

The Land Belongs to Israel

A question that has confronted mankind for centuries is: To whom does the land of Palestine belong? Does it belong to the Arabs who lived there for generations? Does the land belong to the ancient descendants of Abraham and the chosen people of Israel? To whom did God make the promise, and who were the first people to enter the land? If people were driven out of the land by enemies does that disqualify them from occupying their land again?

These are not just questions for politicians to ponder, but something every Bible believing person must consider. What does the Bible teach regarding the land of Palestine and the chosen people of God? To whom does the land belong? Why?

Who owns the land? From the time of creation there is one owner. The land belongs to the LORD God (JHVH – Jehovah) Himself. Therefore, He can give it to whomever He pleases.

God created the heavens and the earth and saw that it was very good. Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and sin entered into mankind. From then on mankind made the wrong choices based upon wrong belief. Human depravity grew worse until God destroyed the earth by the great deluge. The exception was the preacher of righteousness, Noah and his family. Even after the flood and a new humanity mankind was still radically depraved.

The LORD God's Covenant Promises to Abraham

The history of Israel began with the call of Abraham in Genesis 12. God in His saving grace chose one man from the pagan idolaters in the city of Ur land of the Chaldeans. His father died an idolater (Joshua 24:2). God separated Abraham to Himself and blessed him. "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed'" (Genesis 12:1-3, NASB95). All Scripture take from New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update unless otherwise noted.

God chose Abraham and blessed him. Included in this blessing of God to Abraham is the Promised Land. "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" (Genesis 12:7). In the next chapter the LORD gave Abraham the dimensions of the Promised Land. "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'" (Genesis 13:14-15). The promise was renewed repeatedly to Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and Jacob in the chapters that follow in Genesis. The land belongs to Abraham and his son Isaac and his descendants forever. God demonstrated Himself faith to Abraham, and he took God at His word and trusted Him to do what He said He would do.

"After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.' Abram said, 'O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.' Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 'This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.' And He took him outside and said, 'Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as

righteousness. And He said to him, 'I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it'" (Genesis 15:1-7).

God entered into a covenant with Abraham. Abraham believed God. "For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness'" (Romans 4:3). Abraham was declared righteous by faith. In the same way we are declared righteous before God the Father when we place our faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

God entered a covenant with Abraham sealed by a blood covenant. The interesting thing about this covenant God entered with Abraham is that it is one sided. God cut the covenant with Abraham. Abraham slew the animals and laid them before God, and God caused Abraham to fall into a deep sleep. Abraham did not participate in the ritual personally. He could only observe the cutting of the covenant. "It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. 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'" (Genesis 15:17-18). The burning lamp symbolized the Shekinah glory of God. God was solely responsible for this covenant with Abraham. It is one sided. God was binding Himself by a blood covenant to fulfill the covenant promise with Abraham. It was not a conditional promise.

The promise was repeated not in regard to Ishmael the son of Abraham and Hagar the Egyptian maid, but to Isaac the son of Abraham and Sarah. "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. 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" (Genesis 17:7-8). It is "an everlasting possession" (*olam*) meaning "in perpetuity," continuance as long as this earth should last. This is the strongest expression for eternity in the Hebrew language.

Abraham asked the question about Ishmael being the son of the promise. "Abraham said to God, 'Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!" (Gen. 17:18) God makes the promise extremely clear to Abraham in Genesis 17:19. God said, "No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him" (Gen. 17:19).

The land in the covenant stretched from the Nile River to the Euphrates River and from the Persian peninsula to Asia Minor. It is very clear from this covenant-promise that to Abraham and his descendants through Isaac the land of Palestine belongs to Israel forever.

