

DID GOD FULFILL EVERY GOOD PROMISE?: TOWARD A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF JOSHUA 21:43–45

Gregory H. Harris, Th.D.
Professor of Bible Exposition
The Master's Seminary

Some Bible students believe that God's promises concerning land to Abraham's physical descendants have already been completely fulfilled. Those who hold to a 'fulfillment of the land promises' position often consider Josh 21:43–45 as proof that God already fulfilled the land promise of the Abrahamic Covenant to the Jewish people. Consequently, one should expect no future fulfillment for either the land or the nation of Israel because of this passage. However, a proper understanding of Josh 21:43–45 and the broader context of the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants shows that it is incorrect to claim that a statement concerning God's faithfulness in Joshua means that God no longer is concerned with Israel and Israel's relationship to the land of promise.

Introduction, Purpose, and Format

In a recent article on Replacement Theology, Mike Vlach summarizes what many who study Scripture know to be the case:

Few theological issues are as hotly debated as the Israel/church issue. It is a constant topic of debate between covenant theologians and dispensationalists . . . At issue is whether the New Testament church replaces, fulfills, and/or displaces national Israel as the people of God. And if so, to what extent does this affect national Israel?¹

¹ Michael J. Vlach, "Various Forms of Replacement Theology," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 20, No. 1 (Spring 2009): 57. Vlach presents three divisions of replacement theology: (1) "punitive supersessionism," where God punished Israel for rejecting Jesus as Messiah; (2) "economic supersessionism," where it was God's intention all along to replace the promises made to Israel with the church; and (3) "structural supersessionism," which in varying degrees minimizes the Old Testament scriptures (57–69).

Narrowing down the primary divisive issue between the two theological camps ultimately comes down to one key issue:

The land-promise aspect of God's promise to Abraham, a promise repeated frequently throughout the OT, is the crux of the issue for both critics: to whom does the land of Israel belong? Covenant theologians, in line with their view that the church has replaced Israel in the ongoing program of God, deny that the land-promise to Israel is still valid.²

The interpretational significance of this land debate must be dealt with carefully, if for no other reason, based on the high frequency of the land passages that occurs in Scripture. Kaiser observes:

In the Old Testament few issues are as important as that of the promise of the land to the patriarchs and the nation of Israel. In fact, ארץ, "land" is the fourth most frequent substantive in the Hebrew Bible. Were it not for the larger and more comprehensive theme of the total promise with all its multifaceted provisions, the theme of Israel and her land could well serve as the central idea or the organizing rubric for the entire canon.³

In a sense this is a by-product of the core question of what hermeneutic should be employed in reference to these promises given by God and will be examined in this article. However, who owns the land and whether it has any eschatological significance is much more than some "coffee table debate" among theologians. This issue has far-reaching implications even in national and worldwide political policy,⁴ let alone the interpretational significance for the remainder of all Scripture.

² Robert L. Thomas, "Dispensationalism's Role in the Public Square," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 20, No. 1 (Spring 2009): 19. Jeffrey L. Townsend, "Fulfillment of the Land Promise in the Old Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142 (October–December 1985): 320, argues that "the nature of the fulfillment of the land promise made to Abraham and his descendants is an eschatological watershed."

³ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Promised Land: A Biblical–Historical View," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138 (Oct–Dec 1981): 302.

⁴ See Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004) for one interpretation of how dispensationalism affected American foreign policy in the latter part of the twentieth century. For a more hostile attitude to dispensationalism and broadened to include both the United States and Great Britain, see Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road to Armageddon?* (Leicester Lei 7GP, England: Inter–Varsity, 2004). In response to Sizer's assessment of Christian Zionism being one of the most powerful and destructive forces in America, see Phil Baty, "Zionism Thesis Stirs Up a Storm," <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=1990483§ioncode=26> (accessed on 11/15/2011), and Thomas Ice, "Christian Palestinianism," <http://www.bible-prophecy-toda.blogspot.com/2009/07/christian.palestinianism.html> (accessed on 11/13/2011). For a less politically motivated approach to this politically hot issue, see Stanley A. Ellisen, *The Arab–Israeli Conflict: Who Owns the Land?* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1991).

Many readers of the Bible who hold the fulfillment of the land promises position consider Josh 21:43–45 to be their proof text clearly showing that God has already fulfilled the land promises given the Jewish people in the Abrahamic Covenant, and consequently one should expect no future fulfillment for either the land or the nation of Israel:

So the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hand. Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.⁵

While at first glance these verses do indeed seem to give credence to such a conclusion that God has already fulfilled all the land promises to Israel, such an interpretation seems to be surprisingly relatively new and growing in popularity, often appearing in Internet chatrooms⁶ or blogs and in some rather recently published books.⁷

While by no means limited to them, one of the most vocal groups claiming that God fulfilled the Abrahamic Covenant land promises is New Covenant Theology which “is a relatively new system which, though not yet well defined, attempts to combine strengths of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology and to eliminate the weak points between the two.”⁸ With their understanding that the land promises have been fulfilled by the time of Joshua, it would not be surprising that

⁵ All Scripture references used are from the NASB 1971 edition unless otherwise stipulated.

⁶ An example of a posted website referring Joshua and the land promises is Michael D. Marlowe, editor, The Bible Researcher web site. The first part of affirmation #9 of their doctrinal statements says this: “The entitlement of any one ethnic or religious group to territory in the Middle East called the ‘Holy Land’ cannot be supported by Scripture. In fact, the land promises specific to Israel in the Old Testament were fulfilled under Joshua” <http://www.bible-researcher.com/openletter.html> (accessed 11/15/2011). A list of signatories for this open letter is at the bottom of the page.

⁷ While this will be developed throughout this article and reasons given why it has not been a common interpretation, just a sampling of those of amillennial and/or covenantal persuasion who do not hold this teaching from Josh 21:43–45 are John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Joshua*, trans. Henry Beveridge, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 247–48; Keil of Carl Friedrich Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel*, Commentary on the Old Testament. 10 vols. (reprint; Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001), 2:156–57; Martin H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 314–15; Dale Ralph Davis, *No Falling Words: Expositions of the Book of Joshua* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988) 157–58; J. Alberto Soggin, *Joshua: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 201–06; Robert G. Boling, *Joshua*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), 498–500; and C. J. Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, Bible Student’s Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 152–53.

⁸ Dennis M. Swanson, “Introduction to New Covenant Theology,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 18, No. 1 (Fall 2007): 149. That entire journal evaluates various claims and doctrines of New Covenant Theology. Of particular relevance to this article is William D. Barrick, “New Covenant Theology and the Old Testament Covenants,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 19, No. 1 (Fall 2007): 165–80.

Josh 21:43–45 would play a vital role in their taking this position.⁹ Thus it is concluded by New Covenant theologians that Josh 21:43–45 is their irrefutable “trump card” concerning God’s total fulfillment of Abrahamic Covenant obligations, at least as far the land is concerned. Lehrer writes as a representative of New Covenant Theology:

The book of Joshua tells us that when the Israelites had finally taken most of the land, all of the promises given to Abraham had been fulfilled (Joshua 21:43–45). Nothing else needed to happen for God to make good on His word to Abraham. His promises of rest and possession of the land had been fulfilled, just like his promises of many descendants and a special relationship with God. It was all fulfilled by the time of the conquest of the Land of Canaan under Joshua.¹⁰

Adams argues along the same lines: “So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there . . . *Not one of the LORD’s good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled. Joshua 21:43–45, emphasis added.*”¹¹

However, it should be noted that seeing a fulfillment of the land promises is by no means limited to New Covenant Theology. Cox presents the same conclusion written decades earlier:

Did God keep the promise to Joshua? The futurist cannot allow it . . . We could summarize these promises concerning the land of Canaan being inherited by Israel as follows: The land was promised through Abraham; the promise was renewed to Isaac, Jacob and Moses. It was fulfilled literally through Joshua . . . How sad it is then that some theologians are still arguing that they are yet future! Much of the futurist belief rests on the assumption that God has never given Israel all the land promised through Abraham.¹²

Mathison summarizes the fulfillment view and sites the importance Josh 21:43–45 plays in proving this: “There are numerous other passages in the Old Testament that

⁹ See Thomas, “Dispensationalism’s Role in the Public Square,” 26–29, and Barrick’s “New Covenant Theology and the Old Testament Covenants,” 171–75 for a critique of how New Covenant Theology proponents understand the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant having been fulfilled.

¹⁰ Steven Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* (n.p. 2006), 32. Lehrer’s reasoning “when the Israelites had finally taken *most* of the land, *all* of the promises given to Abraham had been fulfilled” (emphasis mine) is contradictory in and of itself, but this will be developed in more detail elsewhere in this article.

