

# **THE PEOPLE, THE LAND AND THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL**

**A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF ISRAEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE**



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EDITORS

**DARRELL L. BOCK AND MITCH GLASER**

 **Kregel**  
*Academic*

*The People, the Land and the Future of Israel: A Biblical Theology of Israel and the Jewish People*

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# FOREWORD

JOEL C. ROSENBERG

**T**he nations of the world are turning against Israel and the Jewish people. Will the church do so, as well?

In October 2013, a group of pastors, theologians and biblical scholars from over the U.S. and Canada gathered in the historic Calvary Baptist Church in New York City for a conference to consider “The People, the Land, and the Future of Israel.” This could not have been a more timely subject, for Israel and the Jewish people face extraordinary peril—existential threats—on a magnitude equal to, and perhaps greater than, any the Jewish State has faced since 1948.

In the pages ahead, you will read the extraordinary and compelling work of these scholars. They examine vitally important historical, theological, and contemporary issues related to Israel and the Jewish people from numerous angles. They came together to affirm what the Scriptures teach about God’s deep and enduring love and plan for Israel, while simultaneously affirming God’s great love for the Palestinian people, and all of the Arab, Persian, Turkish, and other people of the region, according to the Abrahamic Covenant. In so doing, they have created a book that is the first of a kind, and one that is immensely practical for anyone trying both to understand these issues—not through the lens of politics, but through the lens of Scripture—and to communicate these biblical truths to others.

Indeed, many pastors, ministry leaders, seminary students, and lay people have not taken the time to carefully study what the Scriptures have to say on these subjects. As events in the Middle East heat up, they are looking for sound, credible resources to help them better understand God’s heart on these subjects, and how to communicate these

truths to others. This is why I am so deeply grateful to Dr. Mitch Glaser, the leadership of Chosen People Ministries, and the folks at Kregel, for loving Israel and the Jewish people and the church enough to have called together such fine scholars to share their wisdom, based on years of careful research, and create such a book.

That said, before we to work our way through all these key issues, it is useful to understand all of these issues in the context of our times. This was what I was asked to do at the conference, and I believe it remains a helpful place to start.

## **The Stakes Are High**

In some ways, the modern State of Israel has never been more secure. It has won numerous wars against its enemies since 1948 and is widely perceived to have the strongest and most effective ground forces and air forces in the region. It has short and long-range ballistic missiles, the most advanced missile- and rocket-defense system on the planet, and (allegedly) possesses nuclear weapons, as well. Israel has a strong and growing economy, an increasingly high-tech business sector, excellent colleges and universities, and a robust and growing tourism industry.

However, the security situation around Israel is rapidly deteriorating. Consider recent developments.

In Egypt, we have watched millions of Arabs take to the streets calling for revolution and the dramatic fall from power of the Mubarak regime. We have seen the terrifying rise of the Muslim Brotherhood—and its leader Mohamed Morsi—to power, determined to impose Sharia law and end the peace treaty with Israel. Then we witnessed a stunning reversal as 22 million Egyptians signed a petition calling for the end of the Morsi regime, and created historic unrest in the streets, after which the military arrested Morsi, removed the leadership of the Brotherhood, and seized power.

In Syria, we seem to be watching the implosion of a modern Arab state. Tragically, more than 140,000 Syrians have been killed in a bloody civil war, including men, women, and children who have been murdered by their own government with chemical weapons. More than two million Syrians have fled the country. Some five million more Syrians have become “internally displaced”—that is, they have not fled their country but they have fled their homes and villages and are on the run for their lives. Who but the Lord can foretell where it will all lead?

In Lebanon, we are witnessing a modern, Arab, Sunni state steadily being hijacked from within by an Iranian, Shia-backed terrorist movement known as Hezbollah.

By God’s grace, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has been stable for several decades, and a peace treaty between Jordan and Israel is in place. But radical Islamists would like nothing more than to blow up

that peace process, topple King Abdullah II, and create an Islamist regime on Israel's eastern flank.

The peace process between the Israelis and Palestinians has repeatedly foundered, raising the possibility of further violence between two noble peoples that have already suffered so much.

And then there is Iran, the only state in human history ruled by an apocalyptic, genocidal death cult. Its regime is driven by Shia Islamic End Times theology. Its mullahs are feverishly building intercontinental ballistic missiles, and feverishly building the scientific and technological infrastructure to build not just one nuclear warhead, but an arsenal of several dozen warheads. They have defied one U.N. Security Resolution after another, and are working hand-in-glove with North Korea, which not long ago tested its third nuclear warhead.

Make no mistake: the stakes are high. If the Ayatollah Khamenei and his regime are able to build nuclear warheads and attach them to high-speed ballistic missiles, they could do in about six minutes what it took Adolf Hitler nearly six years to do: kill six million Jews. That's how many Jews live in Israel today, and this is who the regime in Tehran has vowed to "wipe off the map."

Yet Israel is not Khamenei's main target. Israel, in Shia eschatology, is merely the "Little Satan." The United States is the "Great Satan" for the mullahs. Yet over the last decade or so, most leaders in Washington and at the U.N. have seemed unable or unwilling to take decisive steps to neutralize the Iranian nuclear threat.

### **"In our time, the biblical prophecies are being realized."**

Just days before we met at the Manhattan conference, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu arrived in the U.S. He met with President Obama and Vice President Biden and their top advisors at the White House, and later with Secretary Kerry at the State Department. Later that day, the Prime Minister met with top Congressional leaders, as well.

The following day, the Prime Minister delivered the final address to the leaders of the world gathered for the opening Fall Session of the United Nations General Assembly. It was a powerful and sobering speech, focused primarily on the steadily rising Iranian nuclear threat and the inability of the world, thus far, to neutralize that threat. Mr. Netanyahu warned world leaders not to be beguiled by the election of the new Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, whom he described as a "wolf in sheep's clothing." He also warned that Israel would be willing to take decisive action against Iran alone, if necessary, to prevent the ayatollahs from acquiring nuclear warheads.

