

Israel - Whose Land Is It?

Two peoples claim the same land in the Middle East. The competing claims of the Jewish people and the Arab and Islamic peoples have led to a series of wars. Disagreements over the land may lead to further wars, and possibly involve other nations. Israel is a focal point of world tension that threatens the stability of the whole world.

Whose land is it? Does the land belong to Israel or the Palestinians, or to both peoples? Who has the right to decide to whom the Land belongs? Israel? The Arab League? The United States? The United Nations Security Council? The United Nations General Assembly? How should it be decided? By the Koran? By the various competing claims of history? By voting? By war? When the Word of God speaks authoritatively on any subject, that is the final word. The Creator of the Earth has much to say about the Land and people of Israel in His supernatural revelation, the Bible, which is the very Word of God.

The Jewish people are the Chosen People: After Adam and Eve sinned, humanity deteriorated so badly that the Lord God destroyed the early world of men with the Great Flood. Noah and his family knew the Lord, and were spared, but after they came out of the Ark and started repopulating the world, their descendants abandoned God, became idolatrous, perverse and evil. Then God created a special nation to be a light to the other nations, to teach the other nations about the one God, and how to be reconciled with Him and receive salvation. Through Israel came the patriarchs and apostles and prophets, and the divinely inspired Scriptures, which teach us everything we need to know to please God and live a genuinely successful life. Through the Jewish people came the Messiah, who enables us to experience atonement, be reconciled to God and live forever!

The Land of Israel belongs to God: *“The Earth is the Lord’s and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it”* (Psalm 24:1). Since the entire world belongs to God, He has the right to apportion it as He chooses.

To fulfill our calling to be a light to the nations, the Chosen People needed a Chosen Land; and so the God of Israel strategically chose the Land of Israel for the People of Israel: *“This is Jerusalem; I have set her at the center of the nations, with lands around her”* (Ezekiel 5:5 and also 38:12). The Land that God chose for us is located in the center of the nations, connecting the continents of Europe, Africa and Asia. Because of this strategic location, the Jewish people had ample exposure to all the nations of the world. The Creator specifically gave the nations their lands based on the Jewish people’s right to be in the Land of Israel! *“When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of man, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel”* (Deuteronomy 32:8).

The Land of Israel was given by God in an everlasting covenant to Abraham and his descendants as an everlasting possession: *“The Lord appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this Land’”* (Genesis 12:7). God further said to Abraham: *“I will establish My covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for*

the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you” (Genesis 17:7-8).

Even though Abraham had many sons, the Land of Israel wasn't given to Ishmael, or to any of the other sons of Abraham, but only to Isaac: *“Abraham said to God, ‘Oh that Ishmael might live before You!’ But God said ‘No, but Sarah your wife shall 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’” (Genesis 17:18-19).* God rejected Abraham's request that Ishmael be the heir of the covenant, and appointed Isaac instead. Years later the Lord God appeared to Isaac and said, *“to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. And I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the Earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 26:3-4).* Knowing that Isaac was the heir of the covenant, which included the Land of Israel, Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. He gave gifts to his other sons, but he sent them away to the lands of the east, not wanting the heir of the everlasting covenant to have rivalry over the Land of Israel from his siblings (Genesis 25:5-6).

Even though Isaac had two sons, the Land wasn't given to Esau, but to Jacob: One night Jacob had a dream while fleeing from his brother Esau. In his dream the Lord said to him, *“I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the Land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants.” (Genesis 28:13).* God later appeared to Jacob and said to him, *“the Land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, and I will give the Land to your descendants after you” (Genesis 35:11-12).* This promise deeds the Land of Israel to the descendants of Jacob - the Jewish people of today.

In addition to the everlasting covenant (which includes the Land), God swore an oath to give the Jewish people this Land: Keep in mind that it's absolutely impossible for the faithful God to break an oath (see Hebrews 6:16-18). In the Holy Scriptures, this oath is reiterated more than forty times. Here is just one example: *“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 will give the land of Canaan as the portion of your inheritance’” (Psalm 105:8-11).* There is no other passage in which there are so many words used to describe God's unyielding commitment to Israel: covenant, word, oath, confirm, commandment, a thousand generations, statute, everlasting covenant. A person has to have a terrible bias or a wilful ignorance not to understand that God is assuring the Jewish people the perpetual right to the Land of Israel in the strongest possible language.