¹¹ Michael W. Adams, “In Defense of the New Covenant: A Theology Response to Richard Barcellos’ Book, In Defense of the Decalogue: A Critique of New Covenant Theology,” <http://www.ncbfnet/PDF/Defense/pdf>, 8, (accessed 01/10/10). [emphasis in the original]

¹² William Cox, *The New Covenant Israel* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1963), 19–20.

tell us that God has already fulfilled the land promises given to Israel (Josh 11:23; 21:21–45; Neh 9:25). Joshua 21:43–45 explicitly declares that *all* the land promised Israel was given to them.”¹³ DeMar shows how interpreting Josh 21:43–45 as being already fulfilled affects the interpretation of other important prophetic passages. As part of the support that there is no time gap between Daniel’s sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks, DeMar presents his second point of argumentation as a known and an indisputable fact: “In addition, the text [Dan. 9:26] says nothing about the restoration of Israel to her land as a fulfillment of some covenant obligation. All the land promises that God made to Israel were fulfilled (Joshua 21:43–45).”¹⁴ Obviously the importance of this is noteworthy: if Josh 21:43–45 can be shown to have already been fulfilled, then the point supporting the fulfillment of Daniel 9 is valid; however, if it can be shown that these promises have not been fulfilled, then his second point of his support for interpreting Dan 9:26 has no basis in one’s eschatological interpretation elsewhere.

The purpose of this article is to examine the validity of the claims that Josh 21:43–45 inarguably proves that all the land promises given by God to Israel have already been fulfilled and consequently have no future eschatological significance. This will be done by (1) a brief overview of the covenants of God up to Joshua 21, (2) an examination of the original geographic boundaries of the Abrahamic Covenant, with special note of the importance of the Euphrates River, (3) a survey of the eschatological significance of Lev 26:40–45, (4) examining strategic passages from the Book of Joshua, (5) critiquing a popular proponent who argues for the complete fulfillment of the Josh 21:43–45, and finally (6), a proposed interpretation.

An Overview of the Covenants of God Pertaining to Joshua 21

Although Joshua 21 is often the beginning place of the study for many who cite these verses as proof that God has already fulfilled the land promises of the Abrahamic Covenant, this is not an appropriate place to begin; there are many other crucial matters to consider. For instance, the Abrahamic Covenant, to which they refer, is the second covenant recorded in Scripture. The first covenant in Scripture, the Noachic Covenant, is important since although often not the case in a consistent manner, the hermeneutic in how one approaches a covenant of God should be noted.¹⁵ Before summarizing the six covenants of God found in the Bible (the Noachic, the Abrahamic, the Priestly, the Mosaic, the Davidic, and the New Covenant), Busenitz rightly reasons: “Let no one underestimate the importance and significance of a correct understanding of the divine covenants. It is much more than an intellectual pursuit. They provide a most foundational theological anchor

¹³ Keith A. Mathison, *Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995), 27. [emphasis in the original]

¹⁴ Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness* (Atlanta: American Vision, 1999), 332.

¹⁵ For an excellent article depicting the component parts of the covenants of God, see Irvin A. Busenitz, “Introduction to the Biblical Covenant; the Noachic and the Priestly Covenant,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 10, No. 2 (Fall 1999): 173–89.

for understanding God's working in human history."¹⁶ Further, "Understanding these six covenants will shape a person's understanding of Scripture. It will reflect a hermeneutical course *which will determine the pitch of one's eschatological sails*."¹⁷ This is important: while most people do not realize it, how one interprets the covenants of God will ultimately and immensely factor into one's eschatology; there is no way to avoid this.

The Noahic Covenant

While we are not able to go into detail of the covenants of God within this article, it is necessary to at least examine the component parts of the covenants under which Joshua would be familiar since they affect the interpretation of Josh 21:41–43.¹⁸ God's promises in the Noahic Covenant are plainly seen in Scripture. In fact, it is within the framework of the Noahic Covenant in Gen 6:18 that the word "covenant" first occurs in Scripture where, before sending the flood, God promises, "I will establish My covenant with you . . ."¹⁹ It is significant that God refers to it as His covenant because He alone makes it; it is a unilateral, not a bilateral, covenant. From the text one would expect (1) that the enduring seasons are an aspect of this covenant (Gen 8:22); (2) God's own emphatic self-identification that "Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you" (Gen 9:9); (3) His solemn promise that never again will all flesh be destroyed by means of the flood (9:11); (4) the rainbow will be the sign for the covenant as long as the covenant is valid (9:12–17), and (5) significantly, the covenant is presented as an "everlasting covenant" between God and all flesh that is on the earth (9:16).²⁰ The Noahic Covenant is the broadest of God's covenant promises because it includes not only all of humanity from that point forward, but it also includes "every living creature" (9:15).

Also, for those who accept the Scripture as the true Word of God, the Noahic Covenant should factor into understanding other portions of the Bible since the Noahic Covenant is not an isolated covenant with some special hermeneutic employed to understand it, when compared to other covenants—especially the unilateral ones—that God would make. Nothing within the text nor in the literal fulfillment of God's subsequent judgment on the earth would give any indication that God intended some allegorical method of interpretation in both what He accomplished in Genesis 6–9 nor for what He promised for the future. Busenitz properly warns:

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* [emphasis added].

¹⁸ This article does not include the Priestly Covenant since it does not directly relate to the argumentation of Josh 21:43–45. However, see Busenitz, *ibid.*, 186–89 for matters related to this, especially its eschatological significance beyond the Book of Joshua.

¹⁹ See *ibid.*, 175–76 for the OT etymology of the word "covenant."

²⁰ For matters related to the use of *olam* ("everlasting") see Allan A. MacRae, "עולם, *olam*," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament [TWOT]*, edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr. and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1:379–80.

When God enters into a unilateral covenant guaranteed only by His own faithfulness; when God enters into a covenant void of any human requirements to keep it in force; when God establishes a covenant that will continue as long as there is day and night and summer and then, *then* great care must be taken not to erect any man-made limitations that would bankrupt the heart and soul of these covenants and annul the glorious full realization of all that He promised through them. Their significance cannot be over-estimated.²¹

Or stated differently, nothing inherently exists within the text indicates that Yahweh had no intention of fulfilling His covenant in a literal way. Nothing within the text gives the reader any indication that at some time in the future (such as Joshua 21), God would consider destroying His earth again by means of worldwide flood, reasoning that since He had *already* fulfilled every good promise contained within the Noahic Covenant by Josh 21:43–45—especially by having not destroyed His world—so consequently He was now free to do so again at any time in the future if He so desired. If one consistently follows this line of reasoning, no one should expect Yahweh to keep His Word about anything, for if one applied this same hermeneutic to the Noahic Covenant as many do for Josh 21:45, there would be no way of knowing whether *any* of the good covenantal promises of God still existed or at what point He ended them. People who hold the Bible to be true would ridicule this approach to Scripture (and rightly so) because it would so weaken God’s promises within the Noahic Covenant, but even more so, it would cast disparaging insults at the person and faithfulness of God because He cannot be trusted to keep His Word. However, it is foundational to note that how one interprets the Noahic Covenant establishes hermeneutical grounds for how the other of God’s covenants should be interpreted unless sufficient grounds for changing the hermeneutic can be established.

The Abrahamic Covenant

As stated before, it is not the nature of this article to point out all the theological elements and proponents of the different views related to the Abrahamic Covenant. But certain crucial elements of the Abrahamic Covenant should be noted to see if they do in fact show that they have been fulfilled by the time of Josh 21:43–45 as some claim.²² A brief survey of what God promised in this eternally important covenant is warranted.

In Gen 12:1–3 Yahweh instructed and promised Abram (1) to go forth from his country and relatives to the land Yahweh would show him (Gen 12:1); (2)

²¹ Busenitz, “Introduction to the Biblical Covenant,” 182–83. [emphasis in the original]

²² For a detailed analysis of the Abrahamic Covenant and various related issues, see Keith H. Essex, “The Abrahamic Covenant,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 10, No. 2 (Fall 1999): 191–212, and Cleon L. Rogers, Jr. “The Covenant with Abraham and its Historical Setting,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127 (July–September 1970): 241–57. See also Robert Saucy, “The Crucial Issue Between Dispensational and Non-Dispensational Systems,” *Criswell Theological Review* 1, No. 1 (Fall 1986): 149–65 for a survey of key interpretational issues between these two groups.

that God would make him a great name (Gen 12:2); (3) that Yahweh will bless those who bless him and will curse the one who curses him (Gen 12:3a); and (4) “in you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:3b). Genesis 12:7 adds, “And the LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this land.’ So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.” In that He did not ratify the covenant at that time, Yahweh spoke of what He would accomplish in the future.

The next reference to what would eventually become the Abrahamic Covenant occurs in Gen 13:14–17: “And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, ‘Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered. Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you.’”