Does the State of Israel currently possess all of the Promised Land? No. They share only a limited amount of the land promised to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12:1-7; 15:1-21; 17:1-21; 22:15-18). Down through the centuries the land has passed back and forth from God's Chosen People to their enemies. Abraham's descendants spent 400 years in Egypt and became slaves. God delivered His chosen people from Egyptians slavery and redeemed them by the Passover lamb. As a nation they became His people, again fulfilling the promises to Abraham when God said: "I have made you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you" (Genesis 17:6). In Genesis 21-22 the promise is further refined to the descendants of Isaac through his son Jacob, not Esau (22:15-18; 21:12; 26:2-5; 28:13-15).

After 400 years did the land still belong to Abraham's descendent through Isaac and Jacob? Yes. Deuteronomy 28 tells us that God will punish His people for disobedience. "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" (Deuteronomy 28:64). The books of Kings and Chronicles tell us the tragic story of idolatry and disobedience. Did God forsake His sinful people? No. He was faithful because He is determined to fulfill His eternal purposes through His chosen people. Israel was exiled to Assyria and Babylon because of her unfaithfulness to the LORD God. God brought them back into the land after 70 years of Babylonian captivity. This was in keeping of the promise in Jeremiah 29:10. "For thus

says the Lord, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place' (Jeremiah 29:10). Israel was treated cruelly under the Romans who carried off hundreds of thousands of Jews into slavery. Jesus was ultimately crucified by the Romans.

What about the rejection of Jesus Christ as the Messiah? How does that affect the choice of Israel as the Chosen People? What is the status of Israel now? Did the church replace Israel as the chosen people? God is sovereign and He is able to make promises and keep them regardless of sinful man. Every one of us who are saved by grace understands that He is faithful even when we are not. Some interpreters seem to have double standards when it comes to Israel. Israel disobeyed and was punished. We disobey and we, too, are chastised. However, God is faithful to His promises.

The apostle John says, "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11).

Just before His death Jesus made this prophecy regarding Jerusalem and Israel in Luke 21:20-24. Jesus said: "they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). He makes clear predictions about the city of destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple that literally came true just as He said. Once again, the people of Israel were removed from the land and dispersed all over the earth as a punishment for their sins.

The Roman general Titus encircled the city of Jerusalem with troops and put the city under siege beginning A. D. 68. Jerusalem was destroyed A.D. 70, and again in A.D. 132-35. Emperor Vespasian completely destroyed and plundered the Temple and slew tens of thousands of Jews. The weak and aged were killed without exception. The remainder was carried off to Rome. Not a single Jew was left in the city. For many years Jewish people were not allowed to live in Jerusalem or even its surroundings. Once every seven years and only one day they were allowed to go to the hill and mourn in the vicinity of the city. In A.D. 132 the pseudo Messiah bar Coshiba led another insurrection and was destroyed by the Roman Emperor Hadrian who made Jerusalem a permanently pagan city and named it Aelia Capitolina with a pagan shrine on the Temple mount. It was changed to pseudo-Christian under Constantine. Then in A.D. 637 it was taken over by the Muslims under Omar. Finally, in 1948 it became Jewish once again. Christians did flee from Jerusalem to Pella before it was too late. The punishment of the Jews has a limit. The "time" is probably until the end of the present age of the Gentiles when Christ will come with divine majesty and power. At that point the Great Tribulation will begin.

The important thing to observe is Israel never has been under its own Davidic king since the city was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. until the present time. There was a hundred year streak of independence under the Maccabees, but they did not have a descendent of David as king. They lived in the land, but no descendent of David was on the throne. However, Israel's national entity was never lost as a result of the dispersion. "Thus says the Lord, Who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; the Lord of hosts is His name: if this fixed order departs from before Me, declares the Lord, Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever" (Jeremiah 31:35-36). Their chastisement will continue until the LORD regathers His people into their own land and causes them to see His glory. From A.D. 135 until the present time, the nation Israel has been dispersed all over the world.

The modern Jewish people are descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Israel has continued as a nation, and is in existence today by the mighty hand of the LORD God. The covenant is an everlasting covenant, and the land is promised to Israel as an everlasting possession.

Will Israel again occupy the Promised Land?