It was a fascinating speech, and at times, quite personal. But the Prime Minister concluded his address with a sentence I have never heard coming from the lips of an Israeli leader in the modern era.

**“In our time the biblical prophecies are being realized,”** Mr. Netanyahu declared. “As the prophet Amos said, ‘They shall rebuild ruined cities and inhabit them. They shall plant vineyards and drink their wine. They shall till gardens and eat their fruit. And I will plant them upon their soil never to be uprooted again.’ Ladies and gentlemen, the people of Israel have come home never to be uprooted again.”

How extraordinary—an Israeli Prime Minister telling the leaders of the world that Bible prophecies are coming to pass in our lifetime. How many pastors and theologians in our day even believe this, much less are proclaiming it to be so?

Mr. Netanyahu was correct. The miraculous rebirth of the State of Israel—and the dramatic re-gathering of Jews back to the Holy Land from all over the world—are central examples of End Times prophecies found in the Bible being fulfilled. What’s more, the Prime Minister also alluded in his speech to the biblical prophecies of a Persian king named “Cyrus” who would rise up one day and set the Jewish people free from captivity.

“The Jewish people’s odyssey through time has taught us two things: Never give up hope, always remain vigilant. Hope charts the future. Vigilance protects it,” Mr. Netanyahu said. “Today our hope for the future is challenged by a nuclear-armed Iran that seeks our destruction. But I want you to know, that wasn’t always the case. Some 2,500 years ago the great Persian king Cyrus ended the Babylonian exile of the Jewish people. He issued a famous edict in which he proclaimed the right of the Jews to return to the land of Israel and rebuild the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. That’s a Persian decree. And thus began an historic friendship between the Jews and the Persians that lasted until modern times.”

It was the Hebrew prophet Isaiah who foretold the rise of a great Persian king named “Cyrus” who would emerge one day to bless the Jewish people, release them from captivity, send them back to the land of Israel, and rebuild the city of Jerusalem. (See Isaiah 44:28 through 45:13.) And sure enough, a Persian king named “Cyrus” did, in fact, emerge to fulfill Isaiah’s startling prophecies, as we read in 2 Chronicles 36 and Ezra 1.

Mr. Netanyahu’s interest in the Scriptures has been growing significantly in recent years, and is increasingly an element in his public statements. At a speech at the Auschwitz death camp in 2009, for example, he **declared** that the prophecies of Ezekiel 37—the dry bones of the Jewish people coming back together miraculously to form the State of Israel—had come to pass in his lifetime.

“The most important lesson of the Holocaust is that a murderous evil must be stopped early, when it is still in its infancy and before it can carry out its designs,” noted Mr. Netanyahu. “The enlightened nations of

the world must learn this lesson. We, the Jewish nation, who lost a third of our people on Europe's blood-soaked soil, have learned that the only guarantee for defending our people is a strong State of Israel and the army of Israel. We have learned to warn the nations of the world of impending danger but at the same time, to prepare to defend ourselves. As the head of the Jewish state, I pledge to you today: We will never again permit evil to snuff out the life of our people and the life of our own country..."

"After the Holocaust," he continued, "the Jewish people rose from ashes and destruction, from a terrible pain that can never be healed. Armed with the Jewish spirit, the justice of man, and the vision of the prophets, we sprouted new branches and grew deep roots. Dry bones became covered with flesh, a spirit filled them, and they lived and stood on their own feet. As Ezekiel prophesied: 'Then He said unto me: "These bones are the whole House of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone; we are doomed.' Prophesy, therefore, and say to them: Thus said the Lord God: I am going to open your graves and lift you out of your graves, O My people, and bring you to the land of Israel.'" I stand here today on the ground where so many of my people perished—and I am not alone. The State of Israel and all the Jewish people stand with me. We bow our heads to honor your memory and lift our heads as we raise our flag—a flag of blue and white with a Star of David in its center. And everyone sees. And everyone hears. And everyone knows—that our hope is not lost."

The question for Israelis and for people everywhere now is this: If the prophecies of Ezekiel 37 have largely come to pass in our lifetime, is it not possible that other major Bible prophecies will come true in our lifetime as well?

## **A Landmark Survey of American Jews**

On the very same day as the Prime Minister's address to the United Nations, a landmark survey of the American Jewish community was released with startling new insights.

"The first major survey of American Jews in more than 10 years finds a significant rise in those who are not religious, marry outside the faith and are not raising their children Jewish—resulting in rapid

assimilation that is sweeping through every branch of Judaism except the Orthodox,” reported the New York Times.

The survey was conducted by the Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project. Excerpts from the Times article:

- The intermarriage rate, a bellwether statistic, has reached a high of 58 percent for all Jews, and 71 percent for non-Orthodox Jews—a huge change from before 1970 when only 17 percent of Jews married outside the faith.
- Two-thirds of Jews do not belong to a synagogue.
- One-fourth do not believe in God.
- One-third had a Christmas tree in their home last year.
- “It’s a very grim portrait of the health of the American Jewish population in terms of their Jewish identification,” said Jack Wertheimer, a professor of American Jewish history at the Jewish Theological Seminary, in New York.
- Sixty-nine percent say they feel an emotional attachment to Israel.
- But only 40 percent believe that the land that is now Israel was “given to the Jewish people by God.”

Perhaps the most striking finding of the survey, the Times reported, was that “34 percent said you could still be Jewish if you believe that Jesus was the Messiah.” It was an extraordinary question to be asked, and an extraordinary result. One in three American Jews now believe you can believe in Jesus as Messiah and still be Jewish. Consider the implications of that fact. Out of an estimated six million American Jews, some two million people no longer believe it is an act of betrayal to the Jewish people for a Jewish person to embrace Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah and hope of Israel.

The full report, which was a mixed offering of bad news and good, should be studied carefully. The implications of the findings must be properly analyzed. But let us consider the possibility that the report offers us clues that we may be approaching the dawn of the greatest spiritual awakening in the modern history of the Jewish people and that the Lord is about to open the eyes of many to the truth of who Yeshua really is. This, in turn, would suggest that if Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus will commit themselves to faithfully sharing the Gospel with the Jewish people in the U.S., Israel and around the world in the years ahead—and do so in a loving, gentle, winsome manner, not with the unconscionable coercion and insensitivity of previous ages—millions of Jewish people may be more ready to hear and receive than at any epoch since the first century. How exciting that would be! Is the church ready for such a season of dramatic evangelism and discipleship among God’s chosen people? Let us hope so.



