

Yahweh's Failed Land Promise

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In their desperate efforts to prove that the Bible was verbally inspired of God, inerrancy believers often point to prophecy fulfillment. In my debate with Bill Jackson, he referred to "multiplied dozens of Old Testament prophetic utterances, fulfilled in minute detail in the New Testament, and in such a manner that there could be no contrivance at all," (Jackson-Till Debate, p. 3). As is true of all who use the prophecy-fulfillment argument, Jackson could only claim "multiplied dozens" of prophecy fulfillments; he could not cite a single verifiable example of a fulfilled OT prophecy.

As I said in the debate, the "prophecy fulfillments" that are invariably cited in support of this argument never actually "happened except in the fertile imaginations of a few religious mystics whose fanciful interpretations of certain events have been swallowed hook, line, and sinker by gullible people like our Mr. Jackson," (Jackson-Till Debate, p. 17). When logical analysis is applied to these alleged instances of prophecy fulfillment, it quickly becomes obvious that there is no real evidence of fulfillment. Time would fail me if I tried to analyze the many alleged prophecy fulfillments that inerrantists have pointed to, so instead I will concentrate on a failed prophecy that they never say much about.

On several occasions prophetic statements were made in the Pentateuch about the land that Yahweh, the tribal god of the Israelites, had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These were clearly stated promises that Yahweh would give the land of the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites to the seed of Abraham. In Deuteronomy 7:17-24, for example, Yahweh presumably made this emphatic promise:

If thou shalt say in thy heart, These nations are more than I; how can I dispossess them? Thou shalt not be afraid of them: thou shalt well remember what Yahweh thy God did unto Pharaoh, and unto all Egypt; the great trials which thine eyes saw, and the signs, and the wonders, and the mighty hand, and the outstretched arm, whereby Yahweh thy God brought thee out: so shall Yahweh thy God do unto all the peoples of whom thou art afraid. Moreover Yahweh thy God will send the hornet among them, until they that are left, and hide themselves, perish from before thee. Thou shalt not be affrighted at them; for Yahweh thy God is in the midst of thee, a great God and a terrible. And Yahweh thy God will cast out those nations before thee by little and little: thou mayest not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase upon thee. But Yahweh thy God will deliver them up before thee, and will discomfit them with a great discomfiture, until they be destroyed. And he will deliver their kings unto thy hand, and thou shalt make their name to perish from under heaven: there shall no man be able to stand before thee, until thou have destroyed them," (ASV with Yahweh substituted for Jehovah).

The substance of this prophecy was repeated in such places as Exodus 23:20-33; Deut. 4:33-39, Deut. 7:1-2, and Deut. 31:1-8. In some of these passages, the names of the "seven nations greater and mightier than thou" to be driven out of the land were also specified as they were above: the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Jebusites, and the Perizzites.

When Joshua assumed the leadership of Israel after the death of Moses, the land promise was renewed in very specific terms:

Now it came to pass after the death of Moses the servant of Yahweh that Yahweh spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, to you have I given it, as I spake unto Moses. From the wilderness, and this Lebanon, even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your border. There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee; I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of good courage; for thou shalt cause this people to inherit the land which I sware unto their fathers to give them, (Joshua 1:1-6, ASV, Yahweh substituted).

Just before crossing the Jordan, Joshua repeated the promise:

And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of Yahweh your God. And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Hivite, and the Perizzite, and the Girgashite, and the Amorite, and the Jebusite. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into the Jordan," (Joshua 3:9-11).

To stress the emphatic nature of parts of the land promises that Yahweh made to Israel, I have underlined certain statements. So when all of the passages I have quoted and listed are considered, we see that the prophecies included all of the following:

Without fail, God would drive out of the land beyond the Jordan ALL of the people then possessing it. No man among these people would be able to stand before the Israelites all the days of their lives. The Israelites would drive out the nations possessing the land and utterly destroy them and the memory of their name under heaven. They were to make no covenants with the nations in this land or show mercy to them (Deut. 7:2). Every place that the sole of their feet would tread upon, God would give to them. Their empire would stretch from the Red Sea unto the river Euphrates and from the great sea (Mediterranean) toward the going down of the sun.

To circumvent obvious contradictions that result when Yahweh's promises are compared to biblical history recorded later, inerrantists contend that the land promises made to the Israelites were conditional on their good behavior, but there is no support for that dodge in the Bible. In Deuteronomy 9:3-7, another prophetic passage relating to the land promise, specific notice was

taken of the fact that the Israelites of the then present generation were themselves undeserving of the land but that it would be given to them for the sake of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:

Know therefore this day, that Yahweh thy God is he who goeth over before thee as a devouring fire; he will destroy them, and he will bring them down before thee: so shalt thou drive them out, and make them to perish quickly, as Yahweh hath spoken unto thee.

