the Jewish population will increase beyond that of Old Testament times. As one would expect in God's plan, therefore, the literal land area of Genesis 15:18-21 is large enough to include an Israelite population far greater than the Jewish population of today or yesterday. The literal land size answers the objection found in Keil & Delitzsch that "if there is to be an increase in the number of Jews. . . above the number of their fathers, and therefore above the number of Israelites in the time of Solomon. . . , Palestine will never furnish room enough for a nation multiplied like this." Keil, III, 452.

I propose that the implied LC becomes formally expressed within the NC. As such it becomes precisely that part of the NC that protects that covenant against "spiritualized" misinterpretations. As a part of NC, LC firmly requires that Israel inherits and occupies the literal Abrahamic land boundaries. LC also requires a supernatural geophysical transformation of the land to provide the economic, commercial, and priestly functions to the nation in the coming millennial Kingdom of God. The millennial world will need a land where people can serve the Lord without compromise regardless of what surrounding Gentile nations do. These are material, physical blessings literally fulfilling Old Testament contractual stipulations, not metaphors of supposed spiritual blessings that apply to the Church as Israel's replacement. The Church has no real estate blessings because it is not a nation. As the earlier discussion of the hermeneutical implications of the contract form of literature showed, contracts are always interpreted in terms of ordinary language for validation of the parties' behaviors. Contract terminology must be conserved throughout the duration of the contract. The LC is no exception.

For anyone following the discussion so far it should be obvious that the land promise literally interpreted has never been fulfilled. Never has Israel simultaneously exercised total control and occupation with its own people over most of Syria, and parts of what is now Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. Moreover, these areas as well as lands west of Jordan have certainly not been geophysically configured for plentiful agricultural productivity. Nor has Israel ever had a social culture where it could be said a citizen would not have to compromise biblical faith and "serve other gods" in some area of life. Another evidence that the land promise has never been filled is that from the exile forward, Israel has never had complete title to its land. Gentile eminent domain continues from Babylon to the United Nations. The Kingdom of God hasn't come because the King isn't welcome--yet.

Conclusion

The contemporary rising trend of anti-Israel/pro-Palestinian views among evangelicals necessarily denies that biblical covenants ought to be considered hermeneutically like ordinary contracts. In the Nicholson interview with Bethlehem Bible College professor, Alex Awad, mentioned in the introduction above, insisted that there doesn't need to be a nation Israel for the fulfillment of the re-gathering-of-Jews-prophecy. But if one accepts the prophecy that there is to be a re-gathering Jews, then why not also accept the prophetic context that speaks of a literal land to which the Jews are re-gathered? Dr. Awad, like an increasing number of evangelicals, uses an arbitrary hermeneutic to select what he wants from the text and ignore the rest.

By contrast this paper has used the literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic that has produced traditional dispensationalism. With this hermeneutic it has attempted to understand Yahweh's land promise in the book of Deuteronomy. It first discussed the concept of covenant as a contract and noted the implications, particularly the reinforcement of the literal hermeneutic as the proper interpretive tool for this kind of literature. It then examined the reliance of the Mosaic covenant upon the previous preservative Noahic covenant and the previous redemptive Abrahamic covenant. The Mosaic covenant was seen as a provisional covenant with Israel to challenge it to bring forth the Kingdom of God in history.

An important finding concerning the Mosaic covenant was that standing behind it was an often overlooked unique, personal relationship between Yahweh and Israel flowing out of the Abrahamic covenant. Whereas the Mosaic covenant was conditioned upon Israel's responses, the Yahweh-Israel relationship was not. The Exodus 32-34 dialog between Yahweh and Moses modeled this difference. The original Mosaic covenant at Sinai (MC-S1) was quickly terminated and replaced with a second version (MC-S2) by Yahweh's initiative. This initiative came out of His commitment to continuing that relationship which He had begun lest His glory be compromised. In the second generation just prior to the conquest at Moab a third version was created (MC-M) to adapt to life in the new land. MC-M is spelled out throughout the book of Deuteronomy.

The paper also discussed the link between lands and nations in general and the promised land and Israel in particular. It showed that one cannot speak of the return of Israel without also speaking of the promised land. It also showed that Israel must meet spiritual requirements in order to occupy the land and have that land fully fruitful as prophecy foretells. The two are inseparably connected and therefore occur together in the New covenant to come.