## Reasons for Hope

In a world that is lost and dark and getting darker, there are reasons for hope.

Yes, evil is on the march. But the Lord God Almighty is holy and sovereign, and He, too, is on the move. In our own lifetime, we have seen the dramatic rebirth of the State of Israel, and the return of millions of Jewish people to the Holy Land, and the rebuilding of the ancient ruins in Israel, all in fulfillment of Bible prophecy. The very fact that there is a State of Israel today is a testament to the existence of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and further evidence that the Scriptures are inspired and that the prophecies are all true. What's more, we see the Lord strengthening His remnant of believers around the world, amidst persecution and suffering, and we know the Lord Jesus is coming back soon, and thus we can endure whatever the world throws at us.

Yes, most Israelis, and Jews around the world, have not personally and carefully studied the Word of God. But Prime Minister Netanyahu is studying the Bible on Shabbat with his son, having occasional Bible studies in his official residence, citing the Scriptures in his speeches, and is increasingly interested in the role of Bible prophecy in our current times. Indeed, more and more Jews are interested in reading the Scriptures. We are even seeing a fascinating movement of rabbis and Jewish scholars encouraging Jews to read the New Testament.

Yes, there is much resistance to the Gospel in Israel and throughout the epicenter. But the fact is the Lord is drawing more Jews and more Muslims to faith in Jesus Christ in the last few decades than in the last twenty centuries. Meanwhile, He is preparing the hearts of many more to come to faith in Jesus as Messiah in the years ahead. Indeed, we are steadily heading towards a Romans 11:26 world, in which "all Israel will be saved." God will do His part. We must now do ours, which is to teach and preach the Scriptures without fear or shame, and to do so based on a solid theological understanding of the people, the land and the future of Israel.

Yes, it's true that many pastors and Christian ministry leaders in the U.S. and around the world do not understand, or have not carefully studied, God's love and plan and purpose for Israel. Indeed, tragically, some pastors and Christian leaders are speaking out against Israel. They say there is nothing special or important about Israel or the Jewish people. Some say God has rejected the Jews. Some call for boycotts against Israel, divestment from Israeli investments, and sanctions against the Jewish state (the "BDS" movement). This is as heart-breaking as it is unbiblical. Such efforts must be firmly and lovingly challenged. Nevertheless, the good news is that God is waking up a remnant here and around the globe of Christians and Messianic Jews eager to rediscover the purpose and power of Bible prophecy and all of God's Word with regards to Israel, and the nations, and many other topics.

In light of God's love and sovereignty, therefore, let us not despair. Rather, let us be encouraged about the people, the land and the future of Israel, even as we are sober-minded about the very real challenges that lie ahead. As we move deeper into the eschatological future, and nearer to the Second Coming, we know the nations of the world are going to isolate, accuse, and then turn on the Jewish people and the State of Israel. This is what prophecy teaches, and current trends are remarkably consistent with this biblical truth. That said, the Abrahamic Covenant is still true and valid. God will bless those who bless Israel, and curse those who curse Israel. So we need not fear. Rather, we must be faithful to the task that God has given us, and that includes strengthening the remnant.

The church is called to embrace the Jewish people and the whole house of Israel, to love them with unconditional love, to bless them in every possible way, and do so in the name of Jesus, even if we do not agree with every decision they make. At the same time, the church is called to embrace the Arab and Persian and Kurdish and Turkish people, and love them with unconditional love, and bless them in every possible way, and do so in the name of Jesus, even if we do not agree with all of their decisions. This is the heart of the Abrahamic covenant—to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. This is the purpose of the Great Commission—to go and make disciples of all nations. The God of the Bible is not “either/or” when it comes to loving Israel and her neighbors; He is “both/and.” He has ordained some different roles and responsibilities for Israel and her neighbors, but He has called us to love them both. Thus, those who love Israel must also care deeply for the Palestinian people; and seek their blessing, and find practical ways to support and encourage them; and stand for both justice and mercy; and especially to love and encourage Palestinians who love Christ and have been called to know and serve Him. Likewise, those who start with a deep love for the Palestinians must also care deeply for the Israeli people; and seek their blessing, and find practical ways to support and encourage them; and stand for both justice and mercy; and especially to love and encourage Messianic believers who love Yeshua and have been called to know and serve Him. This is how the lost world will know we are His disciples, when we show love for one another.

Not every pastor and theologian and lay person understands this, but we must not lose heart. Indeed, let us be filled with hope, knowing the Lord is coming to save His people and establish His kingdom. This is the blessed hope of Israel, and it shall come to pass. Let us teach the Word in the power of the Holy Spirit and with authority. Let us preach the Gospel without fear or shame. Let us live the Gospel by living lives of great love and compassion. Let us do so with patience and humility and gentleness. And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due

time, by the grace of God, we will reap a great harvest. Again, the Word is clear: we are heading towards a Romans 11:26 world. We are heading towards a time in which all Israel will be saved. Let us be faithful in doing our part, that in the end we will all hear from our Savior's lips, "Well done, My good and faithful servant. You were faithful in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your Master."

## Conference Video

[chosenpeople.com/rosenberg](https://chosenpeople.com/rosenberg)



## Interview with Joel Rosenberg

[chosenpeople.com/rosenberg-interview](https://chosenpeople.com/rosenberg-interview)





# INTRODUCTION

DR. MITCH GLASER

The tiny nation of Israel continues to be a political and spiritual football tossed about by the nations of the world.

In the heat of the current conflict, deep questions that require answers linger in the hearts and minds of concerned Christians and even within the Jewish community. Some Christians feel the need to take sides in the midst of the Middle East crisis! Is it possible to believe the Jewish people have a divine right to the Land of Israel and yet care deeply about Palestinians and their concerns? Christians moved by social justice issues wonder whether Israel should have the right to dwell in the land only if Palestinians are treated according to a certain code of ethics.