It should be noted that with Gen 13:15 the land promises are given forever (עולם, *olam*). This is the first reference to everlasting since the everlasting Noahic Covenant and the exact word used in Gen 9:12 and 9:16. While this in and of itself does not prove the eternity of the covenant,²³ at least the same consideration should be given to this usage as in Genesis 9, which is often not the case. At the very least one should expect that “everlasting” should go beyond the not too distant future of Joshua 21. Yet even beyond this, Kaiser argues against those who want to reduce or remove the eternal significance of what God has promised in the Abrahamic Covenant by dividing it into separate parts:

There is an important point that is to be made in the fact that all three parts of the covenant (i.e., the seed, the land, and the gospel [blessing]) were bound together as *one* promise with a promise that this one promise was *eternal*. Most Christians will grant that the seed and gospel aspects of this promise are eternal, but somehow they think it is possible to dissect the eternal promise of the land from the other two eternal aspects! But to use a theological scalpel to cut out one part is to expose the rest of this same covenant to diminution and a time limitation.²⁴

Subsequently, the ratification of the Abrahamic Covenant that occurred in Genesis 15 has perpetual consequences that God has placed squarely upon Himself and no else for its fulfillment:

²³ For support that the term “eternal” should not automatically be diminished in importance, see Townsend, “Fulfillment of the Land Promise in the Old Testament,” 323–24.

²⁴ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. “The Land of Israel and the Future Return (Zechariah 10:6–12),” in *Israel the Land and the People: An Evangelical Affirmation of God's Promises*, ed. H. Wayne House (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 211 [emphasis in the original].

So solemn was this covenant with its gift of the land that Genesis 15:7–21 depicted God alone moving between the halves of the sacrificial animals after sunset as “a smoking furnace and a flaming torch” (v. 17) . . . Thus, He obligated Himself and only Himself to fulfill the terms of this oath. Abraham was not asked or required likewise to obligate himself. The total burden for the delivery of the gift of the land fell on the divine Provider but not on the devotion of the patriarch. As if to underscore the permanence of this arrangement, Genesis 17:7, 13, 19 stress that this was to be a בְּרִית עוֹלָם, “an everlasting covenant.”²⁵

One essential point should be noted: Gen 15:8 gives the specific land boundaries of the Abrahamic Covenant: “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.’”²⁶ It is crucial to note that no future tense occurs at this point as Yahweh previously employed; on the day He alone ratified His covenant He declared, “I have given this land.” Hailing from Ur of the Chaldeans, Abram would be quite familiar with the Euphrates River. There is no indication that one who grew up close to this enormously long river would hold any mystical or allegorical interpretation as to what Yahweh promised:

How was Abram to understand God’s words? They were plain enough. Historically, the geographical location was quite specific in this and later wordings of the land promise. Dispensationalism interprets the words as God intended them and as Abram understood them. No typology. No spiritualizing. No symbolism. No preunderstanding of how the words must fit into a system of theology. No reading back into the words a later special revelation. To take the words in a sense other than what God intended and Abram understood is a distortion. Though Abram’s environment was no longer sinless [as when God first communicated with Adam and Eve], God was still perfectly capable to communicating clearly. He cannot lie and must be taken at His word. Abram understood God correctly, and so Israel became a nation chosen by God in possession of a particular plot of land on the present earth’s surface.²⁷

It is likewise essential to observe that the territory described is quite large with a landmass of approximately “300,000 square miles or twelve and one-half times the

²⁵ Kaiser, “The Promised Land: A Biblical-Historical View,” 303. Although other Scripture passages are important for a fuller study of the Abrahamic Covenant, this article will limit itself to this point. For additional matters such as Genesis 22 and how the New Testament relates to the Abrahamic Covenant, see Essex, “The Abrahamic Covenant,” 205–12.

²⁶ For a study of these specific boundaries given in Scripture as well as argumentation for where the Euphrates serves as a northern border, see Kaiser, “The Promised Land: A Biblical-Historical View,” 303–05. See also Townsend, “Fulfillment of the Land Promise in the Old Testament,” 324–28 for an examination of the specific land boundaries given and a proposed map of all the land thus mentioned.

²⁷ Thomas, “Dispensationalism’s Role in the Public Square,” 36.

size of Great Britain and Ireland.”²⁸ This stands in stark contrast to the surprisingly small traditional borders that include a territory that extends only “about 150 miles north to south (going from Dan to Beersheba) and an average of thirty miles east to west from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River Valley)” and stands in sharp contrast with only a landmass of about 10,000 square miles.²⁹ The significance of this specific landmass will later be explored in this article and must factor into interpreting the land promises given by God referred to in Josh 21:43–45, but it should suffice for the time being that the difference between the land promised by God and that actually gained by the Jewish people comes to approximately only one–thirtieth of the designated landmass.

As previously noted with the Noahic Covenant, nothing within the text offers any reason that to believe that Yahweh would disregard His promises within the Abrahamic Covenant at some future date. For those who quote from the Noahic Covenant and use the literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutic in doing so would have to explain why they would switch hermeneutics within the same book by the same author recording words spoken by the same God. How would one know that God did not intend the same allegorical interpretation of the promises within the Noahic Covenant? Furthermore, Thomas’ point is worthy of consideration:

One wonders whether those who think the land promises to Abraham will go unfulfilled because of Israel’s faithlessness would say the same thing about God’s promise of making Abraham a blessing to all nations. Genesis 12:3c records, “And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” Would they say that this promise has also been abrogated by Israel’s lack of faithfulness? This promise of spiritual blessing to Abraham of being a special blessing to all the nations is still in effect and will be fulfilled to the letter just like another aspect of the Abrahamic covenant, the land promise.³⁰

Along this same line of reasoning, it would have to be answered by those who would decide what parts of the covenant could be forfeited, and on what grounds hermeneutically could it be shown that this did in fact transpire by Joshua 21.

The Mosaic Covenant

The Mosaic Covenant was ratified in Joshua’s lifetime (Exod 24:1–8), and he and the Jewish nation lived under its mandates. Time does not permit a full

²⁸ Charles L. Feinberg, *Israel: At the Center of History and Revelation*, 3d ed. (Portland: Ore: Multnomah, 1980), 168.

²⁹ Ronald B. Allen, “The Land of Israel,” in *Israel the Land the People: An Evangelical Affirmation of God’s Promises*, 17–18, 24. For a more precise and expanded study of the description and dimensions of the biblical land, see Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, rev. and enlarged ed., trans. by A. F. Rainey (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979) 3–15.

³⁰ Thomas, “Dispensationalism’s Role in the Public Square,” 26.

treatment of all the elements of this next covenant of Yahweh.³¹ However, among other things, one tremendously relevant point of importance should be marked, namely, that on three different occasions within the Mosaic Covenant Yahweh Himself once more referred to the Euphrates River as part of the land boundaries for the Abrahamic Covenant after He ratified it in Gen 15:18: (1) Exod 23:31: “And I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River Euphrates; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you”; (2) to the nation Joshua would soon lead into the Promised Land, Yahweh instructed in Deut 1:7, “Turn and set your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites, and to all their neighbors in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the lowland and in the Negev and by the seacoast, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates;” and (3) Deut 11:24: “Every place on which the sole of your foot shall tread shall be yours; your border shall be from the wilderness to Lebanon, and from the river, the river Euphrates, as far as the western sea.” This is significant because the Book of Joshua opens with Yahweh once more instructing the new leader that the land He had given them was “from the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun, will be your territory” (Josh 1:4). More about this will be seen later in this article, but suffice it to say that if Yahweh intended some other meaning than the physical Euphrates River, then the burden of proof is on those to determine what indeed Yahweh intended to mean by specifically and repeatedly naming this river if He did not mean this. And even beyond this, it must further be explained how Joshua would understand God’s intended meaning in attempting to be obedient to Yahweh’s commands and instructions so that Yahweh would grant the opportunity for success set before Him (Josh 1:8).

The Eschatological Significance of Leviticus 26

Another pertinent feature of the Mosaic Covenant that must factor in when interpreting Josh 21:43–45 is Leviticus 26. In this section of the Mosaic Covenant, Yahweh promised His blessings on the nation of Israel if they obeyed Him (Lev 26:1–13), followed by certain judgments on the Jewish people if they lived in covenant violation against Him (Lev 26:14–39). “While the blessings were relevant to the Abrahamic Covenant’s promises regarding land and blessing, the cursings represented a five-stage process of Mosaic Covenant vengeance.”³² As repeatedly seen throughout this section, all the curses inflicted by Yahweh were intended to bring the Jewish nation back into covenant obedience to Him (e.g. Lev 26:18, 21

³¹ See William D. Barrick, “The Mosaic Covenant,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 10, No. 2 (Fall 1999): 213–32 for this and particularly how the ratification of the Mosaic Covenant does not annul any of the previous covenant promises of Yahweh. Also see John H. Sailhamer, “The Mosaic Law and the Theology of the Pentateuch,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, 53 (1991): 241–61.