Speak not thou in thy heart, after that Yahweh thy God hath thrust them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness Yahweh hath brought me in to possess this land; whereas for the wickedness of these nations Yahweh doth drive them out from before thee. Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thy heart, dost thou go in to possess their land; but for the wickedness of these nations Yahweh thy God doth drive them out from before thee, AND THAT HE MAY ESTABLISH THE WORD WHICH YAHWEH SWARE UNTO THY FATHERS, TO ABRAHAM, TO ISAAC, AND TO JACOB. Know therefore, that Yahweh thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiff-necked people.

So here is another clear statement. God was not giving the land to the Israelites because of their righteousness; in fact, he considered them a stiff-necked, undeserving people. (See also Exodus 33:1-6.) He was giving the land to them because of the unconditional promise that he had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Unless he did this, he would have reneged on a promise made to the patriarchs with no strings attached, (Gen. 12:7; 13:14-16).

The unconditional nature of Yahweh's land promise was restated in Leviticus 26:42-45:

Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob; and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land. The land also shall be left by them, and shall enjoy its sabbaths, while it lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity; because, even because they rejected mine ordinances, and their soul abhorred my statutes. And yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them; for I am Yahweh their God; but I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am Yahweh.

So time and time again, it was specifically said that the Israelites would be given the land of Canaan, REGARDLESS OF THEIR OWN CONDUCT, so that Yahweh could fulfill the promise that he made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Inerrantists who deny this are denying biblical statements worded just as plainly as anything ever said on the subject of creation, the resurrection, baptism, final judgment, and other important Christian doctrines.

As proof that the land promise was dependent on the good behavior of the Israelites, inerrantists like to cite Exodus 23:20-33 where a conditional suggestion was attached to the promise: "But if thou shalt indeed hearken unto his voice (the angel that was to go before them, FT) and do all that he speak, then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies and an adversary unto thine adversaries." In emphasizing the if in this verse, they overlook an important point. If Yahweh said that he would fulfill the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob regardless of the wickedness of the generation that went in to possess the land, he could not turn around later and say that he would make good his promise only if the people were obedient. That would put a contradiction into the scriptures that the inerrantists would have to explain, because the land promise could not have been both conditional and unconditional at the same time. And clearly the passages cited earlier were unconditional in promising the land to the Israelites.

So after Yahweh had unconditionally promised to the Israelites that they would be given the land beyond the Jordan, under Joshua's leadership they went in to possess it, and initially the Bible claims that they succeeded. The claim, in fact, was that Joshua thoroughly and completely subdued the land:

So Joshua smote ALL the land, the hill-country, and the South, and the lowland, and the slopes, and all their kings: he left none remaining, but he utterly destroyed all that breathed, AS YAHWEH, THE GOD OF ISRAEL, COMMANDED. And Joshua smote them from Kadesh-barnea even unto Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, even unto Gibeon. And all these kings and their land did Joshua take at one time, because Yahweh, the God of Israel, fought for Israel. And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, unto the camp to Gilgal, (Joshua 10:40-43, ASV, Yahweh for Jehovah).

In places, the Bible is almost boringly repetitious, but this writing characteristic of the "inspired" spokesmen of God often works to the advantage of those who seek to debunk the myth that God verbally inspired the writing of the Bible. In this case, it makes it easy to establish that a complete, unqualified fulfillment of the land promises was claimed by the "inspired" men who wrote the Old Testament. Consider, for example, the clearly stated claim of the following passages:

And Yahweh said unto Joshua, Be not afraid because of them (the armies of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, and Hivites poised for battle against the Israelites, FT); for tomorrow at this time will I deliver them up ALL slain before Israel: thou shalt hock their horses, and burn their chariots with fire. So Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them by the waters of Merom suddenly, and fell upon them. And Yahweh delivered them into the hand of Israel, and they smote them, and chased them unto great Sidon, and unto Misrephothmaim, and unto the valley of Mizpeh eastward; and they smote them, until they left them none remaining. And Joshua did unto them as Yahweh bade him: he hocked their horses, and burnt their chariots with fire. And Joshua turned back at that time, and took Hazor, and smote the king thereof with the sword: for Hazor before time was the head of all those kingdoms. And they smote all the souls that were therein with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them; THERE WERE NONE LEFT THAT BREATHED: and he burnt Hazor with fire. And all the cities of those kings, and all the kings of them, did Joshua take, and he smote them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed them; as Moses the servant of Yahweh commanded. But as for the cities that

stood on their mounds, Israel burned none of them, save Hazor only; that did Joshua burn. And all the spoil of these cities, and the cattle, the children of Israel took for a prey unto themselves; but every man they smote with the edge of the sword, until they had destroyed them, neither left they any that breathed. As Yahweh commanded Moses his servant, so did Moses command Joshua: and so did Joshua; he left nothing undone of all that Yahweh commanded Moses, (Joshua 11:6-15, Yahweh substituted).

So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that Yahweh spake unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land had rest from war, (Joshua 11:23, Yahweh substituted).

