



'The Land': Promise or Curse?

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I would like to begin this discourse with certain questions concerning the MOU (covenant) God made with Abraham and his descendants.

- What is the most integral aspect of God's covenant with Abraham?
- Did God intend to keep this covenant?
- If the covenant was not fulfilled, does it then follow that God lied to Abraham?
- If God did not lie to Abraham, did he then renege on his promise to Abraham?
- Are the promises of God to Abraham's descendants still physically operable or have they lapsed?

'Promise Land'

When we examine the covenant of Abraham, we discover certain specific elements attached to it. It is helpful to consider them through textual evidence since the entire covenant did not appear in just one particular passage. It is also important to consider passages where the covenant was reiterated to its primary beneficiary, Abraham's descendants (Israelites in biblical times and Jews in today's world).

Which Land?

1. *Gen 12.1-9*

Abraham was promised the following: a land (country) of his own, a great nation of descendants, blessing (not specified) and a great name. Added to this is the promise to 'bless whoever blesses you and curse whoever curses you'. When Abraham reached 'Canaan' (that was its name then; *kana'an* in Hebrew) God told him, 'This is the land for you and your descendants', despite the fact the 'Canaanites lived there.' It was not an uninhabited land, but it was promised to Abraham who sets out marking territory in a manner the locals understood, the construction of altars for his God.

2. *Gen 13.14-18*

After the separation with Lot, Abraham was again told to look at the 'land' which was promised to him and his descendants. Two additional details are added here. First, the 'land' would belong to Abraham forever (Hebrew *'ad-'olam*). Second, geographical borders for the promise land were set out. God told Abraham to move his gaze to the four directions of the compass: (1) to *tsaphon* which signifies the north with a geographical marker, the Hermon mountain range; (2) to *negev* which means south with a geographical marker, the southern desert; (3) to *qedem* which means east (no specific geographical marker); and (4) to *yam*, which refers to the western geographical marker, the Mediterranean Sea. This time the promise came with a caveat, Abraham must 'walk' the length and breadth of the land to possess it. Unlike Gen 12, chapter 13 is all about the land.

3. *Gen 15.1-21*

The entire chapter is devoted to the covenant God made with Abraham. Due to the detailed nature of this narrative, I list the various elements of covenant spelt out in Gen 15.

- God promised protection and reward (v1)
- God promised as many descendants as stars in the night sky (v5)
- God reiterated the promise of land (v7)
- God foretold a future enslavement for Abraham's descendants and their ultimate liberation (v13-14)

- God promised that Abraham himself would rest in peace (v15)
- God officially sealed ('cut') the covenant with Abraham (v17)
- God again reiterated the borders of the land, but the details are more specific than in Gen 13

The land promised to Abraham in Gen 15 would span the area between the following geographical markers (v18-21): (1) on one end would be *nahar mitsrayim* (river of Egypt, most likely the River Nile); (2) on the other end would be *haggadol nahar parat* (the great River Euphrates); and (3) all the tribal territories in between (10 tribes are named: Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites).

When the information of Gen 13 and 15 are combined, the following maps of this promise land emerge. The first map shows no names, while the second map juxtaposes the promise land on today's reality.



(https://www.reddit.com/r/imaginarymaps/comments/rgfqzl/map_of_the_promised_lands_of_the_jewish_people/)



(https://www.reddit.com/r/MapPorn/comments/s23irf/the_land_jews_were_promised_in_the_bible_and_the/)

A demanding question arises: Why this land? Modern geopolitics render this a most grievous equation. However, to answer the question, we need to explore further the biblical data about this covenant.

4. *Gen 17.1-27*

In this reiteration of the covenant, God repeated most of the earlier promises, numerous descendants (now defined in terms of multitude of nations) and land. However, a new element was added, a physical symbol of the covenant, the sign of male circumcision. God also clarified that the covenant would not run through the line of Ishmael but rather through the as-yet-unborn Isaac, Sarah's flesh and blood. This is definitive, God's covenant runs through the line of Isaac (see also Gen 22.17-18). No other option is provided. Inheritance of the promise land would belong to Isaac's descendants, Israel, while Ishmael (Abraham's firstborn) was removed from the narrative to demonstrate his lack of claim to the land. It is this inheritance claim which underscores present day geopolitics where two brothers (Jews as descendants of Isaac and Arabs/Palestinians as descendants of Ishmael) claiming to be rightful heirs.