³² William D. Barrick, “Inter-covenantal Truth and Relevance: Leviticus 26 and the Biblical Covenants,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 21, No. 1 (Spring 2010): 82. The five stages are (1) debilitation and defeat (Lev 26:16–17), (2) drought (vv. 18–20), (3) devastation by wild beasts (vv. 21–22), (4) deprivation by siege (vv. 23–26) and (5) deportation (vv. 27–38) [Ibid. n. 2].

etc.). Included in the penalties for blatant and on-going covenant violation, Yahweh pronounced the following judgment regarding the promised land of Israel in Lev 26:31–35:

“I will lay waste your cities as well, and will make your sanctuaries desolate; and I will not smell your soothing aromas. And I will make the land desolate so that your enemies who settle in it shall be appalled over it. You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste.

“Then the land will enjoy its sabbaths all the days of the desolation, while you are in your enemies’ land; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it will observe the rest which it did not observe on your sabbaths, while you were living on it.”

Significantly, Leviticus 26 is given to the nation while they were still at Mount Sinai (Lev 26:45) and before even the spies had been sent out to scout the land (Numbers 13–14). So decades before the nation entered the land that Yahweh had promised them, their existence in the land—or lack thereof—had already been decreed by Yahweh, based on either their covenant obedience or disobedience to Him, especially as prescribed in the Mosaic Covenant. As Kaiser writes, “The ownership of the land (as a gift from God) is certain and eternal, but the occupation of it by any given generation is conditioned on obedience.”³³ It should be noted in the previous chapter how Yahweh viewed the land: He claimed it is as His own: “The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me” (Lev 25:23). For those who think too much is made about the land promises in the Bible, this verse should not be taken lightly: to this day the land remains Yahweh’s.

However, in spite of the covenant violations and even when the promised exile would eventually occur, Leviticus 26 concludes this section of divinely promised blessing and cursing of the nation of Israel as Yahweh revealed His future intention regarding both His land and His people:

“If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me, and also in their acting with hostility against Me—I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies—or if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land. For the land shall be abandoned by them, and shall make up for its sabbaths while it is made desolate without them. They, meanwhile,

³³ Kaiser, “The Promised Land: A Biblical-Historical View,” 307.

shall be making amends for their iniquity, because they rejected My ordinances and their soul abhorred My statutes.

Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them, breaking My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God. But I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am the LORD” (Lev 26:40–45).

Leviticus 26:40–45 is a tremendously important portion of Scripture in understanding God’s future intention regarding both the Jewish people and the land He had promised them in the Abrahamic Covenant. But this is far from the case with many theologians since “Leviticus is not normally the first source students of Scripture consult when discussing eschatology.”³⁴ Barrick rightly summarizes the importance of Leviticus 26 in understanding that the “failure of theologians and expositors to give as much attention to Leviticus 26 as they have given to Deuteronomy 27–28 has impoverished the church’s doctrinal corpus.”³⁵ Nor is this “19th century Darbyism” that concludes, “The theory of futurism concerning Israel is a recent teaching, having originated about 1830.”³⁶ This is the inspired Word of God the moment Yahweh first issued it. To claim the promises of Lev 26:40–45 as a 19th century teaching would make “the just shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17), or “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1) restricted to the “relatively new” teaching originating at the Protestant Reformation rather than the first century when Paul wrote this.

Again, whether one includes or dismisses Leviticus 26 in one’s eschatology has extremely far-reaching interpretational implications in later biblical passages. Barrick summarizes the eschatological significance of Leviticus 26:

Leviticus 26 contains revelation referring to Israel’s future repentance and restoration, which are confirmed by both OT and NT. Since their repentance and restoration have not yet occurred, their fulfillment is eschatological. Leviticus 26’s relationship to the Abrahamic Covenant ties fulfillment to the land God promised to give to the descendants of Abraham. The fulfillment of the land promises awaits Israel’s repentance. When Israel turns to God and confesses her sins, God will restore her to the promised land. *Chronologically, Leviticus 26 is the first detailed description of Israel’s eschatological repentance and restoration.* It provides significant evidence that disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant results in the removal of the blessings promised in the Abrahamic Covenant. The chapter is at the heart of the OT prophets’ announcements concerning the future messianic kingdom. A proper

³⁴ William D. Barrick, “The Eschatological Significance of Leviticus 26,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 16, No. 1 (Spring 2005): 95.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

³⁶ Contra Cox, *The New Covenant Israel*, 73.

understanding of the prophetic program of the OT fully integrates the revelation of Leviticus 26.³⁷

As was done previously in this article with other promises to which Yahweh bound Himself, one should take the same approach to what He promised in Lev 26:40–45, and in this case, how it relates to Josh 21:43–45. In order for the promise Yahweh made in Lev 26:40–45 to have been fulfilled by the time Josh 21:45 occurred, the following elements must have transpired historically and must be shown that they did indeed occur: (1) a national confession of the nation's sin and the iniquity of their forefathers (26:40), (2) Yahweh acted with hostility to exile the Jewish nation into the land of their enemies (26:41), (3) after the national confession of their sin in the exile, Yahweh would remember His covenant with Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham (26:42), (4) the land must be abandoned until all its sabbaths be made up (26:43a), (5) the Jewish nation must have made amends for iniquity once in exile (26:43b), (6) Yahweh must not abhor them nor break His covenant even when the people are in the land of their enemies (26:44), and (7) He must remember His covenant He made with the Jewish people (26:45). These are just as much “the good promises of Yahweh” as is anything else promised elsewhere by Yahweh from Gen 3:15 onward. Even more fitting is that these good promises of Yahweh follow the context of Leviticus 26 that contains multiple references to the land promises:

Leviticus 26 depicts the promised land as the setting for the fulfillment of both blessings (vv. 4–12) and curses (vv. 14–38). It is noteworthy that Ps. 72:16–17 describes the worldwide extension of the Davidic kingdom in terms reminiscent of the blessings in Leviticus 26. That is one of the indications of the eschatological significance of this chapter.³⁸

By no stretch of imagination can any of these elements have transpired historically, especially since the people were in the land in Joshua 21 and had not yet been exiled. Consequently, the burden of proof is on those who make sweeping claims that Yahweh had indeed fulfilled “all His good promises.” Also, as before, one would have to determine what Yahweh in fact did attempt to communicate by these promises of the future if He did not mean to exile and to regather the Jewish nation.

Just before the transition in leadership from Moses to Joshua, God warned that the nation of Israel was already leaning away from Him toward rebellion. After “The Song of Moses” (Deuteronomy 32), which God intended as “a witness for Me against the sons of Israel” (31:19), Moses concluded this section stressing the utter necessity of obedience to Yahweh, particularly how it related to the longevity of the

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 125–26 [emphasis added]. For other eschatological promises within the Pentateuch, such as the four uses of “the latter days” in the Pentateuch (Gen 49:1, Num 24:14–24; Deut 4:30 and 31:29) and their importance, see John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:132. For the Messianic implications of Gen 49:1 and “the last days,” see John H. Sailhamer, “The Messiah of the Hebrew Bible,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, No. 1 (March 2001): 12–22.

³⁸ Barrick, “The Eschatological Significance of Leviticus 26,” 117.

people dwelling in the land that the LORD was about to give them. Deuteronomy 32:44–47 states:

Then Moses came and spoke all the words of this song in the hearing of the people, he, with Joshua the son of Nun. When Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, he said to them, “Take to your heart all the words with which I am warning you today, which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, even all the words of this law. For it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life. And by this word you shall prolong your days in the land, which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess.”

Based on the biblical text Essex concisely summarizes matters related to the nation of Israel in both the near and distant future of what to expect:

The Torah closes with an anticipation of a fulfillment of this promise to Abraham in the conquest of the land under Joshua in the near future (Deut. 31:1–8). However, the Torah predicts that Israel would forfeit the land because of disobedience and be scattered among the nations (Deut. 29:22–28). In the distant future, after the scattering (Deut. 4:30–31), the LORD will return repentant Israel to the land in accordance with His covenant with Abraham (Lev. 26:40–45).³⁹

In regard to which Jewish generations would enjoy the promise of Yahweh to live in the land versus the utter veracity of the eternal covenant God bound Himself to, Kaiser observes: “The conditionality was not attached to the promise but only to the participants who would benefit from these abiding promises . . . The promise remained permanent, but the participation in the blessings depended on the individual’s spiritual condition.”⁴⁰

A fuller summary from the promises God stated within this article one would expect: (1) for Yahweh to go before the nation as He lead them to bring them into the land (Deut 31:3), (2) but in spite of Yahweh’s faithfulness, Israel would fall away and serve other gods (Deut 31:16) because (3) even when Moses was alive the intents of their hearts were already away from God (Deut 31:21b). Because of this (4) Yahweh would ultimately disperse the disobedient people into the nations (Deut 30:1), (5) the land would enjoy its sabbaths (Lev 26:43), but (6) He would not reject or abhor His people (Lev 26:44–45). Eventually, (7) after the blessing and the curse had come upon the people in all the nations where Yahweh had dispersed them (Deut 30:1), (8) the nation collectively would repent and return to the LORD (Deut 30:2). Then (9) Yahweh would regather them into the land from their

³⁹ Essex, “The Abrahamic Covenant,” 206–7.

