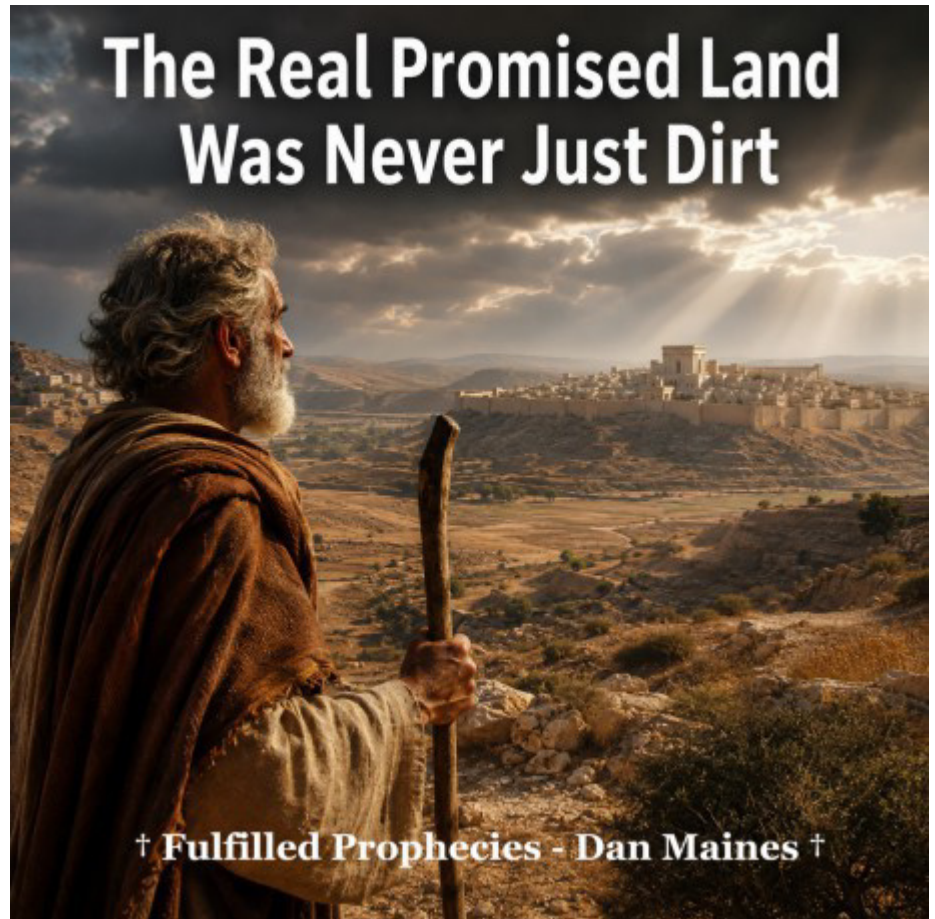


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**Covenant - The
Real Promised
Land Was Never
Just Dirt**



By Dan Maines

The Real Promised Land Was Never Just Dirt

Introduction

† God truly promised Abraham the land of Canaan, and Abraham truly entered that land, but the New Testament reveals that the physical land wasn't the final destination of the promise.

† Abraham lived in the promised land while still living as a stranger and pilgrim, because his faith was reaching beyond geography to something permanent.

† Hebrews tells us exactly what Abraham was looking for, a city with foundations whose architect and builder is God.

† That means the Bible itself takes us from Canaan to the heavenly country, from the earthly inheritance to the heavenly city, and finally to the New Jerusalem.

† The story isn't about God abandoning His promise to Abraham. It's about God bringing that promise to its greater and intended fulfillment in Christ.

† Abraham received Canaan as a real promise, but Canaan pointed beyond itself. The real promised inheritance couldn't ultimately be reduced to dirt, borders, mountains, rivers, or political territory.

† Abraham's journey began in a land, but his faith ended at a city built by God.

Genesis 12:1-3

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you into a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

† The promise began with land, descendants, blessing, and a worldwide purpose. God wasn't merely establishing Abraham on a particular piece of geography, He was beginning a redemptive plan that would eventually bless all the families of the earth (Galatians 3:8).

† The geographical promise was real, but it wasn't isolated from the greater promise. From the beginning, Abraham's calling was connected to God's purpose for the nations (Romans 4:13).

† Paul later identifies the ultimate Seed through whom the Abrahamic promise reaches its goal as Christ (Galatians 3:16). The promise therefore moves toward Christ, not toward an everlasting dependence upon one geographical territory.

Genesis 15:18

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt

as far as the great river, the river Euphrates:

† God unquestionably promised physical land to Abraham's descendants. A fulfilled perspective doesn't deny the land promise, it recognizes what Scripture says happened to it.