The centrality of land in all Genesis passages is highly informative and these passages are supported by other references. We should consider data from elsewhere in the Bible to determine if this land-centric concept is significant.

5. *Deut 3.23-29*

In this speech by Moses, nearly 40 years into the wilderness sojourn of the Israelites, we discover the following boundaries enumerated by God to this 'servant of Yahweh'. Moses had been told he was not to enter the land and pleaded with God to do so. As compensation, God allowed Moses to climb to the top of Mount Pisgah and 'view' the land. God asked him to look to *yam* (which means west but also refers to the Mediterranean Sea), to *tsaphon* (meaning north and refers to the Hermon mountain range), to *teman* (which means south and most likely refers to the southern desert) and to *mizrakh* (meaning sunrise or east with no specific geographical designation). From where Moses stood, that would mean way beyond today's countries of Israel and Jordan. Both here and in Gen 13, east/sunrise offers no geographical boundary leaving the option open-ended.

6. *Deut 7.1*

In this speech, Moses named seven tribes whose lands Israel would occupy, Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites (the list is similar to but shorter than the one in Gen 15). Moses also told them that each of these tribes was stronger and had a bigger population than Israel. Israel's taking possession of the land of promise would never be a simple walk in the park. They would be at war for much of their existence because all these tribes did not welcome Israel with open arms. At first glance it appears that God put Israel on the path of war and occupation (7.2). However, God also specifically instructed Israel that war was not to be their first option. Rather, they should first offer the locals peaceful cohabitation but if the offer was rejected then war of elimination was their next option (Deut 20.10-14).

7. *Josh 1.1-9*

When Moses had passed and the Israelites then had a new leader, Joshua was also given instruction about the land he and the Israelites had been promised by God. As he did with Abraham and Moses, God spelt out the borders of the promise land. Joshua was told the following: (1) the land was to extend from the *midbar* (the southern desert, probably referring to the desert where they had spent 40 years) till Lebanon in the north; (2) the land would extend

until *nahar gadol*, *nahar parat* (the great river Euphrates), including all the land of the Hittites (who lived in southwest Turkey); and (3) until *yam gadol* (the great sea we know as the Mediterranean). This description is remarkably similar to the one given to Abraham but included even more territory by incorporating Hittite territory.

The Gathering

To further compound the dilemma, God predicted Israel's dispersions from the land but also committed himself to their return, a concept known as the 'gathering'. With each return there would ensue a new beginning of sorts.

- Gen 15.13-16: God warned Abraham that his descendants would be foreigners and slaves outside of Canaan for an extended period, but he would bring them back to the land.
- Isa 27.12-13: 'One by one he will gather them—from the Euphrates River¹ in the east to the Brook of Egypt in the west. In that day the great trumpet will sound. Many who were dying in exile in Assyria and Egypt will return to Jerusalem to worship the LORD on his holy mountain.' (NLT)
- Isa 60 & 62: The prophet describes the streaming of the nations from a world saturated with darkness into the light that bathes Jerusalem. The gathering includes the return of Israel to Jerusalem and the 'streaming' of the nations to Jerusalem to learn about Israel's God.
- Amos 9.15: God promised Israel that when they were finally restored to the land, they would never be uprooted again.
- Jer 29.10-14: During the early years of the Babylonian Captivity, God told the Judahites (later called Jews) that his plans were for their good, that he would restore their fortunes and return them to the land.
- Zec 8.4-23: God will gather his people 'from the east and from the west'. He will ensure the security of Jerusalem to the degree that old people can walk the streets freely and children play without fear. The nations will 'stream' to Zion to learn about God and the land will be refreshed.