There is no doubt about Israel's God-given borders because they are described for us in detail in the Holy Scriptures: *“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... Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it*

to you” (Genesis 13:14-17). “*The Lord made a covenant with Abraham, saying, ‘To your descendants I have given this Land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates’*” (Genesis 15:18-21). “*I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River Euphrates*” (Exodus 23:31). Therefore we must conclude that the entire Land of Israel, including Judea and Samaria (the so-called "West Bank"), Gaza, the Golan Heights, and all of Jerusalem, was given by the God of Israel to the people of Israel in perpetuity. We, and we alone, have been given the title to the Land of Israel as a permanent inheritance by the Lord. No human government or coalition of governments has the right or authority to cede portions of the Land of Israel to anyone else.

Israel's sin and resulting exile from the Land of Israel never annulled God's covenant with His Chosen People, nor did it permanently abrogate our right to the Land of Israel: “*Yet in spite of this (Israel's disobedience), 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*” - which includes the Land of Israel (Leviticus 26:44-45). The Lord promises us that our exile from Israel will be temporary!

In Deuteronomy 30:1-5, Moses specifically predicted that we would experience a time of obedience and blessing within the Land, followed by a period of disobedience and exile from the Land, followed by spiritual restoration to God and physical restoration to the Land: “*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 people where the Lord your God has scattered you. 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.” The same people whom God scattered, He promises to regather to their ancestral homeland. The people who have been regathered are the Jewish people.*

In His prophetic Word, God promised to regather us to "our own Land": “*I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands, and bring you into your own Land... And you will live in the Land that I gave to your forefathers*” (Ezekiel 36:24, 28). Again Ezekiel predicts: “*Thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own Land’*” (Ezekiel 37:21). The Lord considers this special land to be uniquely belonging to the Jewish people. Jeremiah adds: “*‘Behold days are coming’ declares the Lord, ‘when it will no longer be said, “As the Lord lives, who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt,” but, “As the Lord lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the countries where He had banished them.” For I will restore them to their own Land which I gave to their fathers’*” (Jeremiah 16:14-15). The Lord promises that He will return the scattered Jewish people to our ancestral territory - Israel, and this regathering to our own Land will be

greater than the Exodus out of Egypt!

God, speaking to us through the prophet Ezekiel, informs us that this Land is specifically reserved for the Jewish people: *“You O mountains of Israel, you will put forth your branches and bear your fruit for My people Israel; for they will soon come. For behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you will be cultivated and sown. I will multiply men on you, all the house of Israel, all of it; and the cities will be inhabited and the waste places will be rebuilt”* (Ezekiel 36:8-10). 2,500 years ago Ezekiel told us that in the Last Days the Jewish people would be restored to our Land. The Land would begin to prosper and the Jewish population would greatly increase. In the past century these prophetic words have been coming to pass. Just as the Lord said, the Land of Israel, which lay barren for centuries, has seen increasing numbers of the sons of Israel returning to our ancient homeland, repopulating the cities and cultivating the Land.

In His prophetic Word, God calls this restored Land "Israel" - not "Palestine": *“I will open up your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the Land of Israel”* (Ezekiel 37:12). The name "Palestine" comes from the Philistines, the ancient enemies of the Jewish people. "Palestine" was the derogatory name given to the Land of Israel by the Romans after they conquered us. But throughout the Word of God, this Land is always called Israel - never Palestine.

The Word of God prophetically tells us that before Messiah Yeshua returns, the Jewish people would be brought back to our land in a state of unbelief. Physical restoration to the Land of Israel would then be followed by spiritual restoration to the God of Israel. The Lord promises us: *I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God* (Ezekiel 36:24-28). The vision of the dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14) gives us the same message. The dry bones represent the Jewish people. We are in a state of spiritual death among the nations. The Lord promises to take us from our grave among the nations and restore us to Israel. After we are back in our Land, the dry bones come together, and sinew, flesh and skin cover the bones. That represents the physical restoration of the Jewish people and the reestablishment of the nation of Israel. The problem is that the restoration will not be complete. There are bodies, but the bodies are without breathe - not fully alive. Then the breathe came (the Holy Spirit) and the bodies became fully alive. This represents spiritual restoration and spiritual life. So, first comes physical restoration of the Jewish people to our Land. After that we receive the Holy Spirit, who gives us spiritual life and reconnects us to God. It is God’s stated intention to first restore us to our Land, and after that, give us new spiritual life. No individual or nation should dare oppose or interfere with this God-ordained plan for the Chosen People and their Chosen Land.