† Joshua later declared that God gave Israel all the land He had sworn to give their fathers, and not one of His good promises failed (Joshua 21:43-45).

† Solomon likewise described Israel as dwelling throughout the territory associated with the promised boundaries (1 Kings 4:21). The physical land promise wasn't left waiting thousands of years for fulfillment.

† Once we allow Scripture to testify that Israel received the land, we're free to follow the New Testament when it reveals the greater inheritance toward which Abraham's faith was looking.

Joshua 21:43-45

So the Lord gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and lived in it. And the Lord gave them rest on every side, in accordance with everything that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the Lord handed all their enemies over to them. Not one of the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel failed; everything came to pass.

† This passage couldn't be much clearer. Israel received the land God promised to their fathers.

† They possessed it. They lived in it. God gave them rest. Scripture then concludes that everything God had promised them came to pass.

† This matters because many interpretations treat the physical land promise as though it remains prophetically unfinished. Joshua says the opposite.

† If the land promise was fulfilled, then Hebrews isn't waiting for Abraham to receive another earthly Canaan. Hebrews directs our attention upward, toward the heavenly country and God's city (Hebrews 11:13-16).

Hebrews 11:8-10

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he left, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as a stranger in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

† Abraham was already in the land of promise, yet Hebrews says he was still looking for something.

† That's one of the most important details in the entire discussion. If possessing Canaan were the ultimate goal, Abraham would've reached the final destination simply by arriving there.

† Instead, Abraham lived in tents while looking for the city with foundations. The tent and the city create a deliberate contrast between what was temporary and what was permanent.

† Abraham wasn't ultimately looking for a better piece of earthly real estate. He was looking for what God Himself would establish (Hebrews 12:22).

† The land was part of the promise, but the city reveals where the promise was going.

Hebrews 11:13-16

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen and welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country which they left, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

† Hebrews doesn't leave us guessing about the country Abraham desired. It explicitly calls it a better country, a heavenly one.

† Abraham had walked through Canaan, lived in Canaan, and

raised his family in Canaan, yet his faith was directed toward something greater than Canaan.

† The text connects the heavenly country with the city God prepared. The country and the city belong together in the writer's argument.

† This destroys the idea that Abraham's ultimate hope was merely possession of earthly territory. Scripture says his desire was heavenly.

† The promised land therefore functions within a larger biblical movement. The earthly land was real, but God's redemptive purpose was moving toward the heavenly inheritance and the city prepared by God.

Galatians 3:16

Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as one would in referring to many, but rather as in referring to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

† Paul centers the Abrahamic promise in Christ. Christ is the promised Seed through whom the blessing reaches its intended goal.

† This changes how the inheritance must be understood. The promise can't be interpreted apart from the One in whom Paul says it is centered.

† Those who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise (Galatians 3:29). The inheritance is therefore defined by union with Christ rather than physical ancestry alone.

† The movement of Scripture isn't backward from Christ to national territory. It's forward from Abraham's promise to its fulfillment in Christ.

Hebrews 12:22-24

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the

righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

† Here Hebrews brings Abraham's expectation into focus. Earlier Abraham was looking for God's city. Now the writer tells believers that they had come to the city of the living God.

† Notice the language isn't geographical. The destination is Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the assembly of the firstborn, God, Jesus, and the New Covenant.

† Hebrews moves from Abraham looking for the city to New Covenant believers coming to that city. That connection isn't accidental.

† The heavenly Jerusalem is the covenantal reality toward which Abraham's faith was directed. What Abraham saw from a distance was becoming the possession of God's New Covenant people.

† This is why returning the biblical hope to earthly geography misses the direction of Hebrews. Hebrews takes us from earthly shadows to heavenly realities (Hebrews 8:5; 9:23-24).

Galatians 4:25-26

Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is enslaved with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.

† Paul contrasts two Jerusalems, the earthly Jerusalem associated with bondage and the Jerusalem above associated with freedom.

† The apostolic direction is upward, not backward. Paul doesn't tell believers to place their inheritance hope in the earthly city.

† The Jerusalem above belongs to the freedom of the New Covenant. This agrees perfectly with Hebrews, where believers come to the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22).

† The inheritance promised through Abraham reaches beyond physical geography because the children of promise belong to the Jerusalem above (Galatians 4:28).

Revelation 21:2-3

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among the people, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,

† The biblical story that began with Abraham leaving his country reaches its covenantal destination in the New Jerusalem.

† Abraham looked for the city whose builder is God. Hebrews identifies the heavenly Jerusalem as God's city, and Revelation presents New Jerusalem coming from God.

† The central promise is now God's dwelling with His people. The inheritance isn't ultimately defined by acreage, national borders, or earthly political control, but by communion with God.