The crux passage concerning the land promise is Deuteronomy 29-30. An exegetical choice must be made here between treating it as speaking of entering a modified version of the Mosaic covenant or treating it as speaking of a distinctly different land covenant. This paper proposes a way to retain the idea of a Land covenant (LC) even though one takes the view that Moses is urging the nation to enter into MC-M. It argues that the prophecy of re-gathering into the promised land emanates from the unconditional, Abrahamic-based Yahweh-Israel relationship modeled in Exodus 32-34. This relationship relies upon a line of prophets beginning with Moses as "contract administrators" who interface with God and the nation. When a major prophecy is made like the land promise, it reveals a firm commitment on God's part to carry it out for doxological reasons. Thus, although the land promise doesn't appear explicitly as a covenant in the Deuteronomy 29-30 prophecy, it is fully functional at that time and eventually is explicitly expressed as part of the New covenant (NC). The LC, therefore, is certainly implied in the Deuteronomy 29-30 prophecy.

Appendix A: Why Israel?²⁶

Those who casually dismiss the suitability of a literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic for the Genesis text miss out on the internal consistency of the Bible. Among other things the significance of God calling a pagan out of the so-called cradle of civilization at the beginning of the second millennium BC to begin anew His program of redemption goes unnoticed. Why that timing?

If one instead utilizes the literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic out of self-conscious appreciation of the Creator's design of human language, and reads the narratives of Genesis 5 and 11, he will discover a fascinating feature in human longevity. The longevity data in Genesis 5 prior to the flood is fairly consistent at approximately 930 years. Verbal revelation could easily be passed down orally by simply asking Adam and Eve and the immediately following generation. After the flood, however, human longevity data declines in exponential fashion (see

²⁶ Referenced in page 3.

figure 1). Those who have some mathematical or scientific interests will undoubtedly be intrigued by this indication of transition from one steady state to another. Pagan myths that mention high antediluvian longevity show no such realism.

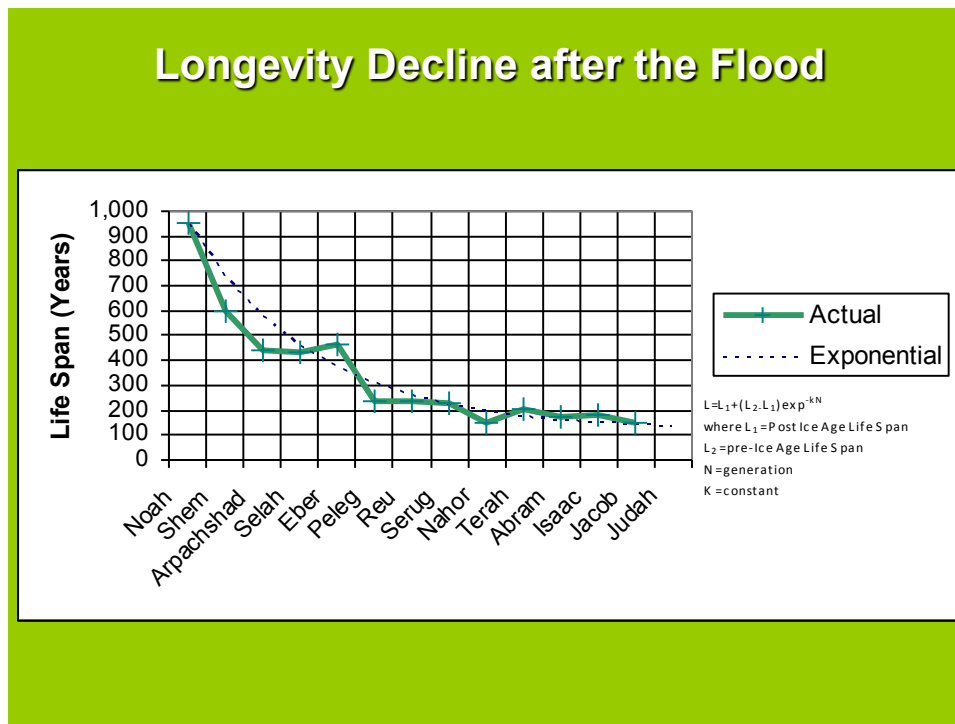


Fig. 1. Postdiluvian longevity data from Genesis 11 plotted by generation. A fit with an exponential function occurs.

An even more intriguing feature in these data becomes apparent if one plots the data against year-of-birth and year-of-death along the X axis and generation along the Y-axis as in figure 2. It becomes readily apparent that something profoundly significant happened at the beginning of the second millennium BC. Within the preceding two centuries a total of nine generations died with the more ancient ones dying after the more recent ones! Shem and Eber, for example, were alive during most of Abram/Abraham's lifetime. Such a phenomenon is unique in human history. It quickly ended the previously easy oral transmission of verbal revelation. That, coupled with the Babel revolt against God and forced dispersion, set up the situation of the early second millennium.

And in the early second millennium God called Abraham out of paganism to form a counter-culture that would be the exclusive conduit of His Word to the human race. The Abrahamic covenant conveyed to Isaac and then to Jacob the promise to establish the special nation Israel. Thus Israel arose precisely at the right time to save mankind's access to God. As the custodian of Scripture Israel preserved the past revelation that all descendants of Noah, Ham, Shem, and Japheth once shared (the "Noahic Bible"). From henceforth special revelation would be written in languages spoken by the Hebrews. Israel exists as the nation of the Bible for all mankind.

