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# The Folly of Fulfillment Theology

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In recent years a new form of Replacement Theology has arrived on the Christian scene called Fulfillment Theology. Like Replacement Theology it ends up contending that, since the time of Jesus, the Jews no longer enjoy a god-given national destiny in the land of Canaan. This time around it is not the Church that replaces Israel and takes over all her promises in scripture but in fact Jesus. He fulfills in His life and redemptive work all the promises that God ever made to the Jews; even the promise that Canaan would be the everlasting possession of the Jewish people! Jesus is the Promised Land. This allows the proponents of this theory to distance themselves from the awful evil (as in the Apartheid State) and anti-Semitic consequences (as in the Christian pogroms of history) of Replacement Theology. However, they end up believing the same thing!

## God and Israel's modern day restoration

Much of the above is backed up by scripture but falsely so! For these people it always comes down to the same thing and that is to find a way to disinvest the Jews of any divine action or biblical significance in Israel's modern day restoration. Once this position has been taken Israel can be viewed as any other nation state entangled in an internal conflict. This usually means that any people can lay claim to the Holy Land and they do. Israel is an occupying bully robbing other peoples of their land and refusing to hand over to them the old biblical city of Jerusalem as their Capital. The Jews occupy the city even though they have a three thousand year unbroken relationship with it and will again this year, as they have for centuries, pray "This year in Jerusalem."

Today many Christians back this thesis and even some evangelicals are beginning to abandon their traditional pro-Israel biblical position in favor of Fulfillment Theology. Also the fact that some leading Christian academics and Ministers have thrown their weight behind it is giving added momentum to its dissemination and acceptance. Nevertheless it remains a flawed theological thesis.

## Jesus and Fulfillment

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the Law till all is fulfilled." Matthew 5:17-18

When Jesus said that He came to fulfill the Law He meant just that! That is, He would perfectly fulfill in His life the moral demands of the Law on behalf of a fallen world. He would thus prove to be perfect man and would give His life on the cross so as to remove the curse of the Law from our lives. (Galatians 3:13) Jesus thus saves us by the power of an indestructible life! (Hebrews 7:16) So, in Matthew five, six and seven He was not talking about the Covenant that God made with Abraham but about the Covenant that God made with Moses! The context of these chapters proves this overwhelmingly. Jesus was expounding the inward nature of the Law and our failure to keep it. He would thus fulfill the demands of it by living in us! This is the very essence of the New Covenant. (Jeremiah 31:31-35; Romans 8:3-4) This, and only this, is what He fulfills! To suggest then that He was in some way by this statement debunking the Abrahamic Covenant is a giant leap into error!

## Moses and Fulfillment

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.” Deuteronomy 18:15

Moses, referring to Jesus, said that God would raise up a Prophet like unto himself. Again Moses was the great Lawgiver of Israel and this Prophet (Messiah) to come would be unique, one of a kind and fulfill the obligations of the Law on behalf of a fallen world. Moses was not undermining the Abrahamic Covenant by this statement. He was in fact giving it “executive authority.” Abraham’s Covenant is God’s decision to save the world (Galatians 3:8) but Moses’ Covenant is God’s decision to teach the world that it needs to be saved! (Romans 3:20) Moses empowers Abraham! That is, the world must be convicted of sin (Moses) before it can be saved from it (Jesus). The Apostle John put it this way...”For the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (John 1:17)

The fact that Jesus’ life was in some measure a re-enactment of Moses’ life does not imply that God has torn up His covenant with Abraham. This is a leap of total presumption and those who make it are not on “biblical territory”. Rather it implies that God is going to “tear up sin” in our lives and that Israel would identify the Prophet by His likeness to Moses! They have no excuse for not recognizing Him. So, Jesus:

1. Lived under the Law (Galatians 4:4)
2. Was circumcised according to the Law (Luke 2:25-28)
3. Was taught by the word of the Law (Luke 2:46)
4. Was for forty days in the wilderness proved by the Law (Luke 4:1-13)
5. Went up to a mountain to deliver the Law (Matthew 5:1-2)
6. Died to fulfill the demands of the Law on behalf of all people.(Romans 8:3-4)

This proved that He was Moses’ successor but it did not abolish, in any way, the promises of God made to Israel in the Abrahamic Covenant. These promises set aside the Jewish people as the “vehicle of world redemption” (Romans 3:1-2; 9:1-5) and they designate Canaan as the everlasting possession of the people of Israel (Genesis 17:7-8) Indeed the writer of the book of Hebrews holds up the Abrahamic Covenant, and God’s faithfulness to it, as proof that He will not fail believers in Jesus who have been saved by the New Covenant; (Hebrews 6:13-20) this, years after Jewish rejection of Jesus’ Messianic credentials. To suggest that these promises have been somehow abolished or are fulfilled by Jesus is just not true. The Hebrew Prophets clearly “see” a day of restoration for the Jewish people that goes beyond the Babylonian return. (Amos 9:11-15; Isaiah 2:1-4; Zechariah 14)) It is passages like the one in Amos that confound “fulfillment proponents” and lead some of them to state that these scriptures need to be “de-zionized!” That is, altered because they contradict their position! This in itself is a defeat for them.

## Paul and Fulfillment

“Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ.” Galatians 3:16

In Galatians three Paul is not arguing for or suggesting that the Abrahamic Covenant has been reconstructed or entirely fulfilled in Jesus. Indeed he is not referring to a “post coming of Jesus new reality” but to an aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant that was enshrined in it when God first made it with Abraham two thousand years before! That is, while the Covenant has clear promises to Abraham’s descendants (plural) (Genesis 17:7) it also holds a promise in a descendant (singular) (Genesis 22:18). In other words, from the very beginning a promise of land and purpose is given to the descendants but, at the same time, a promise of salvation and reconciliation to God is given in a descendant; Jesus! The two promises are mutually interdependent. That is, the one cannot do

without the other. (Luke 1:54-55;71-75)

The real point that Paul was making is that salvation is not by works of the Law, that convict of sin (Galatians 2:16; 3:24)), but by faith in the finished work of the “seed” to come. This promise was made 400 years before the Law was given (Galatians 3:17-18) Paul was not tampering with the Abrahamic Covenant and suggesting that it has been reconstructed.

It must be remembered that the promise to the Seed, as of one, was made two thousand years before Jesus came. If this was the full extent of the promise in the Abrahamic Covenant then God would never have led the “seeds” out of Egypt into the Promised Land because no promise was made to them! One cannot and should not read Galatians three like that. This is the absurd position of those who hold to fulfillment theology. The Bible itself debunks this nonsense! It is a false theology just like its sister called Replacement Theology.

## Conclusion

It must be remembered that in Paul’s time there was only one cannon of scripture; the Hebrew Scriptures or, what many call the Old Testament. It was to these scriptures that Paul was chiefly referring when he wrote that “all scripture is inspired and given of God” etc. (2Timothy 3:16) The same goes for Peter when he wrote that scripture is given by holy men who were “moved by the Holy Spirit.” (2Peter 1:21) In other words the New Testament, though equally inspired, is in fact, a faithful exposition of the Old Testament scriptures. When we realize this we honor all of scripture and recognize that no “prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation.” Those who seek to disinvest the Jewish people of a biblical significance to their modern day return to Zion are in essence seeking to re-write great God-given and holy covenants that God has given to them. They are thereby ‘playing with fire’ and placing themselves in conflict with the purpose of God. In all of this it is good to remember that we can do nothing against the truth. (2Corinthians 13:8) This should make us all tremble!

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