These are all-important questions that will never be satisfied by answers found in political theory or in the analyses of experts on the history of the region. We believe the only place we will find answers to the profound questions that will ultimately shape how we view the Middle East—especially the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians—is in the Bible, the Word of God.

This is why Chosen People Ministries, Joel C. Rosenberg, and the leaders of the historic Calvary Baptist Church in Manhattan convened a conference to tackle these difficult biblical issues. Our hope was to provide Bible believers with the opportunity to build a firm foundation allowing for a more informed response to the raging political questions of our day.

I am grateful for the wisdom and guidance of my prolific coeditor, Dr. Darrell Bock, Director of Cultural Engagement and Senior Research Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary,

as well as for Pastor David Epstein and the staff and family at Calvary Baptist Church in Manhattan who co-sponsored this conference.

Chosen People Ministries has a multi-generational relationship with Calvary Baptist Church. Over the decades, we have sponsored similar conferences at Calvary during the years of the Holocaust and immediately after the establishment of modern Israel. In light of this long-term relationship and since New York City is the Jewish capital of the United States, it seemed only reasonable that a conference of this nature and magnitude take place at Calvary Baptist Church.

I am also grateful for the hard work of the Chosen People Ministries Church Ministries and Conferences department in planning and coordinating the logistics of the conference. They worked tirelessly before the event preparing for the conference.

I am also thankful for the partnership of Joel C. Rosenberg. Joel is one of the most knowledgeable Evangelicals about the Middle East, having worked with various Israeli leaders and having spent many months living in Israel and Arab countries. Joel is a leading voice in support of Israel and is passionate beyond most for the cause of bringing the Good News to both Jews and Arabs in the Holy Land. We are honored that Joel would speak at the conference and write the forward for this book.

A special thank you to Chosen People Ministries staff members, Scott Nassau and Alan Shore, for their help in editing and in writing the introduction sections for each of the chapters.

## **The Importance of the Book and the Conference**

We may ask the question, why is this book necessary and why was the conference significant? I alluded to the answer in my opening comments. Because of the volatile and charged atmosphere for these discussions, both among politicians and Evangelicals, the conveners and contributors believed that a very significant element of the discussion was lacking and a new approach to finding solutions for our questions was needed.

The new approach, in fact, was an old approach that had been lost in the midst of many heated debates and discussions on the issues that surround Israel's land claim. We believed that the answers to the Middle East crisis, like other important questions in life, were to be found in the Bible. In other words, discussions regarding the modern Middle East crisis needed to be better informed and molded by Scripture.

Additionally, many of the fine scholars who contributed to this book believe a biblical theology of Israel and the Jewish people is sorely needed. There are Bible-believing Christians who think that in one way or another, the Church has replaced Israel. This view has become more popular even among many Christians who previously believed the land of Israel was promised to the Jewish people.

In recent years, there has been a marked increase in books, blogs, and films such as *O Little Town of Bethlehem* that present a more sympathetic view of the Palestinian political cause. What is evidently lacking in them, however, is a clear look at what the Bible says about the land of Israel and the role of the Jewish people in the plan of God.

Most of the responses to these weighty biblical questions have been answered with politically and historically based responses and not primarily founded upon Scripture. But, it is with the Bible that we need to begin to answer all of our deeper questions.

This is really the genesis of the conference and this book. It is our hope that Christians will view the Jewish people, the Land and the future of Israel through the lens of the Scripture. We seek to offer a biblical theology that asserts that God has a plan today and tomorrow for the Jewish people—and that this plan includes the land of Israel.

### **The Heart and Tone of the Book**

In tone, this book reflects the loving heart of the participants for all people, including Jewish people, Arabs, Palestinians, Muslims, and groups within the Middle East who are struggling and whose only hope is found in the presence and power of Jesus the Messiah. He is the Prince of Peace and we believe He is coming soon to reign as King—and then peace will flood the hearts and souls of all those who live in the Middle East and beyond!

### **The Use of the Book**

This book should be studied rather than read. There are introductory videos that may be watched, study questions at the end of each chapter, and a video of the chapter in sermon form given at the Calvary Baptist conference. This will enable the book to be used for Sunday schools, Shabbat schools in Messianic congregations, small groups, and even special evening services dedicated to studying these issues.

We also hope that this volume will be used as a textbook for college and seminary courses. It is written in a way that both trained scholars and average members of congregations will appreciate and understand.

We hope that you will make good use of the multimedia platform and enter into the full experience of this book in sight, sound, and word.

—DR. MITCH GLASER  
NEW YORK CITY  
MARCH 2014

## Invitation to the Conference

[chosenpeople.com/intro](https://chosenpeople.com/intro)



## Michael Zinn's Testimony

[chosenpeople.com/zinn](https://chosenpeople.com/zinn)



## Hormoz Shariat's Testimony

[chosenpeople.com/shariat](https://chosenpeople.com/shariat)

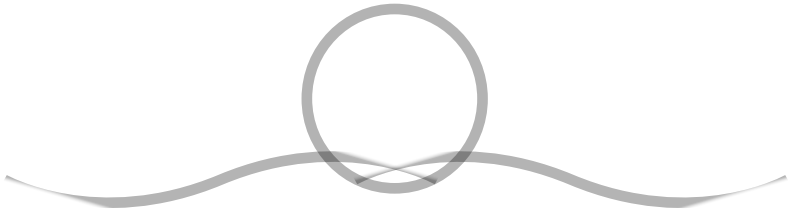


## Panel Discussion

[chosenpeople.com/panel](https://chosenpeople.com/panel)







# **HEBREW SCRIPTURES**







# 1

## ISRAEL ACCORDING TO THE TORAH

DR. EUGENE H. MERRILL

Merrill in his chapter titled *Israel according to the Torah* provides an overview of the creation of the nation of Israel and charts God's course for the nation through a discussion of the covenants made with His chosen people. He shows why Israel's national identity is important to the plan of God beginning with the call of Abraham to leave his home and journey to a new land to become a mighty nation (Gen. 12:1–3). He also points the reader to the ultimate impact Israel and the Jewish people will have upon the nations of the world.