† Revelation describes New Jerusalem as the bride, showing that the city represents God's covenant people in union with Christ (Revelation 21:9-10).

† Abraham looked forward to God's city. Hebrews announced arrival at the heavenly Jerusalem. Revelation shows that city in its New Covenant glory.

Revelation 22:1-2

And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

† The story has moved far beyond the boundaries of ancient Canaan. The imagery now reaches back to Eden itself, with the river of life and the tree of life restored in God's city.

† The nations are present in the picture. This fulfills the worldwide direction already embedded in Abraham's promise, that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him (Genesis 12:3).

† The Bible begins with humanity losing access to the tree of life and ends with the tree of life in the New Jerusalem. That's

the larger inheritance story.

† Canaan mattered, but Canaan wasn't the finish line. God's purpose was always moving toward life, restoration, His presence, His people, and His everlasting kingdom in Christ.

Historical References

† Josephus described the Jewish attachment to Jerusalem, the temple, and the ancestral land, providing important historical background for understanding how central physical geography had become to first-century Jewish identity.

† Philo of Alexandria frequently interpreted Abraham's pilgrimage in moral and spiritual terms, showing that even within ancient Jewish thought Abraham's journey could carry significance beyond geographical relocation.

† The early Christian writer Clement of Rome appealed to Abraham as an example of faith and obedience, reflecting the early Christian emphasis on Abraham's faith rather than an expectation that Christians must possess the geographical land of Canaan.

† These historical witnesses don't establish doctrine, Scripture does, but they help us understand the world in which the New Testament's language about Abraham, Jerusalem, inheritance, and heavenly citizenship was heard.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't need to travel to a particular geographical territory to enter Abraham's promised inheritance. Our inheritance is found in Christ (Galatians 3:29).

† We don't stand outside God's city waiting for another prophetic age to arrive. Through Christ we've come to Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-24).

† Our relationship with God isn't determined by ethnicity, national borders, earthly temples, or possession of particular soil. In Christ, God's people belong to the Jerusalem above (Galatians 4:26).

† Abraham teaches us to look beyond what can be seen. He lived in the promised land while looking for the city God builds,

and that should tell us something about the nature of biblical promise.

† The land was real. The promise was real. Israel's possession of the land was real. But none of that requires us to make dirt the final destination of God's redemptive plan.

† The destination is Christ, the New Covenant, the heavenly Jerusalem, and the presence of God with His people.

† Abraham's journey began with the command to go to a land God would show him. The biblical story ends with God showing His people a city that comes from Him.

† The real promised land was never just dirt. Canaan was part of the journey, but the heavenly city was the destination.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Did God really promise Abraham and his descendants the physical land of Canaan?

A: Yes. The physical land promise was real, and Scripture says Israel received and possessed that land (Genesis 15:18; Joshua 21:43-45).

Q: If Abraham lived in the promised land, why does Hebrews say he was still looking for something?

A: Because Canaan wasn't the ultimate inheritance. Abraham looked for the city whose architect and builder is God and desired a better, heavenly country (Hebrews 11:9-16).

Q: Does saying the inheritance was greater than Canaan mean God failed to fulfill the land promise?

A: No. It means exactly the opposite. God fulfilled the physical land promise, and Scripture then reveals the greater heavenly reality toward which that promise pointed (Joshua 21:43-45; Hebrews 11:13-16).

Q: What city was Abraham looking for?

A: Hebrews identifies God's city as the heavenly Jerusalem, Mount Zion, the city of the living God (Hebrews 11:10; 12:22).

Q: Is New Jerusalem a future physical city that must replace earthly Jerusalem?

A: The New Testament describes the heavenly Jerusalem covenantally. Paul calls the Jerusalem above our mother, Hebrews says believers had come to the heavenly Jerusalem, and Revelation describes New Jerusalem as the bride (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 21:2, 9-10).

Q: Who inherits Abraham's promise now?

A: Those who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise. The inheritance is centered in Christ, not physical ancestry or possession of earthly territory (Galatians 3:16, 29).

Q: So what was the greater destination of Abraham's journey?

A: The greater destination was the heavenly country and God's city, fulfilled in the New Covenant reality of Mount Zion, heavenly Jerusalem, and God's dwelling with His people (Hebrews 11:16; 12:22-24; Revelation 21:2-3).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Genesis 12:1-3; Genesis 15:18; Joshua 21:43-45; Hebrews 11:8-10; Hebrews 11:13-16; Galatians 3:16; Hebrews 12:22-24; Galatians 4:25-26; Revelation 21:2-3; Revelation 22:1-2

† Historical writers: Josephus; Philo of Alexandria; Clement of Rome

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