The Son of God Himself predicted that because the majority of Israel did not believe He

was the Messiah, Jerusalem would be destroyed, and we would be exiled among the nations, but eventually, we would return to the Land of Israel (Luke 21:23-24). This prophecy began in 70 AD when Jerusalem was destroyed, and then again in 135 AD, when the Second Jewish Revolt against the Roman Empire was crushed. We were scattered to the nations, and lost political control of Jerusalem and Israel. However, over the past 2,000 years, there were always some Jewish people who remained in the Land of Israel. Starting in the 1880's, this prophesied regathering of Jewish people to Israel picked up speed, and now there is a reborn nation of Israel, with Jerusalem as its capital, with 5.5 million Jewish people regathered from more than 70 countries - just as Israel's Messiah predicted. And amazingly, even though our original language, Hebrew, died out as a spoken language, it has been resurrected and is once again the spoken language of the Jewish people of today. This restoration of a language is unique in human experience. It's no coincidence that after two thousand years of exile, the Chosen People are being restored to the Land that our fathers possessed, and simultaneously, we are being spiritually restored to God through the Messiah, as is evidenced by the growth of the Messianic Jewish movement in Israel and around the world. This is not a historical accident, but the plan of God!

2,500 years ago the Lord also told us that the Jewish return to the Land would provoke a reaction from Israel's neighbors: *"Because the enemy has spoken against you 'Aha' and 'The everlasting heights have become our possession' ... Surely in the fire of My jealousy I have spoken against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom, who appropriated My Land for themselves as a possession with wholehearted joy and scorn of soul, to drive it out as a prey"* (Ezekiel 36:2-5). Even though the nations surrounding Israel would claim possession of the Land of Israel for themselves, and try to drive out its rightful Jewish inhabitants, God repudiates the claims of these nations. Even though the majority of the Jewish people were exiled from our Land (there always was a remnant of Jewish people who remained within Israel), that doesn't give anyone else the right to claim the Land of Israel for themselves. If a landlord has some bad tenants that he evicts from his property, he does not expect anyone else to enter his vacant property and claim it for their own. Due to our sins, the Landlord of Israel evicted most of us from the Land, but that didn't give the Romans, the Byzantines, the Crusaders, the Ottomans or the Arabs the right to claim God's holy Land for themselves. Aren't they mere squatters?

Eventually this conflict over the Land of Israel will entangle the entire world: God, speaking through the prophet Zechariah in 12:1-3, in the sixth century BC, predicted: *"Behold I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that causes reeling to all the peoples around"* (the nations will react to the regathering of the Jewish people with senseless behavior and irrational hatred); *"and when the siege is against Jerusalem, it will also be against Judah. And it will come about in that day that I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples"* (Israel's neighbors want to destroy the hated "Zionist Entity" because the Islamic worldview teaches that the entire world will ultimately come under the control of Islam. A Jewish state in the midst of the Moslem Middle East is by its very existence an insult to Allah and Islam, and must be destroyed. Islam can have no true and lasting peace with Israel - only a temporary cease-fire. Hostilities will once again be renewed when Islamic strength is renewed. At its core, this is a religious conflict - not a political or economic one); *"all who lift it will be severely injured."* (The nations of the world will be

drawn into this conflict and try to remove the Jewish presence and authority from Jerusalem. However, be warned - every nation that tries to remove the Jewish people from our Land and capital city will be severely injured). *“And all the nations of the Earth will be gathered against it.”* (The world’s united nations will wage a final world war in the Middle East, directed against Israel).

It's amazing to see this 2,500-year-old prophetic scenario shaping up before our very eyes! Zechariah’s prophecy continues and informs us that the army of the united nations will be completely defeated; the All-Powerful God will destroy all those nations that fight against Israel; Israel will be miraculously saved from destruction, and also be spiritually saved by recognizing the One whom we have pierced - the resurrected and glorified Messiah Yeshua!

This will be a time of great difficulty for the Jewish people, but we will be miraculously delivered out of it: *“Alas! for that day is great, there is none like it; and it is the time of Jacob's distress, but he will be saved from it”* (Jeremiah 30:7). As the world turns against Israel and the Jewish people, and sides with our enemies, the fires of anti-Semitism will reach their hottest point, but with God's help, we will come through our fiery trials to a time of unparalleled salvation. Israel’s salvation and blessing will then overflow to the other nations of the world!