Merrill concludes that God will remain faithful to His unconditional covenant with Israel, by redeeming the nation and returning them to the land to “carry out successfully the mission to which God had called them” until the great day when Jesus returns to establish His Kingdom.

*Introduction**The Promise of a People**The Lineage of the People**Abraham to Eber**Eber to Shem**Shem to Seth/Adam**The Descendancy of the People**Abraham to Judah**Judah to David**David to Jehoiachin**Jehoiachin to Jesus**The Creation Covenant**Its Nature**Its Purpose**Its Failure**The Subsequent and Necessary Covenants: All Redemptive**The Noachic: Reinstitution of the Nations**The Abrahamic: Establishment of a Redemptive People**The Mosaic: Constitution of a Redemptive Nation**The Davidic: Personalizing of a Redemptive Individual**The New: Anticipation of a Messianic Ruler over a Renewed Nation**Conclusion***Part One: The Lineage of the People*****Introduction***

The Hebrew term usually translated “people” (*'am*), though employed hundreds of times with reference to Israel, is virtually generic for humankind and lacks the specificity that is intended when Israel as a chosen people is in view. Ironically, for that denotation the word “nation” (*gôy*) is found (ca. 35x with reference to Israel out of 556 occurrences in all).<sup>1</sup> Thus, Israel is not an amorphous people among the peoples but a nation among the nations with all that entails.<sup>2</sup> This is important to keep in mind for the eschatological gathering of Israel will not be as a people alone but as a clearly recognized nation.

***The Promise of a People***

The first attestation of Israel as a nation (*gôy*) is in connection with the Abrahamic Covenant as articulated in Genesis 12:1–3. Speaking to Abram, Yahweh says, “I will make you to be a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great and you will become a blessing” (v. 2). The full implication of this will be developed at a later place in the chapter. For now it is sufficient to note the use of *gôy* rather than *'am*, the latter of which never occurs with reference to the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. 17:20; 18:18; 35:11; 46:3).

### ***The Lineage of the People***

*Abraham to Eber (Gen. 11:14–26; cf. 10:21–31; 1 Chron. 1:24–27))*

Before any single generation of a people could be fully identified and credentialed in the ancient Near East, it was important that its antecedent lineage be established. Where did they come from? Of what people groups do they consist? What has been their history of sedentariness and migration? What is their eponymy? The linear genealogy of this passage provides a clear answer to at least the last question. Abraham was the last of seven generations in a linear genealogy commencing with Eber, he and Eber included (Gen. 11:14–26). The consonants of Eber (*'br*) are exactly the same as those in the word “Hebrew” except for the vocalic gentile ‘ at the end of “Hebrew” indicating ethnicity or nationality (*'br'*). Spelled with vowels, the two words are respectively *'ēber* and *'ibr'*. Thus, Abraham was an Eberite or, in time and in line with the ancient versions, a Hebrew.<sup>3</sup>

As to other characteristics of nationhood, none applies in the case of Abraham’s predecessors except for consanguinity and possibly common language.<sup>4</sup> One should therefore refer to the Eberites (=Hebrews) as a landless, disparate, and scattered people who may or may not have had any sense of calling or purpose.

*Eber to Shem (Gen. 11:10–16; cf. 10:21–24; 1 Chron. 1:17–23)*

The ancestry of Abraham is further defined as being transmitted via Shem, one of three sons of Noah. Only four generations are recorded between Shem and Eber; thus, Abraham was 11 generations from Shem. The name “Shem” (*šēm*) means “name,” to be understood perhaps as *the* name, the one paramount in the illustrious patrimony of Abraham. Abraham and his descendants would therefore be known as Shemites (or Semites) since they descended from Noah through Shem. “Semite” (or “Semitic”) is equally applicable to peoples other than the Hebrews, the most famous being the Arabic line of Abraham’s son Ishmael (Gen. 16:7–14; 25:12–18; 28:9). The familial structure of Abraham’s can be described as follows: Abraham was a Semite, one among 1/3 of the world’s population, but, more narrowly, he was also a Hebrew, one line among the only two known lines descendant from Eber, namely, that of Peleg (Gen. 11:16; cf. 10:25–31).

*Shem to Seth/Adam (Gen. 5:1–32; cf. 1 Chron. 1:1–4)*

Of the three sons of Noah, Shem was designated to be the bearer of the so-called Noachic Covenant (Gen. 9:8–17), a fact only intimated from the beginning but made clear as the descendants of the three sons of Noah at last centered on Abraham through Shem.<sup>5</sup> After Cain slew Abel, Seth became the son of Adam designated to form the ancestral line that would pass through Noah, Abraham, and David to Jesus Christ. Ten generations are recorded in the narrative, including Adam

and Noah (Gen. 5:3–29), but special attention must be paid to three explanatory notes that underscore the nobility of humankind and the need for its restoration to glory. In the first place, the writer notes that God created humankind “in the likeness of God” and then called them “Adam” (or “mankind”).<sup>6</sup> Second, Adam’s son Seth is said to be in Adam’s likeness (*děmût*) and image (*šelem*). The same two terms are found in the creation story of Genesis 1 but in reverse order. The point is that despite the sin and fall of Adam and Eve, the image of God in mankind, though marred and distorted, still exists and is worth restoring. The third noteworthy statement comes in the naming of Noah at his birth (Gen. 5:29).<sup>7</sup> After the historical plight of humankind since the Fall and the impending judgment of the Flood, Lamech prophetically sees the day when his son Noah would become the means of bringing comfort and rest to the human race. Little could he know of the great plan God had for a line of Noah’s descendants that would culminate in a Deliverer who would usher in everlasting rest and peace.