The land promise God made is not just about entering the land but also about re-entering the land again and again and again. Abraham entered Canaan as Abram but then left for a while to Egypt and after he had returned to the land his name was changed to Abraham (Gen 17). Jacob ('grabber' or 'usurper') had to leave home for nearly 20 years but eventually returned, aided by a personal promise God made to him (Gen 28.15), as Israel. Jacob's clans would leave for a centuries-long stay in Egypt as Hebrews but then were miraculously brought back to the land, as *Bene Yisrael* ('children of Israel'), in an event we call Exodus. The 10 northern tribes were dispersed by Assyria but did not entirely disappear. The people of Judah were taken to Babylon (located in Shinar) for about a century but eventually returned, with a new identity, the Jews. The Babylonian Captivity or Exile had a major dispersal effect with Judahites (aka Jews) spreading all the way to Persia and Egypt but again were allowed to return by the Persian emperors. The final dispersion was carried out by the Romans in two stages at the end of the First Jewish War (AD 66-73) and the Second Jewish War (AD 132-135). While most Jews were locked out of the land for the next two millennia, many remained. The 'gathering' is seen by some as being fulfilled in the modern Zionist movement which led to the establishment of the modern state of Israel (1948) even though it may be questioned whether this is the actual 'gathering' or something on a grander scale that has yet to happen.

In Joel 3.2, the idea of return is punctuated with a prophecy about divine judgements on the nations of the world for three sins: (1) 'harming my people', (2) 'scattering my people' and (3) 'dividing up the land'. We cannot help but wonder at a quirk of history where every empire that attempted to dislocate or destroy the descendants of Abraham has disappeared into the sands of history.

The Remnant

In addition to the gathering motif, the Hebrew Bible also contains prophecies which demonstrate that the land has always had Abraham's descendants occupying it despite the various dispersals. This idea is encapsulated in what is often termed the 'remnant' doctrine which is easily forgotten due to the Christian appropriation of its tenets.

Isa 5 contains the 'Song of the Vineyard' (5.1-7) where God moans the failure of Israel/Judah and vows to disperse them from the land (v13). Nevertheless, Israel/Judah are still referred to as his 'vineyard', his 'delightful garden' (v7). In Isaiah's call (ch 6), God again reiterates his intention for total dispersal (v12) but also confirms that a tenth might remain, and a 'stump' (remnant?) will survive to again become a 'holy seed' (v13). This is also corroborated by Isa 11.1 which points to the regrowth of Jesse's 'root' (remnant?). This passage is recognised by both Jews and Christians as being messianic. The idea is embedded in the writings of several prophets, such as Amos, Micah and Jeremiah.

In biblical history, the concept of 'remnant' was applied to Israelites who survived the Assyrian invasion (Isa 10.20-22). Judah's survivors during Sennacherib's siege were considered 'remnant' (Isa 37). Jeremiah referred to the poor in Judah who were not deported by the Babylonians as 'remnant' (chs 39-40). In post-exilic writings (Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah), the returning Jewish exiles were called 'remnant'. This 'remnant' concept seems designed to inform readers that the promise land would never undergo a time when Abraham's descendants did not occupy the land God had promised. In other words, there would be a continuous presence in the 'land' by Abraham's rightful heirs. It seems ludicrous that God would grant the land to Abraham and his descendants only to allow it to be completely overrun by those with no divine right to the inheritance. The animosity of the Samaritans against the Jews returning from exile, in the book of Nehemiah, is testament to this struggle. With all these factors in mind, the following pattern emerges:

God gifted the land to Abraham and his descendants ⇒ Abraham's descendants would have to struggle to occupy the land ⇒ sin against God would result in 'dispersion' from the land ⇒ but a 'remnant' would always occupy the land ⇒ ultimately there would be a 'gathering' of Israel which ushers in the messianic age.

Nevertheless, even a casual perusal of the Hebrew Bible presents a major problem. Were these promises (prophecies) ever a reality? Will they ever be reality? Did God intend to do this or was it hyperbolic promise? If we assume this land promise was intended to be actual, we are confronted with an even more difficult reality: Was it ever fulfilled?

Perhaps we should back up and examine the factors involved in this decision of God. Why did God send Abraham to this land (Canaan)? Was there no other place for Abraham and his descendants? Why did God not send Abraham to Greenland or Siberia, somewhere with almost no human populace to compete with?