⁴⁰ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 90–91. See also an extended discussion by Bruce K. Waltke, “The Phenomenon of Conditionality within Unconditional Covenants, in *Israel’s Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, ed. Avraham Gileadi (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 123–39.

captivity (Deut 30:3–5). Yet even beyond these blessings, (10) Yahweh Himself will one day circumcise their hearts and the hearts of their descendants “to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live” (Deut 30:6). Furthermore (11) God Himself would inflict strong judgments on the nations who afflicted Israel (Deut 30: 7), because, after all, in being utterly true to His word, Yahweh had previously promised, (12) “I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you I will curse” (Gen 12:3), which is most assuredly “a good promise of the Lord.” Finally, after Yahweh has brought every bit of these elements about, (13) the nation will *again* obey Him, living in total covenant obedience (Deut 30:8) and then receive once more God’s covenant blessings on them (30:9–10). These verses require God’s strong judgment for disobedience on the Jewish nation yet contain His promise for the same people whom He judged to again obey Him after they had once been disobedient and thus afflicted by Him, including even exile into pagan nations. If anyone claimed such blessings for the New Testament church, according to context of Deuteronomy 30, they can occur only after “the blessing and the curse” has come upon them, and they are banished to all the different nations where God had banished them (Deut 30:1).

Significant Factors from the Book of Joshua

Three pertinent items within the Book of Joshua help to gain the proper interpretation of Josh 21:43–45, namely, (1) God’s opening charge to Joshua in 1:1–4, (2) that Joshua 13–21 is one unit within the book that presents the dividing the land among the Jewish people, and (3) the opening summary statement God made in Josh 13:1–7.

God’s opening charge to Joshua in Josh 1:1–4 began with specific boundaries, markers that would have been quite familiar to Joshua:

Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ servant, saying, “Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun, will be your territory.

The mention of the Euphrates River in Josh 1:4 is extremely significant in that, first, as already shown, God had previously included it as part of the boundaries of the land promise on four different occasions, beginning with the ratification of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 15:18), occurring at Sinai in the chapter before the ratification of the Mosaic Covenant (Exod 23:41), and twice in Deuteronomy (Deut 1:7; 11:24). Second, Josh 1:4 is the only time the Euphrates River occurs in the entire Book of Joshua; not one reference exists that shows that even any exploratory excursion was ever made to the Euphrates, such as decades earlier when Joshua had

been a part of the spies sent out to survey the land in Numbers 13, let alone any verses that show it was portioned out as part of the land divisions in the book and gained as its rightful promised land possession. It should also be noted that Joshua would have been quite familiar with the promises and warning of the recently given Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28–30, as well as the ultimate future hope for both the land and the Jewish nation revealed in Lev 26:40–45.⁴¹

Another important item that is often neglected by those who quote Josh 21:43–45 as a proof text that God has already fulfilled the land promises of the Abrahamic Covenant is the division of the land given in Joshua 13–21. Joshua 13–21 is one segment within the book, and individual chapters must be viewed within this context. Actually, within Josh 21:43–45 are the last three verses in this section and offer “a glorious summary” of the land division.⁴² The opening verse of the this section, Josh 13:1, is extremely important in that *God Himself* evaluated what He had accomplished thus far as well as what remained yet to be accomplished: “Now Joshua was old and advanced in years when the LORD said to him, ‘You are old and advanced in years, and very much of the land remains to be possessed.’” Yahweh then delineated groups within the land that were part of the “very much of the land that remains to be possessed” in Josh 13:2–7:

“This is the land that remains: all the regions of the Philistines and all those of the Geshurites; from the Shihor which is east of Egypt, even as far as the border of Ekron to the north (it is counted as Canaanite); the five lords of the Philistines: the Gazite, the Ashdodite, the Ashkelonite, the Gittite, the Ekronite; and the Avvite to the south, all the land of the Canaanite, and Mearah that belongs to the Sidonians, as far as Aphek, to the border of the Amorite; and the land of the Gebalite, and all of Lebanon, toward the east, from Baal-gad below Mount Hermon as far as Lebo-hamath. All the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon as far as Misrephoth-maim, all the Sidonians, I will drive them out from before the sons of Israel; only allot it to Israel for an inheritance as I have commanded you. Now therefore, apportion this land for an inheritance to the nine tribes, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.”

Because of Josh 13:1–7, which deals with particulars related to the land of Canaan, let alone the added reference in Joshua 1:4 to the territory associated with the Euphrates that exists outside of the land that they currently occupied, it is beyond argument that Israel never possessed the land as stipulated in the Abrahamic Covenant during the days of Joshua. This obvious lack of gaining all the land that God promised is a significant point marked by both non-dispensational and dispensational camps. Regarding the land promises given to Israel, several

⁴¹ Barrick notes, “Interestingly, the land itself is treated as a separate participant in the covenant. It can be the recipient of the restitution of the sabbaths that it had been denied (vv. 33–34, 43)” (Barrick, “Eschatological Significance of Leviticus 26,” 117).

⁴² David M. Howard, Jr. *Joshua* in The New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 397.

acknowledge the clear teaching that “the Israelites never came into undisputed possession of the whole promised land, to the full extent of the boundaries laid down in Num 34:1–12, never conquering Tyre and Sidon, for example . . .”⁴³ Bright writes that the promise only “began to find fulfillment—though never a complete fulfillment—in the giving of the Promised Land.”⁴⁴ Noting the contrast between God’s faithfulness and Israel’s incomplete obedience, Hess adds, “Thus the tendency has been to understand here a process of dispossession. Israel had begun it under God but the nation’s failure to complete it was a failure in its obedience to complete the process.”⁴⁵ Mabie offers this fuller explanation of how incomplete the conquest of the land of Canaan was during Joshua’s life:

Although it is commonly misconstrued that only the book of Judges reflects the incomplete aspects of the conquest, both Joshua and Judges reflect the reality of unconquered peoples, cities and territories. Indeed, the chapter following the list of defeated kings [Josh. 12] articulates a daunting list of unconquered areas spanning from the far south to the far north, particularly on the Coastal Plain and in the Jezreel and Beth Shean Valleys (Josh 13:1–6, 13). Similarly, during the dividing of the land, other unconquered areas are noted (cf. Josh 15:63; 16:10; 17:11–16). Likewise, at the tent of meeting in Shiloh the Israelites are rebuked for “neglecting to possess” the land, since there are still seven tribes that have not received their inheritance (Josh 18:1–3).⁴⁶

Davis adds a good summary statement of what Josh 13:1 teaches: “All this land was, in one sense, on the edges of Israel’s land. If such was the land that remained, it implies that Israel had achieved a significant measure of the dominance in the main part of Canaan. Not that such dominance was total, but it was substantial.”⁴⁷

Joshua 21:43–45, which concludes the land division chapters (Joshua 13–21), plays a strategic role in understanding the entire book:

The passage is a theological conclusion of the entire book up to this point . . . The editor emphasizes here the completeness of God’s action . . . No matter what the political situation of Israel in a later generation, be it the division of the kingdom, the fall of the northern kingdom, or the destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile, Israel could not blame God. God had faithfully done for Israel

⁴³ Keil and Delitzsch, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel*, 157.

⁴⁴ John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 96–97.

⁴⁵ Richard S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1996), 285.

⁴⁶ F. J. Mabie, “Geographical Extent of Israel,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson, eds. (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity, 2005), 318.