Noah, the prototype of the Deliverer *par excellence*, is implicitly compared to Adam in that he would “bring us comfort<sup>8</sup> from our work” and “from the toil<sup>9</sup> of our hands” (Gen. 5:29). The latter term is found in the curse of the ground brought about by Adam’s sin: “in toil shall you eat [of the ground]” (Gen. 3:17). The comparison with Adam is more explicit in the passage that introduces the Noachic covenant in which Noah is commanded to “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen. 9:1). The identical words are found in the creation mandate to Adam, the implications of which will be treated later. For now it is sufficient to see that Abraham issued from Adam (the human race) via Seth, Noah (the “second Adam”), Shem (the ethnic people), and Eber (the patronym). The creation of a nation awaits a time future to the Patriarchs.

***The Descendancy of the People (Gen. 21:1–7; cf. Josh. 24:2–4)***  
*Abraham to Judah (1 Chron. 1:28, 34; 2:1–2; Matt. 1:2; Luke 3:33–34)*

The line from Abraham to Judah is uncomplicated to say the least. Abraham, in fact, was the great-grandfather of Judah, the son of Jacob (or Israel).<sup>10</sup> Both Isaac and Jacob had become custodians of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 17:19; 21:12; 26:3–4; and 27:27–29; 28:3, 13–15 respectively). The people of Abraham were in process of becoming a nation through the tribal stage represented by Judah. To him the covenant promise was bequeathed and through him would come the Messianic figure who would rule over all and, in a sense yet to be revealed, who would atone for the sins of the world.

From the time of his naming (*yěhûdâ*, “let him praise”; cf. Gen. 29:35) and thereafter it was clear that Judah, despite his failings, was the chosen vessel by which the redemptive purposes of God would be accomplished. The clearest indication of this sovereign selection is

articulated in the blessing by Jacob of his twelve sons (Gen. 49:8–12).<sup>11</sup> His brothers will praise him (a play on his name) and he will be the one who takes up the scepter and staff, signs of his royal status.<sup>12</sup> This rule will be temporary, however, for it will be surrendered at last to the “one to whom it belongs” v. 10).<sup>13</sup> King David certainly qualifies on the historical plane as the Old Testament makes crystal clear, but beyond him exists one who is even greater as he himself testifies. A full discussion of this important truth must be delayed for now.

## **Part 2: The Descendancy of the People**

*Judah to David (Ruth 4:18–22; 1 Chron. 2:3–17)*

This section will be treated only lightly since other chapters will address post-Pentateuch times and texts in detail. The justification for its inclusion here is to demonstrate how the seed-bed of Old Testament thought and theology was not stifled or truncated at the end of Torah but, to the contrary, blossomed and came to fruition in the remainder of the canon.

The first canonical reference to the ancestry of David is the epilogue to Ruth, included there perhaps to demonstrate the inclusion of Gentiles like Ruth herself in the circle of God’s saving grace. Beyond that, the genealogy identifies her as David’s great-grandmother, surely an even more powerful sign of the grafting of those outside the Abraham-Isaac line into the “wild olive tree” (Rom. 11:17). As for David, he was born in Bethlehem of Judah and thus as a Judahite fulfilled the ancient promise to Judah that it would be the tribe from whence the Royal One would emerge. That Jesus was born in Bethlehem is self-evidently a claim to Davidic descent and to royal prerogatives.

The Chronicler devotes more space to the genealogies of Judah and then those of David than to any other tribe (Judah: 2 Chron. 2:3–55; 4:1–23; David: 3:1–24 ), 99 verses in all! He clearly understood the messianic nature and separation of the tribe of Judah and of David, its most prominent figure. Beyond that, he is the central figure of the lengthy history of Israel and Judah compiled by the Chronicler (1 Chron. 11–29), 18 chapters out of 64 in 1 and 2 Chronicles or 28%. The focus narrows from Adam>Seth>Noah>Shem>Eber>Abraham>Jacob>Judah>David.

*David to Jehoiachin (1 Chron. 3:1–16; Matt. 1:6–11)*

The descent from David to Jehoiachin consists of 14 generations and a period of about 400 years, David and Jehoiachin included. For reasons of symmetry (14, 14, 14 generations; Matt 1:17), Matthew omits the names Joash, Amaziah, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah; however, the lineage from David to Jehoiachin is not rendered incomprehensibly incomplete to the last of the Davidic monarchy before the Babylonian exile.<sup>14</sup> Jehoiachin’s release from house arrest by Evil-Merodach

in 562 BC reignited hope in the exile community that the house of David would continue on to its goal of ensuring return, redemption, and restoration of God's chosen people.<sup>15</sup>

### *Jehoiachin to Jesus (Matt. 1:12–16)*

In summary, two brief observations must suffice about this post-Torah record: (1) Neither the Old Testament nor any other extant literature records the genealogy preserved by Matthew. His sources are completely unknown but his fidelity to the traditions of the preceding parts of the genealogy leaves no room for doubt as to his accuracy. (2) The genealogy of Luke's Gospel supplies Mary's ancestral heritage which, like Matthew's, also links David to Jesus but through David's son Nathan rather than through Solomon (Luke 3:23–31). Thus, both Joseph and Mary were of the house of David but through parallel lines of succession (Luke 1:27; 2:4; cf. Matt. 1:20).

## **Part 3: The Creation Covenant**

### *Its Nature*

Though many scholars question the notion of a creation covenant, a case can be made for it but time and space limitations preclude making it here and now.<sup>16</sup> What is lacking is the complete formal structure of a covenant document but elements remain as follows: (1) Two parties are involved, namely, God and humankind (Gen. 1:1, 27); (2) "witnesses" are present in the form of all other created things (1:6–25); (3) there is a set of stipulations—fill the earth and have dominion over it (1:28); and (4) blessings (1:29–31; 2:15–16; 2:22–23) and curses (2:17; 3:14, 16, 17–1) accrue depending on covenant loyalty or disloyalty. Though lacking all the elements that normally indicate covenant genre, clearly in the nature of the case the creation mandate is not between parties equal in stature; hence it is of a so-called "sovereign-vassal" type. God dictates its terms and humankind, as the inferior party, has no choice but to comply if it wants to enjoy the blessings of the relationship and avoid its negative consequences.