‘Cursed Land’

While the land promised to Abraham is a relatively large territory, in reality most of the biblical events occurred in an area much smaller than the promise. This smaller area was called Canaan in OT period but had three Roman designations in NT times: Judea, Samaria and Galilee. Of far greater significance is that the NT calls this land the ‘land of Israel’ (Matt 2.20), the common designation of the land after the Exodus events. At the end of the second Jewish War, also known as Bar Kokhba Revolt (AD 132-135), the Romans changed its name to Syria-Palestina (Palestina being derived from the name Philistines who were the most entrenched enemies of ancient Israel) to demonstrate their disdain for the Jews and their claim of the land. In later periods, the area was sometimes referred to as the Levant or by other names depending on who ruled the territory. The British mandate of so-called Palestine incorporated the territories known today as Israel and Jordan.

Abraham’s journey started in Ur in the Shinar region (modern day Iraq), took him up into Paddan-Aram (modern Syria), into Canaan, briefly into Egypt and finally settling in the southern part of Canaan. When Abraham arrived in Canaan, he discovered a land rife with tribal wars, with no unified country and pieces of it governed by city-states or warlords (all referred to in HB as ‘kings’). This reality meant that Abraham had to have his own private militia to survive his migration (see Gen 14). To the many warring tribes, Abraham and his clan would have been viewed as intruding migrants. Yet, this is where God placed Abraham.

If we look at the area from another perspective, we notice that Canaan was a rather strategic land bridge between three continents, Asia, Africa and Europe. Because of this, every major empire invaded, conquered and decimated the land. This happened time and time again until modern times. In ancient times we have invasions and conquests by Egyptians, Hittites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans. Consequently, more battles were fought on this soil than any other on earth. In medieval times we see Islamic invasions, conquests and occupation by the Baghdad Caliphates, the Mamluks of Egypt, the Seljuk Turks and the Ottomans who ruled the land for about 400 years. About the same time there were European Christian Crusaders invading, conquering and establishing Christian kingdoms in the land. After World War 1, the territory became the holding of British and French Colonial mandates. The establishing of a Jewish State, Israel, in 1948 meant that more wars and battles were and are still fought over this tiny portion of the earth. If ever a piece of earth is ‘cursed’, surely this is it. Yet, God sent Abraham to this most hostile place on earth.

Another perspective to consider arises from the Genesis narrative of post-flood reality. Noah had three sons and the Bible traces the world’s peoples to his sons and grandsons. We examine the Table of Nations (Gen 10) in terms of name lists and also geographical distribution, keeping in mind that all the names are not of persons but of people groups.

1. Japheth: Gomer (Eastern Europe, Turkey), Magog (Russia), Madai (Media, Persia), Javan (Greece), Tubal (Turkey), Meshech (Armenia) and Tiras (Macedonia region)
 - Gomer: Ashkenaz (Ukraine), Riphath (Turkey) and Togarmah (Turkey)
 - Javan: Elishah (Sardinia?), Tarshish (Spain), Kittim (Cyprus) and Rodanim (?)
2. Ham: Cush (Ethiopia, Somalia), Mizraim (Egypt, Sudan), Put (Libya, Tunisia) and Canaan
 - Cush: Seba (Arabia), Havilah (Arabia), Sabtah, Raamah (Arabia), Sabteca (?) and Nimrod [who built Babylon, Erech, Akkad, Calneh, Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah and Resen]
 - Raamah: Sheba and Dedan (both in Arabia)

- Mizraim: Ludites (Lydia in Turkey), Anamites (?), Lehabites (Libya), Naphtuhites (?), Pathrusites (Sudan), Casluhites (?) and the Caphtorites (Crete; Philistines came from here)
- Canaan: Sidon (Lebanon), Hittites (Turkey), Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, Arvadites, Zemarites and Hamathites (all within Canaan)
- 3. Shem: Elam (Iran), Asshur (Assyria), Arphaxad (Arabia/Iraq), Lud (Turkey) and Aram (Syria)
 - Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether and Mash (all probably Iraq)
 - Arphaxad: Shelah (?)
 - Shelah was the father of Eber (Hebrews originated from him)
 - Eber: Peleg (?) and Joktan (Arabia)
 - Joktan: Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Obal, Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah and Jobab (all Arabian tribes)

The map below illustrates the possible distribution of Noah's descendants.