⁴⁷ Davis, *No Falling Words: Expositions of the Book of Joshua*, 110–11.

what he promised. Blame belonged on Israel's shoulders, not God's.⁴⁸

After noting the failure of Israel to take full possession of the land, Davis eloquently adds the following and laments the neglect by some of the true importance of Josh 21:43–45:

Lastly, we must look at the grand testimony of Yahweh's fidelity. This passage is the theological heart of the Book of Joshua; it deliberately echoes the concerns of 1:1–9 (cf. especially 1:2–3, 5–6) and structurally draws a line across everything that has preceded. Here is the jugular vein of the book. Yet two major commentaries published within the last twenty years allot nine and five lines respectively to this section: an inexcusable blunder.⁴⁹

However, several who study the Book of Joshua over the centuries have wrestled with how to harmonize the statement of incomplete conquest in Josh 13:1 with the statement of what seems to be total conquest in Josh 21:43–45, John Calvin being among them:

In order to remove this appearance of contradiction, it is necessary to distinguish between the certain, clear and steadfast faithfulness of God in keeping his promises, and between the effeminacy and sluggishness of the people, in consequence of which the benefit of the divine goodness in a manner slipped through their hands . . . Wherefore, although they did not rout them all so as to make their possession clear, yet the truth of God came visibly forth, and was realized, inasmuch as they might have obtained what was remaining without any difficulty, had they been pleased to avail themselves of the victories offered to them.⁵⁰

Davis acknowledges the apparent conflict between the two texts, and offers this assessment:

. . . namely, that there remained much land to be possessed (13:1) and there were enemies that Israel was not driving out (e.g. 16:10;

⁴⁸ Trent C. Butler, *Joshua*, Word Biblical Commentary, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 234–35.

⁴⁹ Davis, *No Failing Words*, 157.

⁵⁰ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Joshua* 248. Donald H. Madvig's, *Joshua*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebel (Grand Rapids: Zondervan: 1992), 353, wording is a little confusing: "The statement 'the LORD gave Israel' emphasizes God's sovereign action . . . The land was God's to give Israel. All of Canaan was not yet in Israel's possession, nor were all the enemies destroyed. Nevertheless Israel was in control of 'all the land.'" Then, "Yet God's oath to Abraham had now been fulfilled" (ibid). If the land was not in Israel's possession, then it does not reason that God's oath to Abraham had been fulfilled.

17:12–13). But we must remember that the biblical writer . . . knew of these other factors, and, if he had thought them to be directly contradictory to 21:43–45, he would surely have noticed it (and, presumably addressed the matter). Apparently the biblical writer felt no unbearable rub here . . . Yahweh had given Israel all the land (v. 43a)—witness the fact that they possessed and lived in it (v. 43b). The fact that they might possess still more of it (cf. Exod. 23:30) does not negate this.⁵¹

Mabie offers his harmonization of the apparent contradiction between Josh 13:1 and 21:43–45:

Despite the reality of unconquered areas, the *entire* land is divided among the tribes by lot at the command of Yahweh (Josh 13:6); thus all the land is given as Yahweh promised (cf. Josh 21:43–45). This interplay between given and unconquered land is nicely reflected in Joshua's exhortation to the leadership of Israel in Joshua 23, which is situated "a long time after Yahweh had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies." While this speech notes Israel's victories in the land and stresses that everything Yahweh promised had "come to pass," it also clarifies that some allotted land is still inhabited by unconquered nations (Josh. 23:4, 9–10, 14).⁵²

Mabie further emphasizes "the parallel realities" of Josh 13:1 and 21:43–45, just as God had specifically promised in "the blessing and the curse" of Leviticus 26/Deuteronomy 28:

In addition, Joshua stresses that Yahweh will continue to drive out these remaining nations in line with Israel's faith and obedience (Josh 23:6), but that unfaithfulness and disobedience will put this in jeopardy" (Josh 23:12–13, 15–16). In short, this speech helps to clarify the theological nuances surrounding the parallel realities of *completely given land* and *incomplete conquest* (cf. Num. 33:53; Deut. 8:1, 11:22–23).⁵³

Others understand Josh 21:43–45 as highlighting different aspects of God's character. Woudstra thus writes on God's faithfulness as seen in this passage:

⁵¹ Davis, *No Failing Words* 158. While in agreement to what is written above, this author differs changing the "might possess still more land" to "will possess still more land," since the land boundaries of the Abrahamic Covenant had not remotely come close to being possessed by Israel as an everlasting possession plus the eschatological promises of Lev 26:40–45.

⁵² Mabie, "Geographical Extent of Israel," 318 [emphasis in the original]. See also T. A. Clarke "Complete v. Incomplete Conquest: A Re-examination of Three Passages in Joshua," *Tyndale Bulletin* 61, No. 1 (2010) 89–104, who argues that the tension between the two texts within Joshua is not as strong as it first appears.

⁵³ Mabie, "Geographical Extent of Israel," 318. [emphasis in the original]

This passage constitutes one of the key sections of the entire book, for one may learn from it the revelational purpose that the Holy Spirit had in inspiring the human author to compose the book. This purpose is to let the full light of revelation fall upon the faithfulness of the covenant God who keeps his word once given to the forefathers. As such, this passage summarizes the first part of the book and points out its basic message. Verse 43 refers primarily to the distribution of the land described in chs. 13–21; v. 44 reflects the actual stories of the Conquest as told in chs. 1–12; and v. 45 places the entire book under the perspective of God’s faithfulness.

The book of Joshua views the conquest of Canaan as both complete and incomplete. In 23:4–5 these two lines run side by side, an indication that the author means them to be equally valid, although the emphasis on the completeness of the Conquest is predominant.⁵⁴

Further commenting on Josh 21:45, Woudstra reasons that God’s faithfulness should result in thanksgiving: “No wonder, then, that the final word of this passage is one of thankful recognition to the faithfulness of God. Instead of failing to come to pass (Heb. “fall to the ground”), *the good words* of the Lord, spoken to the house of Israel (viewing the people as a unity, another leading motif) have all come out (cf. 23:14). This note of thanksgiving reverberates in the NT as well (cf. Rev. 11:16–18).”⁵⁵

Hank Hanegraaff’s *The Apocalypse Code* and Joshua 21:43–45

An appropriate case study on how one’s interpretation of Josh 21:43–45 affects one’s eschatology can be seen in Hank Hanegraaff’s *The Apocalypse Code* because he (1) presents a hermeneutical and exegetical system of interpretation in a book devoted entirely to eschatology, (2) strongly denounces any futurist’s interpretation of the land of Israel’s eschatological role, (3) presents himself as “The Bible Answer Man” on his radio program, and (4) is one of the leading and most vocal proponents that Josh 21:43–45 clearly shows that God’s complete fulfillment of His promises to the Jewish nation regarding the land:

First, the land promises were fulfilled in the fore future when Joshua led the physical descendants of Abraham into Palestine. As the book of Joshua records, “The LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled

⁵⁴ Woudstra, *Joshua*, 314. So also Ziese: “An understanding of 21:43–45 begins with the observation previously offered, namely, that this is an assessment specifically directed toward Yahweh. Here is an affirmation of the belief that the *leadership of Yahweh* has not flagged or failed” (Mark Ziese, *Joshua* in *The College Press NIV Commentary*, eds. Terry Briley and Paul Kissling (Joplin: MO: College Press, 2008), 351. [emphasis in the original])

⁵⁵ Woudstra, *Joshua*, 315. [emphasis in the original]

there.” Indeed says Joshua, “Not *one* of all the LORD’s good promises to the house of Israel failed; everyone was fulfilled” (Joshua 21:34, 45). Even as the life ebbed from his body, Joshua reminded the children of Israel that the Lord had been faithful to his promises. ‘You know with all your heart that *not one* of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled, *not one has failed*’ (Joshua 23:14).⁵⁶

One can already see the effects on Hanegraaff’s eschatology in that even in writing about Joshua, he cannot bring himself to refer to the land as the land of Israel but rather instead refers to Joshua leading “the physical descendants of Abraham into Palestine.” Joshua would have been totally unaware of this unbiblical designation because not once does God ever refer to the land He promised in the Abrahamic Covenant as “Palestine”—and this is significant—as Kaiser has previously shown that the word “land” is the fourth most frequent substantive in the Hebrew Bible.⁵⁷ The designation Palestine does not occur in the Pentateuch—or elsewhere in Scripture—to describe the land promises of the Abrahamic Covenant, the name only coming into use many centuries later during “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24).⁵⁸ The repeated use throughout the Bible, particularly the Pentateuch, is to “the land of Canaan,” such as Gen 17:8: “And I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”⁵⁹ Psalm 105:8–12 likewise gives reference to God and the Abrahamic Covenant and His giving of the land of Canaan as the portion of their inheritance:

He has remembered His covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations, the covenant which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac. Then He confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, saying, “To you I

⁵⁶ Hank Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 178. [emphasis in the original]

⁵⁷ Kaiser, “The Promised Land: A Biblical–Historical View,” 302.