### *Its Purpose*

The purpose of the mandate is crystal clear: Man, as the image of God, is to exercise dominion over all other created things as God's earthly surrogate. He is not just *in* the image of God—he *is* the image of God and therefore represents God. In a sense, man is of royal stock, a king over whatever realm God places him. Thus the notion of human kingship finds its roots.

### *Its Failure*

The use of the term "failure" must first of all be clarified. Whatever God creates or initiates cannot fail so any breakdown of the



covenant relationship that might take place is the fault of man and man alone. Humankind was created with the ability to choose, as the text clearly attests (Gen. 2:16–17), so his fatal choice to disobey his God brought upon his own head the judgment about which God had already warned—he surely died (2:17; 3:19).<sup>17</sup> But even this seeming irreversible rupture of relationship could and would be overcome by the Creator. What he had created he would re-create. This brings into play the scheme of redemption and reconciliation that occupies virtually all the rest of sacred Scripture. Its implementation would come about through a series of covenants God would offer to fallen humanity which, if entered into and kept with loyal compliance, would grant new life and new hope. In fact it would eventuate in a “new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

## Part Four: Subsequent and Necessary Covenants of Redemption

### *The Noachic Covenant: Reinstitution of the Nations (Gen. 9:1–17)*

The covenant text proper isolated here is embedded in a larger context in which God’s promises (8:22–24) and Noah’s prophetic outcomes to his sons (9:20–29) appear. The proposition that covenant is the instrument of reconciliation between God and humankind following the Flood is clear from the fact that the technical term *bēr’t* (“covenant”) occurs in this passage seven times in the span of 17 verses, a density of usage unparalleled elsewhere in the Old Testament. The larger context may be analyzed as follows:

God’s promise never again to curse the ground (*’ădāmâ*) as he had by sending the great flood (8:22–24).<sup>18</sup>

The original creation mandate reiterated to Noah (9:1–2, 7), with an additional expansion concerning what could and could not be eaten (vv. 3–4); man’s original vegetarian diet (Gen. 2:9, 16) now augmented by the consumption of animal meat, clearly a concession to creation’s fallen nature.

Blood prohibited for consumption because it symbolized life and therefore could be “eaten” only by God in sacrificial ritual (v. 4; cf. Ex. 30:10; Deut. 12:27; etc.).

Concept of the sanctity of blood leads to the matter of murder by which a man’s blood is shed (v. 6). Since man is the image of God, the penalty for murder must be *lex talionis*, that is, life for life, but only as administered by government. Thus, humanity in general must be governed by law and must in turn exercise authority as an agent of God (Rom. 13:1: “The [powers] that be are ordained by God”).

All of these principles and statutes are formalized and activated by the ceremony of covenant (vv. 8–7). Twice God says he is establishing

his covenant with humanity (vv. 9, 11). The verb translated “establish” (*qûm*, here the hiphil participle *mēqî'm*), bears the nuance of keeping, as in keeping one’s word (HALOT, 1088). God, the one who cannot lie, pledges here to keep the covenant, no matter what (cf. Gen. 6:18; 17:7, 19, 21; Ex. 6:4; Deut. 8:18; Ezek. 16:60, 62). In the immediate situation, the Lord promises never again to destroy the earth by flood and as a sign of his solemn commitment he places a rainbow in the clouds. This he does, he says—and in highly anthropopathic language—so that he will never forget what he has promised (vv. 12–16). It is a “string around the finger” (Heb *'ôt*).<sup>19</sup>

Following a drunken stupor, Noah adds to the covenant document prophetic destinies for his three sons (Gen 9:25–27): (1) Canaan, son of Ham, will be cursed, principally by his becoming a slave people;<sup>20</sup> (2) Yahweh, God of Shem, will be blessed; and (3) Japheth will not only subdue Canaan but will find refuge in Shem. As to (1), no case can be made for African slavery, though Hamites did indeed settle in Africa. The text could not be clearer: It is the Canaanites who will be held in bondage. This began with the slave labor of the Canaanite Gibeonites who had tricked Joshua into making a covenant with them (Josh. 9:3–27) and continued intermittently until no Canaanites survived. The blessing of Yahweh (2) was in effect a blessing of Shem because it suggests that God would be with Shem in a special way, one we have traced earlier and found to center in Shem’s role of covenant bearer of salvation.<sup>21</sup> Japheth (3) would be both large and small. It represents the Gentile nations that cover the earth but find their refuge and redemption in the tents of Shem, that is, in the line of Shem from which would come salvation.

In conclusion, the Noachic Covenant reinstates the notion of divine authority mediated through humankind, even in its fallenness. Noah was, in effect, a second Adam from whom the nations would descend and through whom the original covenant mandate could be carried out.

***The Abrahamic Covenant: Establishment of a Redemptive People***  
(Gen. 12:1–3; 13:14–17; 15:1–21; 17:1–21; 22:17–18; 26:3–4;  
27:27–29; 28:13–17; 35:9–13; 46:1–4)

The Abrahamic Covenant is a (if not the) central theological rubric of the Old Testament because (1) it encapsulates in one man God’s plan for the rehabilitation and restoration of his original, pre-Fall creation; (2) it engenders a fountain-head of blessing through a people who will both fill the earth and become narrowed to one descendant who will bring atonement and new life; and (3) it contains within it the promise of a people, land, and law that will form on earth a nation that, ideally at least, foreshadows the Kingdom of God in the new heavens and new earth.

The matters of its literary form and conditionality or non-conditionality, though important, cannot be discussed fully in this brief treatment.<sup>22</sup> However, the premise of this chapter is that God made to Abraham an unconditional grant of land (Gen. 12:1; 13:15; 15:18), nationhood (Gen. 12:2; 17:4), and blessing (Gen. 12:2; 22:17; 26:3), with the ancillary privilege of being a means of blessing the nations (Gen. 12:3; 27:29; Isa. 19:24; Zech. 8:13).<sup>23</sup> Moreover, this grant will never be rescinded because it is based on the sworn oath of a God who cannot lie (Gen. 22:16–17; 26:3; 50:24; Ex. 13:11; 33:1; Deut. 4:31; 6:18; 31:20; Ezek. 36:7–15).