For the first time since A.D. 70 the nation of Israel is an independent and self-sustaining political state. How does this fit into the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy regarding Israel?

Many passages of Scripture speak of Israel's future as a nation in her own land (Isa. 11:1-12;14:1; 27:13; 43:5-7; 60:21; 61:8-9; Jer. 16:14-16; 30:1-11; 31:8, 28-37; 32:37-44; Eze. 11:14-21; 20:42; 34:13; 37:21-28; 39:25-29; Amos 9:14-15; Obadiah 17; Micah 4:1-8; Zeph. 3:14-20; Zech. 8:5-22; 10:10). These passages indicate that Israel will occupy their promised land. It is an everlasting possession.

Samuel Wilkinson wrote, "The O. T. promises are all as certain of fulfillment in their O. T. sense and meaning and purpose to Israel, as are the N. T. promises certain of fulfillment to the Church" (*The Israel Promises and Their Fulfillment*, p. 57).

A passage of Scripture important to the discussion of Israel and her relation to the future is found in Daniel 9:25-27. Time does not permit us to study in detail Daniel chapter nine. "Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate" (Daniel 9:26-27). This passage is referring to the same events as Jesus's predictions in Matthew 24 and Luke 21. The first 483 years have been literally fulfilled. Jerusalem was rebuilt as indicated in Daniel 9:25 and the Messiah was cut off after 483 years in A.D. 30. The events during the final seven years are yet to be fulfilled. The simplest way to take these passages is stated by Walvoord. "Israel's glorious restoration in the millennial kingdom will follow the second advent of Christ and continue throughout the thousand years of Christ's reign on earth" (*Major Bible Themes*, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Revised by John F. Walvoord, Zondervan, p. 309).

The prophet Ezekiel looked across the centuries and wrote the words of the LORD God: "I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out; and I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face. As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you," declares the Lord God. I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; and I will purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the Lord" (Ezekiel 20:34-38).

The Hebrew prophet Amos saw that same day when he wrote: "Also I will restore the captivity of My people Israel, And they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them; they will also plant vineyards and drink their wine, and make gardens and eat their fruit. I will also plant them on their land, and they will not again be rooted out from their land which I have given them, says the Lord your God" (Amos 9:14-15).

These passages point to a day when Jesus Christ returns to the earth and sovereign King and will put down every enemy and reign. It will be a time when God will regather the nation Israel back to their land again.

"The history in the Old Testament is largely in fulfillment of the great prophecies of Scripture," notes John Walvoord. "Literally hundreds of prophecies have been fulfilled. . . The Old Testament predicted three dispensations of the land of Israel, and these were fulfilled (1) in her descent into Egypt and subsequent bondage and release, and the return to the land, (2) the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities which removed Israel once again from the land, and her subsequent return after seventy years in Babylon, and (3) her dispossession once again after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The broad movement of Israel possessing the land and being disposed of it formed the important background for her entire history (Gen. 15:13-16; Deut. 28:62-67; Jer. 25:11-12; cf. also Lev. 26:3-46; Deut. 30:1-3; Neh. 1:8; Psa. 106:1-48; Jer. 9:16; 18:15-17; Ezek. 2:14-15; 20:23; 22:15; James 1:1)" (*Major Bible Themes*, pp. 304-305).

Another important factor is the Davidic kingdom. The throne promised to David and his seed forever (2 Sam. 7:16; Psa. 89:35-36; Jer. 33:21; Dan. 7:14). Again note the lineage: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and his descendants.

Is the State of Israel today the fulfillment of these prophecies?

No one can deny the fact that no ancient nation has ever come back to existence after two thousand years. Never before has any ancient people, scattered down through the centuries returned to their ancient land, and regained its independence as a nation. Only Israel with over 4,000 years of existence remains a separate people. It is nothing short of a miracle. We are not talking about Ishmael and his descendants, but the descendants of Abraham through his son Isaac, Jacob and their descendants.