(<https://cutpaste.typepad.com/souljournal/2015/06/genesis-10.html>)



At first, Noah's descendants settled in the Shinar valley between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers or modern-day Iraq. They did this in defiance of a divine injunction, so God caused a global dispersion (Gen 11). The patterns which emerge from this distribution are these (see Gen 10): (1) Most of the descendants of Japheth moved north and west from Shinar to form the European races of the world; (2) The descendants of Ham and Shem had a more mixed history with overlapping territories; (3) Ham's descendants dominated northern Africa and parts of the Ancient Near East (today we call it Middle East);

(4) Shem's descendants largely settled in the Ancient Near East. The Israelites descended from Shem and the land promised to Abraham was primarily Shem and Ham territories. When the peoples of the world are traced back to Noah then it stands to reason that the land God gave Abraham is 'cursed' because it became the focal point in wars between 'brothers'. It seems God intended to sow 'promise' in a land of 'curses'.

Further, I posit that God gave this land to Abraham because it was a 'cursed' land inhabited by a 'cursed' people. The promise to Abraham was meant to be the antidote to the curse. Certain psalms highlight the fact that the territory assigned to Abraham and his descendants was largely occupied by Ham's descendants. A very unfortunate incident occurred in Gen 9 (the precise nature of Ham's act is hotly debated) which led to Ham's last son, Canaan, being cursed, and by extension Ham's entire lineage. Psalms 78, 105 and 106 recite the history of Israel and in all three, Egypt is associated with Ham. Egypt is referred to as the 'tents of Ham' (Pss 78.51) or as the 'land of Ham' (Ps 105.27; Ps 106.22). The promise land stood in the middle of wars of empires but mostly between Ham and Shem's descendants. Since Ham's line was under a curse, much of what belonged to this line would be given to Shem and his descendants, namely, Abraham and Israel. In Today's world, the only significant remnants of Shem are the Jews as most of Shem's descendants disappeared in history or were absorbed into emerging people groups. Further complicating this picture is the fact that nearly all of Japheth's descendants today are the so-called Christian nations, while most of Ham's current descendants belong to Islam.

This confluence of religions and races is amplified in another set of biblical prophecies in Eze 38-39. In this vision, the prophet sees a Hyper Alliance of nations led by Gog, king of Magog (Russia). Involved in this alliance are Meshek, Tubal and Togarmah (Turkey, Armenia, Georgia regions), Persia (Iran), Cush (Ethiopia, Somalia), Put (Libya, Tunisia), Gomer (Eastern Europe), possibly Sheba and Dedan (the Arabian peninsula) and Tarshish (Spain) (38.1-16). The target of the alliance is Israel who stands alone but there is an unexpected twist because God will rage against and destroy the alliance (38.17-23). The main Battlefield is even named: 'I will make a vast graveyard for Gog and his hordes in the Valley of the Travellers, east of the . . . Sea . . . the Valley of Hamon-gog' (possibly the Dead Sea or Sea of Galilee regions) (39.11). Comparing this prophecy with Gen 10 reveals that all nations mentioned in Eze 38 belong to the Japheth and Ham lineages, while Israel comes from Shem. Historically speaking, such a battle has never happened but does look a possibility in the 21st century. (The map below shows the movements of this hyper coalition against Israel).



<https://robertcliftonrobinson.com/2023/10/19/timeline-for-the-last-days-everything-is-centered-on-israel-and-the-jews/>

Compounding the issue is the fact that certain elements of this battle are then replicated in the final apocalyptic prophecy in Rev 20. In that vision, John previewed the final battle between God and Satan, the Battle of Gog and Magog, with the result being the lake of fire and the final extermination of sin itself. Also, in Rev 20 we see a hyper coalition of all nations against God's celestial city, the New Jerusalem, whose residents are the redeemed (spiritual Israel?). By conflating the two prophecies we may conclude that Eze 38-39 was never physically fulfilled because it will be fulfilled apocalyptically as depicted in Rev 20. However, this does not account for the fact that applying typological logic to biblical prophecy is fraught with challenges and does not discount an actual physical fulfilment as precursor to an apocalyptic one. This is a challenge that may not be readily resolved even if we desire it to be so.