If taken literally—and no good literary, hermeneutical, and theological reason exists not to—one should note that all three elements were fulfilled in biblical times. Israel occupied the land of Canaan under Joshua, David and Solomon greatly added to it territorially, and it was maintained all through the period of the Divided Monarchy until the Assyrian deportation of 722 BC and the Babylonian exile of 586 BC. Even after that, the state of Yehud was formed after the exile and an “Israel” was recognized in some form or other until the Romans put an end to it early in the second century AD.

The promise of nationhood was slower in coming and was not a functional reality until the beginning of the United Monarchy under Saul (ca. 1050 BC). The elements of the promise were there much earlier (ca. 1350) in the tribal affiliations, but not in the structural sense that marked the transition from “people” to “nation.”

Abraham’s seed was blessed in numerous ways throughout the ancient historical period, and they became a blessing to others also in those times. This was evident as early as the exodus event as seen in the “mixed multitude” that accompanied them in their escape from Egypt. These proselytes were clearly impacted by Israel’s God and thus blessed in unimaginable ways considering the utter depravity of Egyptian paganism from which they were converted. Examples of individuals are Rahab the Canaanite prostitute and Ruth the Moabite, both of whom were grafted into the messianic ancestral tree (Matt. 1:5 and Ruth 4:17–22 respectively), to say nothing of the much later Naaman, the Syrian soldier, who confessed that Israel’s God was the only true god (2 Kings 5:15).

Even these manifestations of the efficacy of the Abrahamic Covenant are eclipsed by the eschatological revelations of a future Israel with a future land, nation, and blessing. Glimpses of these things may already be seen in the modern immigration of the Jewish people into their ancient homeland, their formation into a nation among the nations of the world, and their blessing the nations through medical, scientific, and cultural enterprise. These foretastes set the stage for what yet lies ahead. The making of *aliya* will far transcend any historical examples; the nation will no longer fear their hostile neighbors but will far outshine them; and the greatest contribution of all—their recognition, con-

fession, and proclamation of their Messiah to the world—will transform the world as the nations also embrace the living God of Israel.

***The Mosaic Covenant (Ex. 19:5–6; 24:8; 34:10, 27–28; Deut. 4:13, 23; 5:3; 9:9; 29:1, 12; 31:16, 20)***

The term “Mosaic” is preferable to “Sinaitic” or the like because it suits both the Sinai and Moab versions and settings of the revelation of the covenant, that is, the ones found in Exodus and Deuteronomy respectively. The major question to be asked of the Mosaic Covenant is: What is its relationship to the Abrahamic Covenant and, later, to the Davidic? These two questions demand separate answers.

*The Mosaic Covenant vis-à-vis the Abrahamic Covenant*

Unlike some systems that view the covenants of the Old and New Testaments as sequential and on the same plane, this chapter argues that in both form and substance the Mosaic stands as an adjunct to the Abrahamic, in service to it, as it were. That is, the Mosaic draws out the theological implications of the Abrahamic as they pertain to the identity and role of the special nation implicitly in mind there. The narratives of Genesis and Exodus leave no question as to these matters: The nation in mind is Israel, the seed of Abraham that would be a blessing to those peoples and nations that blessed it.

One might designate the Abrahamic Covenant as an ontological or existential entity that consists of the desire of a gracious God to bring the fallen world back into fellowship with himself without explicitly saying how. The Mosaic Covenant, on the other hand, is a functional or utilitarian covenant that names the instrument that will effect this divine plan and instructs that instrument as to its several responsibilities in such an enormous enterprise. The secret lies in Israel’s being a chosen vessel that will, by strict obedience to Torah, model to the rest of the world what the Kingdom should be like. At the same time, it will be custodian of the message of redemption and the “missionary” responsible for its proclamation.

Failure to do this adequately will not ultimately frustrate the plan of God, for as Paul states so eloquently, “Because of [Israel’s] transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:11). On the other hand, “Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full numbers of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved” (v. 25). The Mosaic Covenant may be broken by Israel (and was), but just as a natural olive tree may lose its branches and have wild olive branches grafted on to it, so it may also have its natural branches re-grafted in due time (Rom. 11:17–24). To this, the Old Testament also testifies in multiple passages (e.g., Lev. 26:40–45; Deut. 7:12; Isa. 10:21–22; 51:11; 55:3; Jer. 31:8, 16, 31, 34; 32:40; 44:28; Ezek. 16:60, 62; 37:26; Hos. 2:18; 3:5; Zech. 10:9).

The Davidic and New Covenants lie outside the parameters of this chapter but will receive adequate treatment by other participants in this colloquium.

## **Conclusion**

In one sentence, Torah teaching on the land and the people may be summarized as follows: God created all things for his glory, including humankind, his own image, designed to co-reign over all else; but man's sin and fall broke the connection, a rupture that could be mended only by an unconditional covenant pledge of restoration on God's part, the agent of which was the chosen people Israel who, for a time, were set aside because of their covenant disloyalty, but who will be redeemed and returned to the land to carry out successfully the mission to which God had called them until Jesus comes to install the everlasting Kingdom.

## **Study Questions**

1. To whom did God reveal his plan for a special people through whom the whole earth would be blessed?
2. What term in Hebrew is usually employed to describe it as a chosen people?
3. What is Israel's primary purpose in the world?
4. From what name does the term "Hebrew" derive?
5. What is the earliest book to contain the genealogy of David?
6. What is the major difference between the Sabbath command in Exodus 20 and that in Deuteronomy?
7. What is the origin of the term "Semite"?
8. From what tribal descent was Jesus the Messiah?
9. Why was humankind created in the first place?
10. Which two Gospels contain genealogies of Jesus?

## Conference Video

[chosenpeople.com/merrill](https://chosenpeople.com/merrill)



## Interview with Dr. Eugene Merrill

[chosenpeople.com/merrill-interview](https://chosenpeople.com/merrill-interview)