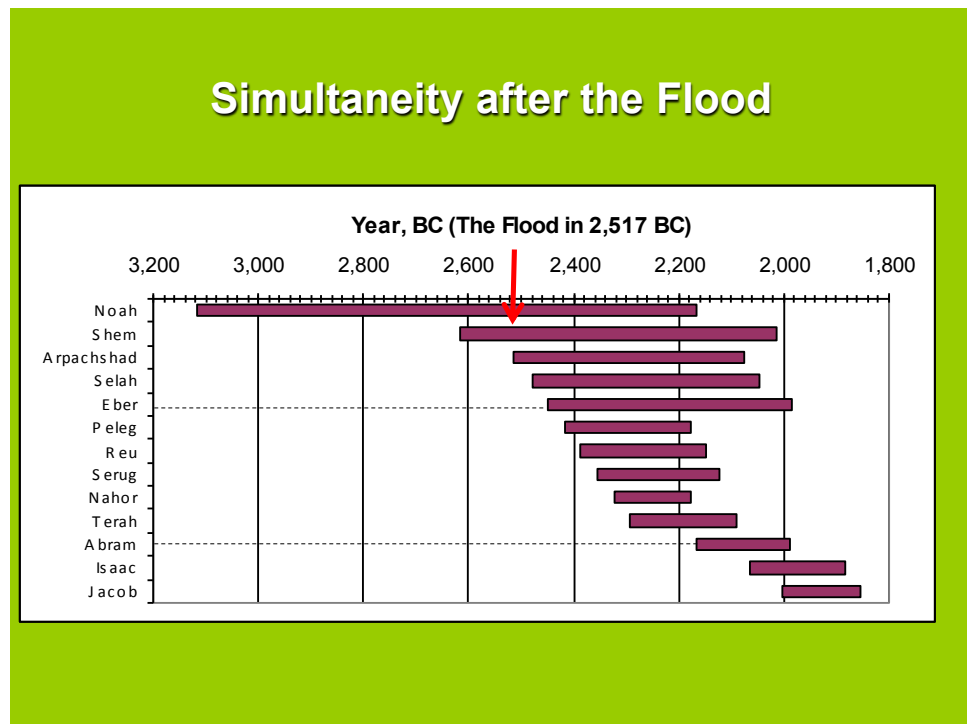


Fig. 2. Postdiluvian longevity data from Genesis 11 plotted by birth and death dates. Simultaneity can be observed between generations. Note what happens between 2,200 and 2,000 BC.

That Israel not only preceded Christianity but will also follow it as the re-gathered millennial priestly nation in God's redemptive program on earth is another unique feature in God's revelational exclusivism. As Yaakov Ariel has noted: "In no other case has one religious community assigned a predominate role to another religious community in its vision of redemption or claimed the other group held a special relationship to God."²⁷

Appendix B: Israel at the Center of the Earth's Land Masses²⁸

The ICR study was done by a graduate student using software and computer time that was available forty years ago. Thus the computational algorithm used larger land unit areas than would be done today. The results, therefore, are quite approximate. Figure 3 shows the results of computing for each land unit area along the 30° N Lat circle the mean east-west travel distance, \bar{r} , to every other land unit area along that circle. It turns out that the land unit area at 30° E Lon has the shortest mean east-west travel distance to every other land unit area at 30° N Lat. This land unit area centered on 30° N Lat and 30° E Lon. is close to Jerusalem's latitude and longitude (see below).

²⁷ Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880-2000* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 287.

²⁸ Referenced page 8, fn 18.