Since Ezekiel is pre-exilic as well as exilic, it may be possible to dismiss his prophecies as allegedly being fulfilled in the Babylonian Exile or perhaps the Roman diaspora. However, if we take Zechariah into account a very different picture emerges. First, Zechariah is post-exilic and so the Babylonian Captivity is excluded. Second, Zechariah is largely eschatological or more appropriately apocalyptic prophecy with numerous links to and echoes in Revelation. Chapters 12-14 of the book are highly instructive. Certain salient features stand out in these chapters.

- Zechariah does not so much speak of the land as of the city of Jerusalem, a metonymy for Israel/Judah/the land (12.2,3,5,7, 8, etc.).
- The final three chapters of the book underscore that the events being described concern 'the day of the coming of Yahweh' (14.1; the expression appears in abbreviated form as 'on that day' [Heb. *'banyom hahu'*] several times and is recognised as an eschatological phrase).
- The prominence of God's military title, Yahweh Tseba'ot (12.5; 13.2; etc. NLT rendering as 'Lord of Heaven's Armies' is probably the best translation of the name). The name is employed four times in the climax of Zechariah's prophecy (14.16-21).
- Yahweh Tseba'ot performs two tasks: the purifying nature of his judgements against 'Jerusalem' (13.2-3), and 'supporting Jerusalem' against impossible odds (12.1-3,6).
- Yahweh Tseba'ot will permit all the nations to rise up against Israel, burn down Jerusalem, decimate the land, loot houses and rape women (12.3; 14.1-2). But in due time he will turn against these nations to destroy them, Israel will become a raging flame in his hands (12.4, 6) and Israel will achieve complete victory (12.7; 14.3).
- Yahweh Tseba'ot's actions culminate in the grand vision relating to Mount Olives which has immediate parallels to the New Jerusalem prophecy in Rev 20-22.

Difficult questions come to mind at this juncture. Are Ezekiel and Zechariah's prophecies literal or metaphorical? Will these prophecies be fulfilled literally or in an eschatological and spiritual manner? How can we make sense of the prophecies when certain elements seem to parallel Rev 20? Will there be physical and apocalyptic fulfilments? Suffice to say I contend that the answer lies somewhere between the two realities: physical and apocalyptic. I think that there will be a physical war pitting the nations against physical Israel which will serve as precursor to the final apocalyptic conflict. This potential World War 3 will become a lens through which the cosmic struggle between God and Satan should be viewed. I ask, 'Could this be the Battle of Armageddon (Rev 16) which presages the final Battle of Gog and Magog (Rev 20)?'

Christians today face a damning dilemma. The entire Bible is Jewish Scripture in origin and has been tacitly accepted as such by generations of Christians who often refer to the Judeo-Christian roots of western Christian civilisation. For better or worse, God used Israel as his repository of light in a darkened world and the church is a missiological extension of that concept. Therefore, any conflict involving Israel (despite military and political considerations) is a microcosm of the cosmic battle between light and darkness. Both Ezekiel and Zechariah prophesy that the entire world will turn against Israel in the 'last days' or 'in the day of Yahweh's coming'. I ask: Are these prophecies being fulfilled in current events around the world? Why are both Islamic fundamentalism (personified by Iran and its 'Axis of Resistance') and extreme leftist WOKE progressives (totally contradictory ideologies) so bent on the destruction of Israel (encapsulated in the trope, 'From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free') that the world is witnessing something far more sinister than Nazism? Are we then in the 'day of the coming of Yahweh'?

X Marks the Spot

Keeping all of this in mind, the question still remains: Why did God give Abraham this particular land with its chequered history and prophesied conflicts? I would like to suggest a possible (somewhat conjectural, I admit) reason why this particular land was chosen by God.

In Gen 2, God created a home for Adam and Eve. Gen 2.8 says, 'God planted a garden in Eden (not Garden of Eden as Eden is the name of the territory not the garden) from the east (same word *qedem* as in Gen 13) and placed *adam* there' (at this stage of the narrative 'adam' is not a proper name but simply means 'human'). From the garden starts a river which splits into four major branches ('heads' in Hebrew): Pishon (which runs through the entire land of Havilah, probably southwestern Arabia-Somalia region), Gikhon (which runs through the land of Cush, that would be Ethiopia-Sudan-Egypt territory), Tigris (*hiddeqel* in Hebrew, which runs east of Assyria, Iraq-Syria regions) and Euphrates (*parat* in Hebrew; also Iraq-Syria area). By comparing this data with contemporary maps, I suggest that the four rivers are the modern rivers of Jordan, Nile, Tigris and Euphrates.

