

WHITFIELD PARISH
St James' Church † St Luke's Church

LIFE Group Notes w/b Sunday 15 February 2009

Covenant, the land and the Jews

I write this on the day of the Israeli parliamentary elections. By the time you come to do the study it is likely that who will actually form the new government still won't have been decided. For Zionists (Jew and Christian), the Jews' entitlement to the *land* of Israel, and especially to Jerusalem, is non-negotiable.

1. Why do events in Israel/Palestine have such a big influence on the rest of the Middle East and why is the United States of America so pro-Israeli?

Read Genesis 12:1-3; 15:5-6 & 18-20; 17:1-11

Covenant

A covenant is an agreement or pact between two parties. Covenant is a huge theme throughout the Bible. A Biblical covenant always originates with God (e.g. '*I will establish my covenant*', Genesis 6:18) and in this sense it is **one-sided in establishment**, but it is mutual or **two-sided in accomplishment**.

God promises to be faithful to his covenant (e.g. Deuteronomy 4:31) and although God makes a number of covenants¹, their essence is summarised by the statement: '**I will be your God and you will be my people**'². Although there are several covenants in the Old Testament, both OT and NT writers regard them as one covenant ('The Old Covenant', 2 Corinthians 2:14). The Israelites in OT times repeatedly fail to benefit from the full blessings of their covenant relationship with God by failing to live according to God's covenant laws.

2. From the above Genesis verses, what are the features of God's covenant through Abram/Abraham?
3. To whom do the covenant promises apply?

¹ e.g. through Noah, Genesis 8-9; through Abraham, Genesis 12-17; through David, 2 Samuel 7; through Jesus, 1 Corinthians 11:25

² Genesis 17:7; Exodus 6:7; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18; Revelation 21:2-3

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Hebrews 8:7-13

4. So why the 'New' Covenant!?
5. What are the features of the New Covenant?
6. To whom do the New Covenant promises apply?

Read Romans 9:1-8; 10:1-4 & 11-17

7. Why does Paul feel so strongly about the Jews?
8. What are the two senses in which Paul uses the term *Israel* in 9:6?

One of the features of **dispensational theology** is that Jews today are saved not through trust in Jesus Christ as saviour and Lord, but through God's promise to them made through Abraham, i.e. the Old Covenant. The Cross of Christ is therefore taken out of the salvation picture for Jews. Dispensational theology is very influential among evangelicals in the USA and gives theological fuel to **Christian Zionism**, a feature of which is that the promised land of the Old Covenant is the rightful inheritance of the Jews today. Some Christian Zionists believe that the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was a pre-requisite for the return of Christ. Christian Zionism seems to play a big part in shaping US foreign policy with regards to the Middle East. Stephen Sizer, vicar of Christ Church Virginia Water, has written extensively, and Biblically, on dispensational theology and Christian Zionism (see <http://www.stephensizer.com>).

9. Do Jews need Jesus or is it (as some Christians say) anti-Semitic to evangelise Jews?
10. Do the Jews have a *Biblical* claim to the land of Israel/Palestine?

Read Romans 11:25-27

These verses are used by some to argue that all Jews are ultimately saved, or at least that before Jesus' return a large number of Jews will become Christians.

11. What do you think?

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Next week (normally parish prayer meeting week) we begin our LIFE Groups' Lent series. This will kick off with an all-together study led by Richard England at St Luke's Church on **Tuesday 24 February, at 8pm**. As it will be Shrove Tuesday, **pancakes will be served from 7.30pm!**