⁵⁸ NASB has no occurrences of the word “Palestine” in all of Scripture while the KJV has one occurrence in Joel 3:4, which NASB translates as “Philistia.” See J. H. Paterson, “Palestine,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, eds. Merrill C. Tenney and Steven Barabas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 4:564, for the origin of the word “Palestine,” its connection with ancient Philistia, and for a survey of the use of the word beginning with the Roman occupation and its increased political usage during the twentieth century. Paterson sites the KJV as having the name Palestine four times but has three of the four uses translated as “Philistia” (Exod 15:14; Isa 14:29, 21) and only Joel 3:4 as “Palestine.” “The ASV and RSV, acknowledging the origins of the name, have preferred Philistia in each case, for its primary application was to the Philistine homeland, i.e. the coastlands of E. Mediterranean from Gaza N to Joppa. Application of the name to the wider region lying inland from the coastline was the work of classical writers, so that by the time of the Rom. occupation it could be understood in its modern sense, embodied in the Rom. province of Palestina” (ibid.).

⁵⁹ *Accordance Bible Software* lists 65 hits for “the land of Canaan.” Of these hits, 53 occur in the Pentateuch, and 8 occur in the Book of Joshua. Other than the Ps 105:11 passage cited above, the other occurrences are Judg 21:12, 1 Chron 16:18, and Acts 13:19.

will give the land of Canaan as the portion of your inheritance, when they were only a few men in number, very few, and strangers in it.”

After the conquest led by Joshua, “the land of Israel” became the common designation (1 Sam 13:19, 2 Kings 5:2, 1 Chron 13:3, etc.). Ezekiel 11:17 has God Himself defining the land by this same designation and never as Palestine: “Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries among which you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.””

Hanegraaff’s statements are highly significant in that in *The Apocalypse Code* he makes sweeping claims that by reading his book and employing his “Exegetical Eschatology,” “you will not only be equipped to interpret the Bible for all it’s worth” (xxvii) but also learn a methodology one should employ in any legitimate Bible study, warning against *eisegesis* as reading into the biblical text something that simply isn’t there.⁶⁰ Further Hanegraaff explains that he is not committed “to any particular method of eschatology” but rather argues for “the plain and proper meaning” of a text.⁶¹ He further instructs that the “plain and proper meaning of a biblical passage must always take precedence over a particular eschatological presupposition or paradigm” (2). Using an acronym “LIGHTS” for his hermeneutical system for studying eschatology, the “L” stands for a “literal understanding” of the biblical text. While this sounds very similar to a premillennial understanding of the text, it is the outworking or application of the hermeneutics that cause the interpretational paths to diverge.⁶² Hanegraaff often does indeed take “the plain and proper meaning of a biblical passage” (2), which in reality is calling for a literal, grammatical, historical interpretation of the text. In two of his other works, quoting out of Genesis 9—the section of Scripture dealing with the eternal promises that God made in the Noahic Covenant—Hanegraaff cites Gen 9:6 to show that even after the fall of man, the Bible still refers to man being created in the image of God.⁶³ So from his own reasoning, an everlasting covenant promise of

⁶⁰ Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code* 1 [emphasis in the original]. In the discussion that follows, page numbers from this work will be cited at the conclusion of each quote.

⁶¹ Borderline farcical is Hanegraaff’s claim, “In the final analysis, my purpose is not to entice you to embrace a particular model of eschatology but to employ a proper model of biblical interpretation” (3). This being written after Hanegraaff excoriates in his prologue anyone who would hold to a future for the nation of Israel, i.e. Zionism, and strongly rebukes those who hold “such unbiblical notions” (p. xxii) calling it “inflammatory rhetoric” (p. xxvii). He further warns: “In the pages that follow, you will answer these and a host of other questions by internalizing and applying the principles of a methodology called Exegetical Eschatology . . . In the process you will not only be equipped to interpret the Bible for all it’s worth but you may well discover that you hold the key to the problem of terrorism in one hand and the fuse of Armageddon in the other” (xxvii).

⁶² For instance, the “T” section of his acronym “LIGHTS” is chapter six “Typology Principle: The Golden Key” (161–203). From these previous statements, in reality what Hanegraaff does is employ an allegorized hermeneutic whenever any text does not meet his preterist theology. This allegorizing of different texts basically undermines a great deal of what he would argue against as a literal approach to the text (his “L” section in the LIGHTS acronym). Hanegraaff does not explain what to do if the “L” (literal principle) and the “T” (typology principle) stand at odds with each other.

⁶³ Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993), 131, and Hanegraaff, *Resurrection* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 131.

God found in Gen 9:6 should be interpreted literally and likewise has ramifications up to the present day.

Hanegraaff presents a scriptural synergy principle as means of safeguard in Bible study, and of course, with the thrust of his book, this would especially relate to eschatological studies:

Finally, the *S* in LIGHTS represents the principle of *scriptural synergy*. Simply stated, this means that the whole of Scripture is greater than the sum of its individual passages. You cannot comprehend the Bible as a whole without comprehending its individual parts, and you cannot comprehend its individual parts without comprehending the Bible as a whole. Individual passages of Scripture are synergistic rather than deflective to with respect to the whole of Scripture.

Scriptural synergy demands that individual Bible passages may never be interpreted in such a way as to conflict with the whole of Scripture. Nor may we assign arbitrary meanings to words or phrases that have their referent in biblical history. The biblical interpreter must keep in mind that all Scripture, though communicated through various human instruments, has one single Author. And that Author does not contradict himself, nor does he confuse his servants (9–10).

A good case text for Hanegraaff's eschatological scriptural synergy would be to see how he would handle the divine promises God gave regarding both the land and the Jewish people in Lev 26:40–45, since it is “the first detailed description of Israel's eschatological repentance and restoration.”⁶⁴ Further, these verses were written before the Book of Joshua so that Josh 21:43–45 must be read in light of these previously revealed promises since “and you cannot comprehend its individual parts without comprehending the Bible as a whole” (9). However, Lev 26:40–45 plays no role in the eschatology of *The Apocalypse Code* because its Scripture index has no references within his text to these important eschatological promises that God had made. *The Apocalypse Code* contains three footnotes that cite Lev 26:18, 21, 24, 28, and 33 but makes no comment on these.⁶⁵ So the last verse Hanegraaff cites in Leviticus (either in just listing the references or quoting others) is Lev 26:33 (“You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste”) but omits Lev 26:34–35 that begins with the connective “then:” “Then the land will enjoy its sabbaths all the days of the desolation, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it will observe the rest which it did not observe on your sabbaths, while

⁶⁴ Barrick, “The Eschatological Significance of Leviticus 26,” 126.

⁶⁵ See Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code* 256 n. 64 and 264–65, n. 44 for Leviticus 26:33. On page 265 n. 46 he cites Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, *Charting the End Times* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2001), 84–85 who refer to Leviticus 26:23 in their book. So actually it is LaHaye and Ice who cite these verses and not Hanegraaff.

you were living on it.” Hanegraaff further omits the severe treatment of the Jewish nation during exile (Lev 26:36–39), but even more to the point, Hanegraaff finds no place in his theology for Lev 26:40–45 for the future regathering to the land that Yahweh repeatedly promised. It would be enlightening to see how Hanegraaff would handle Lev 26:40–45 since, to quote him again, he reminds us, “The plain and proper meaning of a biblical passage must always take precedence over a particular eschatological presupposition or paradigm” (2), and “Scriptural synergy demands that individual Bible passages may never be interpreted in such a way as to conflict with the whole of Scripture” (9). Again this is significant because Hanegraaff presents Josh 21:43–45 as empirical proof that *all* the land promises made by God—which should include the multiple land references of Lev 26:40–45—have already been fulfilled by Joshua’s time and thus have no relevance in eschatological studies.

In writing against “Christian Zionists who see the fact that Jerusalem is now completely in the hands of the Jews as validation for the Bible,” Hanegraaff refers to matters related to Deuteronomy 28–30 to support his case:⁶⁶

Modern Israel fails to meet the biblical requirement for return to the land. *As Moses unambiguously warned* [emphasis added] the children of Israel, disobedience against the Lord would result in dispersion (Deuteronomy 28:58–64, 29:23–28), while return to the land requires repentance: “*When* you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart . . . *then* the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from the nations where he scattered you (Deuteronomy 30:2–3).” (196–97; emphasis in the original)

Since Hanegraaff cites Deut 30:2–3 as part of his support, the context of what God promises will occur in Deut 30:1–8 at some undisclosed future time should be considered:

“So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the LORD your God has banished you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you.

⁶⁶ It is the position of this article that the nation of Israel collectively lives in covenant disobedience to Yahweh, and consequently the verses do not apply to them at this time since they as a collective people have not yet repented. Any covenant obedient Jew is presently part of the Body of Christ (Eph. 3). If these are in fact “the last of the last days,” Jerusalem and Israel will indeed play a pivotal role in eschatological events, but that is for another study.

“If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. And the LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers.

“Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.

“And the LORD your God will inflict all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. And you shall again obey the LORD, and observe all His commandments which I command you today.”