The land promised to Abraham not only incorporates these four rivers but may have been the original location of the Garden in Eden. While earth's topography changed substantially after the flood, it is quite plausible that God geo-located Eden and that is where Abraham, who would be the 'Father of faith' (Rom 4), was sent. His mission would have been a recalibration of the original plan, a Garden in Eden 2.0. The plausibility of this argument is augmented by other biblical data.

- Eze 11.23 describes how God's glory rose out of Jerusalem and stood over a mountain east of it. This is probably a reference to Mount Olives which stood just east of the city.
- Matt 21.1-11 records Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. He descended into the city from Mount Olives and the writer cites Isaiah and Zechariah as proof of Jesus' messianic mission.
- Acts 1.9-12 tells how Jesus ascended to heaven, with the disciples in full view, from Mount Olives. The disciples were assured by an angel that the manner of his ascent will be duplicated in a future descent, in the same way and at the same place. Implied is the idea that Jesus would return on Mount Olives.
- Zec 14 depicts a final apocalyptic battle where God will descend upon Mount Olives, east of Jerusalem, splitting the mountain into half and creating a gigantic valley between the two halves. This could be a reference to the final landing of the New Jerusalem on this planet (Rev 21). This enormous city would require a gigantic landing space and John witnessed these events from a high mountain.

Mount Olives is prominent in the biblical prophecies and events connected with Jesus. The mountain is the epicentre of the 'land'. Its proximity to Mount Moriah where Abraham almost killed Isaac and where Solomon built the Temple makes it along with Mount Moriah the 'twin towers' of the plan of salvation. Fitting all these pieces together creates a completed puzzle where 'X' marks the spot. This is where the Garden in Eden was located; this is where the messiah would perform his salvific mission; this is where the King of Kings would return to. Evidently, this land would play an eschatological role in the history of God's salvific work. Think of this in another way, this land is where the human odyssey always originates and ends. The first human journey began here and ended with the loss of land (the Adam and Eve narrative). The second human journey of faith would also begin and culminate here (the Abraham odyssey). The final human journey into full restoration would begin and climax here (the Jesus narratives). Adam began life in this land. Abraham began faith's journey in this land. Jesus performed his recovery mission in this land. The land where Paradise was lost is also the land where Paradise will be regained. There is no other land. If this is so, it explains why every empire which does not represent God has envied, desired and attempted to take and destroy this land and its God chosen people.

For all the evident military, economic and global strategic importance of this land, the true explanation for both covenant and history being inextricably linked to this land lies in its eternal significance. Since the actual promise land includes Shinar and Egypt, it comes as no surprise to realise that Abraham and Israel's history played out within the 'metro' promise land. At no point in Bible history do Abraham's descendants ever get completely disconnected from the land. The many diaspora events (Egyptian slavery, Babylonian Exile, Roman diaspora) did not cause total dislocation because God kept his promise. God's final kingdom conflicts will also occur in this land, 'cursed' in so many ways but chosen by God as the theatre of the conflict with evil. What we witness in earth's history is a microcosm of what is occurring at the cosmic backdrop. Therefore, the land is not just promise, it is God's spatial commitment to Abraham and all his descendants, physical and spiritual.

While Abraham and his physical descendants were promised land of their own, Abraham's spiritual descendants are also promised 'land'. Jesus said, 'I go to prepare a place for you' (John 14.3) and the Bible reaches its zenith with 'New Heaven and New Earth', new land (Rev 21.1). The land Adam lost and was destroyed through human sin will be restored to its pristine perfection and much more by Jesus, the second Adam. God's work through human history is epitomised by land promise, not just any land, but *the* land. The covenant with Abraham provides a lens through which we can see the ultimate fulfilment. God's steadfastness to Abraham and Israel is the warranty card of his commitment to the redeemed. God does not lie, nor does he renege on his covenant promises. That was true for biblical Israel, it is still true for 'all Israel', physical and spiritual, today. In short, promise land concretises the covenant and provides a true and tangible reversal of the curse.