The Almighty God will severely judge any nation who defies Him and His Word and dares to divide up any part of this special Land: *“In those days and at that time when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat. Then I will enter into judgment with them there on behalf of My people and My inheritance Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; and they have divided up My Land”* (Joel 3:1-2). When Messiah Yeshua returns, the fortunes of the Jewish people will be fully restored, and the nations will be summoned to Jerusalem, where they will be judged for scattering the Jewish people and dividing up our Land.

Sadly, many Christians won’t accept these facts because they accept "Replacement Theology," the erroneous teaching that God is finished with the Jewish people, and has replaced Israel with the Church. Speaking to us through the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord specifically warns against having a theology that denies Israel's future destiny: *“Have you not observed what this people have spoken, saying, ‘The two families which the Lord chose, He has rejected them?’ Thus they despise My people, no longer are they as a nation in their sight. Thus says the Lord, ‘If My covenant for day and night stand not, and the fixed patterns of Heaven and Earth I have not established, then I would reject the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, not taking from His descendants rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them’”* (Jeremiah 33:24-26). This tells us that all of God’s promises to the Jewish people will literally be fulfilled!

Christians must repudiate “Replacement Theology.” No one who claims to follow the Messiah ought to teach or believe that the Jewish people have been lost, destroyed, replaced, superseded, permanently set aside or continually exiled from our Land. Don’t ignore the admonition given by Rabbi Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, specifically directed to Gentile Christians, which I

paraphrase here: *“do not be arrogant toward the natural branches, the Jewish people. God chose them to be the root of the Tree of Salvation. They support you - you don't support or replace them! Only some of them were broken off from the Tree of Salvation - not all of them. Moreover, it is God's plan to graft the entire Jewish nation back into the Tree of Salvation, so don't be arrogant or conceited toward the Jewish people. Be respectful to them, lest God punish you!”* (Romans 11:17-24).

Knowing that God will not break His covenant with the Jewish people, even in spite of our sins, should be reassuring to every Christian. If God broke His covenant with the Jewish people (which includes the Land of Israel) due to our sins, what about twenty centuries of sin in the Church? It's true that there has been a faithful remnant within the Church, just as there has always been a faithful remnant of true Believers within Israel, but there has also been an endless succession of anti-Semitism, heresy, apostasy, greed, immorality, division, and ceaseless struggles for power and prominence within the Church. Professing Christians have subjected fellow Christians to torture and death in the name of Christ. If God can annul His covenant with Israel, then He can just as easily annul His covenant with the Church! But the faithful God will never break any of His covenants - with Israel or the Church.

If you are a Christian you need to stand by Israel, and support Israel as much as possible. God's ancient promise in Genesis 12:3 is still very much in effect: *“I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse.”* And God, speaking to Israel, promises, *“Behold, all those who are angered at you will be shamed and dishonored; those who contend with you will be as nothing and will perish. You will seek those who quarrel with you, but will not find them, those who war with you will be as nothing and non-existent”* (Isaiah 41:11-12).

Christian churches should regularly pray *“for the peace of Jerusalem,”* asking God to send Yeshua - the Prince of Peace, back to Jerusalem - the City of Peace, so He can rule on the throne of David, bringing peace and prosperity and justice to Israel and the other nations. There will never be peace in the Middle East, or on Earth, until Prince Yeshua is ruling from Jerusalem over a restored Israel populated by Messianic Jews! We also need to pray for our Arab brothers, that they too might come into relationship with the God of Israel through Messiah Yeshua.

Rather than persecuting us for the death of Yeshua, and engaging in any form of anti-Semitism, and embracing Replacement Theology, true Christians must reach out to the Jewish people with love and mercy, and help us find God and the Messiah. Because of the way that God has used Israel to bring salvation to the other nations (*salvation is of the Jews*), every true Christian is under a special obligation to help the Chosen People, who have stumbled, come into a right relationship with God, which includes Messiah Yeshua. Rabbi Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, declared: *“Salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel jealous”* (Romans 11:11). True Christians should have compassion on us, love us and make us jealous of their relationship with the God of Israel. Your peace and joy, your love and mercy, and your knowledge of God and Messiah and the Bible should challenge us to reevaluate our rejection of Yeshua!

Finally, Christians need to support those who are reaching out to the Jewish people with the

Good News about Messiah Yeshua, supporting those that not only bless Israel, but also those who bring us the Good News. The God-ordained priority for world evangelism demands that the Good News about the Messiah must go to the Jewish people first (Romans 1:16).

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