The regathering of Israel will continue. The "time of Jacob's trouble" will come and Israel will be persecuted during the Great Tribulation. Christ will return from heaven and descend to the Mount of Olives and deliver His persecuted people. From Jerusalem He will reign over the earth a thousand years.

The State of Israel is probably not the end of time Israel, but it is definitely the work of God preparing for such a time. Every day when you see Israel in the news you are reminded that the existence of Israel is a miracle beyond any shadow of doubt. Israel exists today because it is the sovereign purpose of God. He brought the remnant back into Palestine during the past 100 years. He established her as a nation on May 14, 1948. He has protected her over the past 60 years.

Dwight Pentecost gives a good summary of the coming events regarding Israel. "What is the relation of the newly formed state of Israel to this prophetic program? Have these prophecies already been fulfilled? Will there be a future fulfillment in the establishment for the state of Israel? A study of the Scriptures compels us to say that what we have recently seen of the establishment of the state of Israel is not the direct fulfillment of these prophecies. God today is not working toward the fulfillment of the program for Israel. That nation was temporarily set aside when they rejected Christ, and God today is calling out from among both Jew and Gentile a people for His name (Acts 15:14). God will not move toward the fulfillment of these prophecies for Israel until the Church, which is His present age program, has been removed by translation. What is to be concluded is that God is getting the stage set for this great drama, is getting the actors all in place, so that at a moment's notice He could move to fulfill these momentous events following the anticipated rapture of the church. Coming events are casting their shadows before them. The world is being made conscious of Israel because God has never forgotten the promises made to her in the days of Abraham" (*Prophecy for Today*, Zondervan Publishing House, p. 70).

In the words of the apostle Paul, "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew." Romans 9-11 describes the sovereign hand of God on Israel even until today. He is not through with His people. There is a glorious future for Israel when Christ returns and reigns for a thousand years upon the earth (Ezek. 20:34-38; Psa. 2:6-9; Dan. 7:13-14; Isa. 2:1-4; 9:6-7; 11:1-10; 32:1; Jer. 31:33-34; Eze. 34:23-24; Dan. 2:44; 7:27; Zec. 9:10; 14:16-17; Rev. 20:1-15).

Let us keep clearly in mind the second coming of Jesus Christ is imminent. It can take place any moment. He will come like a thief in the night. There is nothing to keep Him from coming today to take born again believers to be with Himself. That coming will be time for the events of the Great Tribulation to unfold before the eyes of the world.

Some Abiding Principles and Practical Applications

1. Are you ready for Christ to come? You will not have a second chance when He comes. The birth pangs are evident when you watch the news on any given day. God is arranging the events to prepare for the day of His coming to reign upon the earth. His delay is to give the church opportunity to preach the gospel to the

ends of the earth. "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" (Matthew 24:14). Perhaps He is waiting for you to believe on Him as your Savior.

2. God has reestablished Israel in the land. The land belongs to Israel. God is working out His eternal purpose through His people. What He is doing will bring glory to His name alone. "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:36).

3. Israel is back in the land. "Israel today is in the proper place to enter in to the covenant anticipated in Daniel 9:27 which will begin the last seven-year period leading up to the second coming of Christ. Even the modern city of Jerusalem built by Israel is occupying the precise area predicted in Jeremiah 31:38-40 . . ." (John Walvoord, *Israel in Prophecy*, Zondervan, p. 130). Jesus Christ, David's greater son, shall reign as King over Israel (Luke 1:30-33).

4. No nation has ever treated Israel with hatred and survived. Listen carefully to God's promise to Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse" (Genesis 12:3). As a nation we had better be careful how we treat the people of Israel. I appreciate the words of Donald Barnhouse. "When a man dies, a physician has to write on the death certificate the cause of death. When a nation dies, more often than not, the cause of death is that the nation has mistreated the Jews" (*Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 77). History is a testimony to that truth.

5. "And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:4). Indeed, we have been blessed with the fulfillment of this great sentence. Jesus is the fulfillment of this blessing. Have you been blessed by Him?

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