So Yahweh gave unto Israel ALL the land which he sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And Yahweh gave them rest round about, according to all that he sware unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; Yahweh delivered all their enemies into their hand. THERE FAILED NOT AUGHT OF ANY GOOD THING WHICH YAHWEH HAD SPOKEN UNTO THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL. ALL CAME TO PASS, (Joshua 21:43-45, Yahweh substituted).

These statements are fully as clear as Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38. Yahweh gave unto Israel ALL the land that he swore to give to their fathers, and the dimensions of that land were clearly laid out in such passages as Exodus 23:20-33 and Joshua 1:1-6. Its borders extended from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, from the wilderness, to Lebanon, and to the great river Euphrates. Furthermore, the fulfillment claims state that the Israelites left none alive to breathe and that not a man of all their enemies stood before them. Who were those enemies? Time and time again, they were named in the land prophecies: the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Gergashites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Jebusites, and the Perizzites. Yet after audaciously claiming in the passages noted above that every aspect of Yahweh's land promise had been fulfilled, the writer(s) turned around and brazenly admitted that some parts of the land were not conquered and some of the peoples in these lands were not driven out:

Now Joshua was old and well stricken in years; and Yahweh said unto him, Thou art old and well stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed. This is the land that yet remaineth: all the regions of the Philistines, and all the Geshurites; from the Shihor, which is before Egypt, even unto the border of Ekron northward, which is reckoned to the Canaanites; the five lords of the Philistines; the Gazites, and the Ashdodites, the Ashkelonites, the Gittites, and the Ekronites; also the Avvim, on the south; all the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah that belongeth to the Sidonians, unto Aphek, to the border of the Amorites; and the land of the Gebalites, and all Lebanon, toward the sunrising, from Baalgad under mount Hermon unto the entrance of Hamath; all the inhabitants of the hill-country from Lebanon unto Misrephothmaim, even all the Sidonians; them will I drive out from before the children of Israel: only allot thou it unto Israel for an inheritance, as I have commanded thee, (Joshua 13:1-6, Yahweh substituted).

This statement flatly contradicts the claim in Joshua 11:23 that Joshua "took the whole land, according to all that Yahweh spake unto Moses" so that the land had rest from war. All of the territorial regions singled out in this passage as land that remained to be possessed lay within the boundaries that were laid out in Joshua 1:1-6 to specify the scope of the land that Yahweh would give to the Israelites. So if Joshua had indeed taken "the WHOLE land, according to all that Yahweh spake unto Moses," as claimed in Joshua 11:23, how could it be said later that "very much land" remained to be possessed? Perhaps some of our inerrantist readers can answer this question. They are good at coming up with far-fetched, how-it- could-have-been scenarios to "explain" obvious contradictions in the Bible.

Most of the rest of the book of Joshua and the better part of Judges contradict all of the fulfillment claims that I have noted above. Joshua 15:63 says, "And as for the JEBUSITES, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem unto this day." Yet the Jebusites were specifically named as one of the seven nations "greater and mightier than thou" that would be utterly destroyed. Joshua 16:10 says, "And they drove not out the CANAANITES that dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwell in the midst of Ephraim unto this day, and are become servants to do taskwork." But the Canaanites were specifically listed as one of the seven nations that would be utterly destroyed. Joshua 17:12-13 says, "Yet the children of Manasseh could not drive out the inhabitants of those cities; but the Canaanites would dwell in that land. And it came to pass, when the children of Israel were waxed strong, that they put the Canaanites to taskwork, and did not utterly drive them out." Yet the promise had clearly been that the Canaanites would be utterly driven out, that NO MAN would be able to stand before the Israelites all the days of their lives. Making servants of them can hardly be considered fulfillment of a prophecy declaring that they would be "utterly driven out." In fact, it contradicts a restriction noted on page three that expressly prohibited the Israelites from making covenants with the inhabitants of their promised land.

In Joshua 16:10; 17:12-13; Judges 1:1-5; 1:9; 1:21; 1:27-36; 3:1-6 and many other places, references are made to the people that the Israelites could not drive out of the land, and many of these were specific references to people from the "seven nations greater and mightier than thou" that Yahweh promised that he would drive out WITHOUT FAIL. But he didn't, and so the inerrancy champions have some serious explaining to do. IF "Yahweh gave unto Israel ALL the land which he sware to give unto their fathers" (Joshua 21:43-45) and IF "they possessed it (the land) and dwelt therein" (same passage) and IF Yahweh "gave them rest round about, according to ALL that he sware unto their fathers" (same passage) and IF "there stood not a man of ALL their enemies before them" (same passage) and IF "Yahweh delivered all their enemies into their hand" (same passage) and IF "there failed not AUGHT of any good thing which Yahweh had spoken unto the house of Israel" (same passage) and IF "all came to pass" (same passage), how could it have been that some of the enemies of Israel were still in the land during the time of the book of Judges and how could it have been that some of the people of the "seven nations greater and mightier than thou" were still dwelling with the children of Israel "unto this day"?

Someone has a lot of explaining to do, and it isn't those of us who reject the inerrancy doctrine.