The blessing of and curse of Deuteronomy 27–28 forms the immediate context related to Deut 30:1 “So it shall become when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you.” Specifically pertinent to this section is Yahweh’s plainly-stated promise of exile for the disobedient nation found in the curse section of Deut 28:63–65:

“And it shall come about that as the LORD delighted over you to prosper you, and multiply you, so the LORD will delight over you to make you perish and destroy you; and you shall be torn from the land where you are entering to possess it. Moreover, the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth; and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone, which you or your fathers have not known. And among those nations you shall find no rest, and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot; but there the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing of eyes, and despair of soul.”

Since Hanegraaff duly writes “Moses unambiguously warned” (196) in matters related to Deuteronomy 28–30, especially Deut 30:2–3, one would expect the same unambiguous writing by Moses to continue in Deut 30:4–8, especially since this is one section of Scripture and not random verses thrown together. Yet again in the Scripture references of *The Apocalypse Code*, Deut 30:1–5 is quoted in only two footnote citations (265 n. 44 and 266 n. 46) and thus does not factor into Hanegraaff’s eschatology. Deuteronomy 30:2–3 was quoted in the previously cited passage. This is very important because these are the only references out of Deuteronomy 30; or put differently, Hanegraaff quotes Deut 30:2–3 but totally disregards the immediate verses before or those that follow in Deut 30:1–10. This also is important because Deuteronomy 30 harmonizes with what God had previously promised in Lev 26:40–45. As before, Hanegraaff has already acknowledged that Moses wrote unambiguously in this section (196). One would expect the following verses to be written in the same manner. Simply put, Hanegraaff leaves out very pertinent revelation that Yahweh has given regarding the future of both the nation of Israel and the land.

God knew that Israel would fall away from Him, as we have already seen, revealing this before they entered the land: “for I know their intent which they are developing today, before I have brought them into the land which I swore” (Deut 31:21). As Sailhamer described this section, “One can already hear in these words the distant voice of the prophets. Exile is on the way. The future is at risk. There is at this time little room for hope among God’s people.”⁶⁷ So while Yahweh will remain faithful, He realized even that day the nation’s heart was already turning away from Him. However, it must be emphasized that God had already revealed what would transpire in Deut 30:1–10 when the nation would eventually be brought into exile among the nations because of their blatant covenant disobedience as well as His promise to regather them and give them a new heart. Obviously Yahweh saw far past the immediate context of Joshua 21 where Israel, for the most part, was living in covenant obedience to Him and thus received the covenant blessings of dwelling in the land and peace from its enemies, as Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27–28 stipulated.

From an interpretational standpoint, taking these verses as unambiguous and not omitting connected verses from the context, the unambiguous writing of Moses/the Word of the Lord is that when the Jewish nation repents, then Yahweh will indeed restore them both to Himself and then to the land (Deut 30:2–3), is precisely the point. When this does occur, Yahweh will fulfill His promise to return the exiled nation to their land as part of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant (Lev 26:40–45; Deut 30:4–5). To make certain that this will happen, Yahweh Himself will give the nation a circumcised heart to love the LORD their God with all their heart (Deut 30:6), with ultimate New Covenant blessing overtones evident within this verse that God would further delineate in upcoming portions of Scripture.⁶⁸ Further Yahweh will inflict the nations with the same curses that He had inflicted on the Jewish people (Deut 30:7), concluding this section with a repeated statement—to the same Jewish people on whom He had inflicted the curse: “And you shall again obey the LORD, and observe all His commandments which I command you today” (30:8). This follows with another connective “then,” as Hanegraaff previously noted was required in Deut 30:2–3 (197): “Then the LORD your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand . . .” (Deut 30:8a).

Specifically in regard to the Book of Joshua, not one of the items of Deut 30:1–8 had transpired by the time of Joshua 21. As was true for Leviticus 26, Deut 30:1 specifically requires that Israel be banished “in all the nations where the LORD your God has banished you.” The banishment of Israel had not occurred in Joshua 21; obviously the nation had not repented by that time (30:2), and Yahweh had not yet restored them from captivity (30:3). Collective Israel was not yet “outcasts to the ends of the earth” (30:4); consequently Yahweh had not yet brought them again “into the land which your fathers possessed” (30:5). Even beyond these, another good promise of Yahweh was that He would indeed circumcise the heart of the nation so they could obey Him (30:6). In like manner, by Josh 21:43–45,

⁶⁷ Sailhamer, “The Messiah of the Hebrew Bible,” 20.

⁶⁸ See Larry D. Pettegrew, “The New Covenant,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 10, No. 2 (Fall 1999): 251–70 for an examination of the New Covenant in relation to Israel.

Yahweh had not yet “inflicted all these curses” on their enemies (30:7). Nor had God again “prospered them abundantly” after first cursing them, as the nation would receive the promised benefits of covenant obedience to Yahweh (30:9–10). Simply put, by no means can it be shown that all the good promises of Yahweh had been fulfilled by Josh 21:43–45; nor can it be shown even at the present time that this has yet transpired. However, regardless of his imploring people not to allow one’s eschatology to affect the understanding of certain passages but rather let the plain meaning of the text speak for itself (29), Hanegraaff’s predetermined theology has no room for the good promises of Lev 26:40–45 or Deut 30:4–10, omitting and ignoring them and deeming them as having no eschatological relevance, and as stated before, the church’s doctrinal corpus has indeed become impoverished.⁶⁹

Along the same lines of using selective verses and omitting essential other verses, Hanegraaff does so with the Book of Joshua as well. For instance, in the Scripture reference page for *The Apocalypse Code* (289), the only verses cited in the entire Book of Joshua are Josh 21:43, 45, and 23:14, all occurring on one page (178). Hanegraaff’s entire argument is devoid of any reference to God’s charge to Joshua to take the land, which includes a reference to the Euphrates (Josh 1:1–4). Nor is there a reference to God’s beginning statement in the land division section (Josh 13–21), whose opening verses have God Himself declaring that much of the land remained yet to be conquered (Josh 13:1–7).

Conclusion and Significance

At first glance Josh 21:45 does seem all-encompassing: “Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.” But as has been shown, these verses do not sit isolated away from the previous revelation from God. Those who cite Josh 21:43–45 as having fulfilled God’s promises for the land promises of the Abrahamic Covenant⁷⁰ is not so much taking verses out of context (such as John 8:32 “you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” without including the first provisional part of John 8:31: “Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine,’” followed by the connective “and you shall know the truth . . .”), since Joshua 21 does indeed refer to portions of the land promised Israel by God. Those who cite Josh 21:43–45 as proof texts are taking verses *in isolation and exclusion* from previous revelation given by God regarding the specific land boundaries, eschatological promises from the Pentateuch, and even passages within the Book of Joshua from which they make their claim, namely Josh 1:1–4 and 13:1–7. Simply put, those who cite Josh 21:43–45 as proof that God fulfilled all His land promises to Israel do so by excluding and isolating from some very significant problem passages. It is no wonder that Calvin and many others avoided the claim that all of God’s land promises had been fulfilled by God by the time of Josh 21:43–45; this interpretation is inherently weak

⁶⁹ Barrick, “The Eschatological Significance of Leviticus 26,” 29.

⁷⁰ E.g. Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code* 178; DeMar, *Last Day’s Madness*, 332.

and laden with massive—and ultimately unexplainable—theological problems for those who accept the Bible as God’s divine revelation.

It seems better to understand Josh 21:43–45 in a much more restricted manner: Yahweh did indeed fulfill all His good promises up to that time, but Josh 21:45 is just a historical marker in God’s faithfulness and not the pinnacle or completion of His covenant faithfulness:

These verses emphasize the totality of Israel’s success, the overarching picture of complete victory, and the all-encompassing nature of God’s faithfulness to his promises and his people. It is of a piece with similar passages, such as 10:40–42; 11:16–23; and 23:1. It does not echo the passages that stand in tension with it, which speaks of unfinished business, of land that remained to be captured. Yet on its own terms, *it does present an accurate picture of the prevailing situation at the time.*⁷¹

Such an understanding is found elsewhere in Scripture. For instance, Paul’s benediction in Rom 16:25–27 makes a far-reaching statement regarding how far the gospel had gone forth by the time of its composition:

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.

Likewise in Col 1:23 Paul wrote regarding that gospel that the Colossians should not be “moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven.” One would be hard pressed to argue that the Lord intended that the gospel had indeed “been made to *all* the nations” (Rom 16:26) or “proclaimed *under all creation* under heaven” (Col 1:23) by the time Paul wrote these verses, or even almost two thousand years later at the time of this writing, that no unreached people groups remain. One day all nations under heaven will be reached, as Jesus Himself declared, “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come” (Matt 24:14). God will one day fulfill every good promise He has made down to the last jot and tittle, culminating with the Messiah, whose first advent had not arrived by Joshua 21 and whose second advent yet awaits us.

⁷¹ Howard, *Joshua* 397–98. [emphasis added]