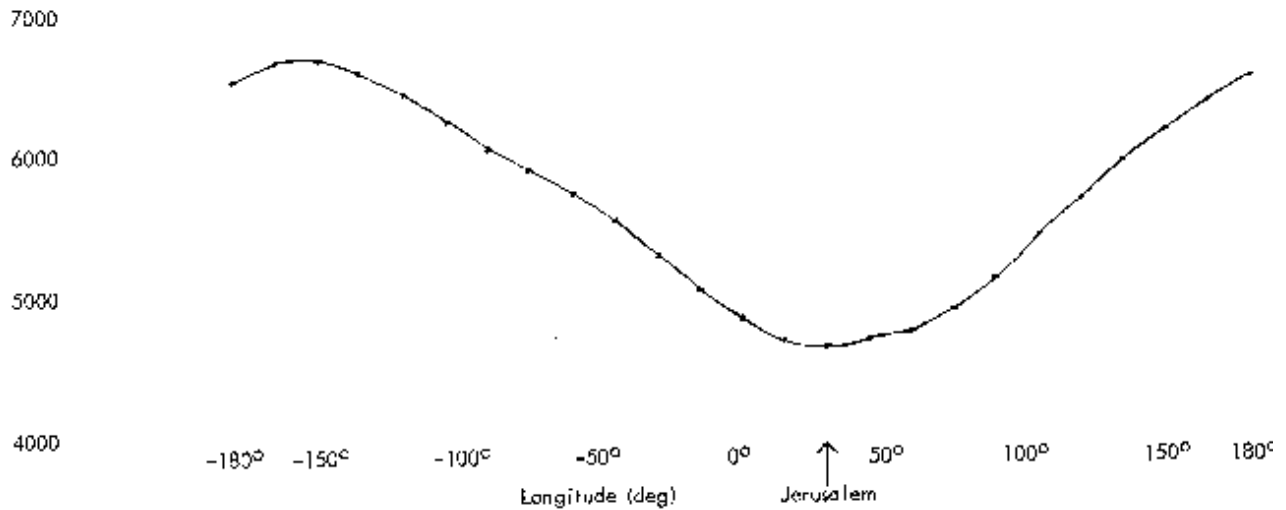


Fig. 3. \bar{T} at 30° Latitude as function of Longitude (Jerusalem ($32^\circ, 34^\circ$))

Figure 4 pictures the computational results starting at any given land unit area along the 30° E Lon circle and computing the mean north-south travel distance to every other land unit area along that circle. The results show that the land unit area at 30° N Lat has the shortest north-south travel distance to every other land unit area at 30° E Lon. So, as in Fig 3 above, this point is very close to Jerusalem's latitude and longitude. Fig 4 is on the next page,

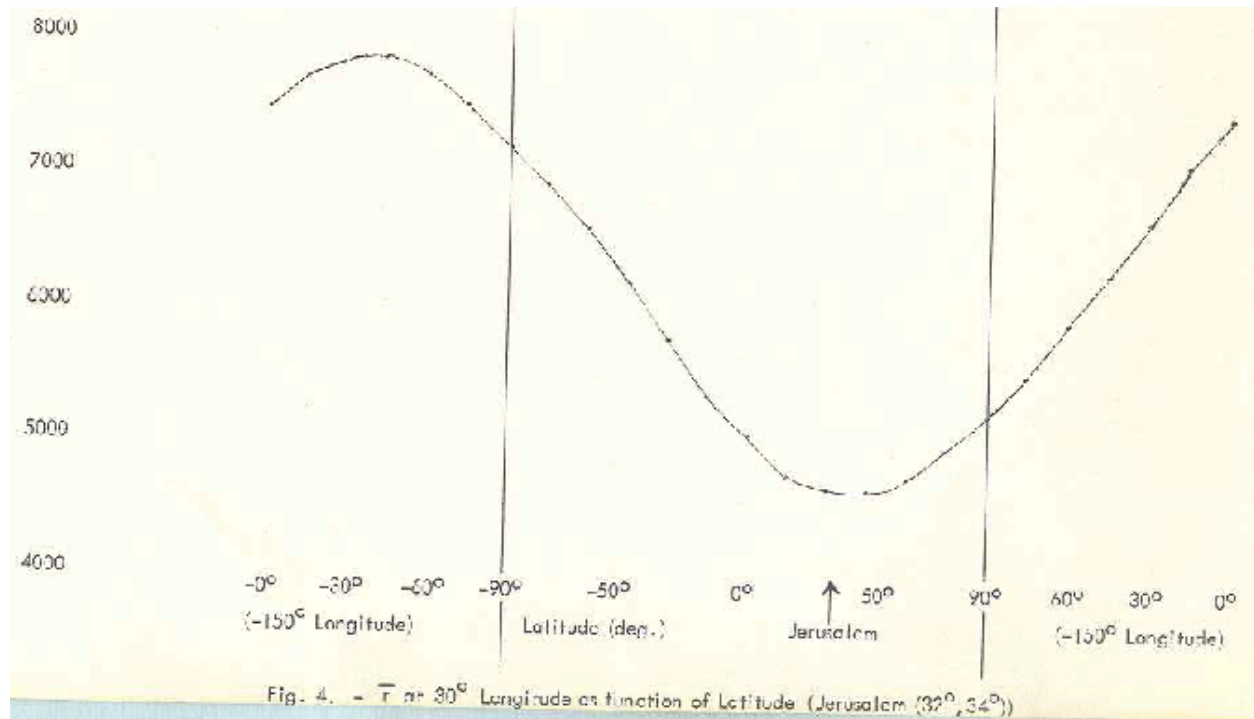


Fig. 4. \bar{T} at 30° Longitude as function of Latitude (Jerusalem ($32^\circ, 34^\circ$))