

ISRAEL - WHOSE LAND IS IT? (Rick Yohn)

Over the past three thousand years, people groups and nations have argued over who has the right to live in the Land of the Bible. Perhaps a history lesson, not provided by the present day news commentators or newspapers, will answer that question. Does the Land belong to the Palestinians or the Jews? Is the Land of Israel the rightful property of the Muslims or those of the Jewish faith?

Let's begin with the Palestinians. How far back does this nation go? According to both the Bible and the secular history books up to 1988, there is no mention of a Palestinian State. In fact, the State of Palestine was not created until November 15, 1988 and Yasser Arafat became its first President. On the other hand, the State of Israel was created under King David three thousand years earlier. Before that time, the name, Palestinian, was assigned to whoever was living in the Land including both Jews and Arabs. But when the United Nations recognized Israel as a State once again, six Arab nations attacked the Jews of the Land, including Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia. It seemed like a repeat of David and Goliath. The Jewish population at the time was 650,000 against the combined population of the six nations which was 40 million. The Jews call that period The War of Independence, while the Palestinians refer to it as The "Nakba" (catastrophe).

Other wars followed The War of Independence including: (1) The Six-Day War (1967), (2) The Yom Kippur War (1973), (3) The First Intifada (1987-93), (4) The Second Intifada (2000-05), and (5) The Gaza War (2008-09).

Furthermore, the Palestinian State is now divided in government and allegiance between the PLO, run by Chairman Abbas, who runs the West Bank and Hamas, that controls the Gaza Strip. And as far as the main-stream media is concerned, the Jews are "occupiers" and the Palestinians own the Land. So who is the rightful owner of that Land? When in doubt of ownership always check the contract.

The contract for the Land of Israel has been known over the last four thousand years as a "Covenant" (The Abrahamic Covenant). That covenant (contract) was made a thousand years even before King David came on the scene and we can find the "Title Deed" in the first Book of the Bible – Genesis. The contract was made between God and a man named Abraham. The words of the contract go something like this, *"The Lord had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples of the earth will be blessed through you.'"* (Genesis 12:1-3). This covenant (contract) was God's idea, not Abraham's. He would have stayed where he was had God not challenged him to leave his comfort zone and go to a place where he had never been and live among people of a different language and culture.

Later, God enlarged the covenant to include more specific information. God told Abraham, *"Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever."* (Genesis 13:14). We don't know exactly where Abraham was standing, but it was at a high enough elevation to see the whole plain of the Jordan Valley, which would have been east from where he was standing. As Abraham turned around to the south and west and north, his



Figure 1 - Map of Israel's War of Independence - armishel.tistory.com/237



eyes provided a mental photograph of just how expansive an area God's contract included. But God wasn't finished surprising Abraham. He decided to become even more specific so He included the people groups who lived in the Land. *"To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt – the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites"* (Genesis 15:18-19).

However, this does not yet solve the mystery of the rightful owner of the Land. God told Abraham that he would make him the father of many nations – *"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you."* (Genesis 17:4-6). Now it is important to know when God made this statement. Abraham was already a father, for he had a son by Hagar, his wife's handmaiden. The son's name was Ishmael and he was twelve years of age. And being the "firstborn", Ishmael expected to receive all the rights and privileges of the first-born son. However, when God promised a son to Abraham, He was not referring to Ishmael, who was the brain-child of Sarah, Abraham's wife. God promised Abraham a son that would come from the bodies of both Abraham and Sarah.

That promise astonished Abraham, who thought that Ishmael would be his legitimate heir. In fact, Abraham laughed at the thought of having a second son. He questioned this reality by asking, *"Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" And Abraham said to God, 'If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!'"* (Genesis 17:17-18)

The name of this son would be Isaac. Consider God's further revelation of His contract with Abraham. *"Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. **I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.** And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. **But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.**"* (Genesis 17:17-21)

God blessed both of Abraham's sons: Ishmael and Isaac. However, the Land Contract was to be made with Isaac and his descendants, which today we call Jews. Later, this contract was passed on from Abraham to Isaac and then to Jacob rather than to his brother Esau, from whom came the Edomites and the Idumeans. It is true that many Arabs come from the line of Ishmael and those of the Muslim faith honor Ishmael, but other people groups also derive from Ishmael. However, only those of Jewish blood come from Isaac and have the right to claim what God has promised and given them.

The Jews have a 4,000-year covenant or contract with God when it comes to the Land of Israel. But what they now possess is not what they will eventually inherit. If anyone in the United Nations read God's contract with Israel to the U.N. delegates, there would be a riot, and whoever read the contents out loud would be attacked as a traitor, lunatic, or terrorist. However, here's the rest of the story.



Figure 3 - Map of Israel's Future Territory - www.biblerays.com

In the Book of Numbers, Moses tells His people the future boundaries of Israel (southern, western, northern, and eastern boundaries (Numbers 34:3-12). And (Ezekiel 47:15-20) provides the borders of Israel's future land once again. Israel's neighbors are doing all they can to reduce the Jewish territory, but God will determine who receives what portion of the property. After all, the Land is God's Land, and He will give to whomever He wants to give it – *“The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it”* (Psalm 24:1). And since the Abrahamic Covenant is an “eternal” Covenant, the promise and contracts are guaranteed.

Where was Abraham when God made such promises? Was he in communication with God? Did he and God come to some agreement terms, such as, *“If you do this, I will do that”*? Let's look at the timetable when God made this Covenant with Abraham. *“As the sun was setting, **Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him**”* (Genesis 16:12). Abram was sound asleep and had no input into God’s promises to him. Such a Covenant is called an “unconditional” covenant. In other words, Abraham did not have to do anything for God to give him this promise of a land. The fulfillment of God’s promise was based upon God’s faithfulness and not Abraham’s goodness or faithfulness. God made the promise and then guaranteed it by walking in the blood of slain animals and birds. And Abraham? He was experiencing “Dream Land” as God was putting His reputation online.

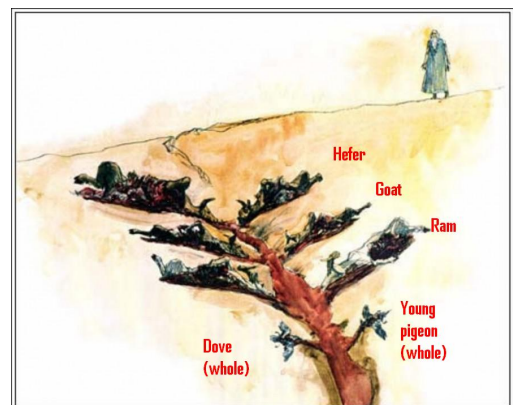


Figure 4 - Abraham prepares for God's Contract - <https://achristian.wordpress.com>

God promised His people time and again that He would one day gather them from the nations and bring them back to the Land He promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: *“For **I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine. Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign LORD. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, O house of Israel! ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. They will say, ‘This land that was laid waste **has become like the garden of Eden**; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited.’ Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.”** (Ezekiel 36:24-36)*

These promises were partially fulfilled in 1947-48 when the United Nations voted to give them a small portion of what God had promised them. Israel is back in the Land God has given them. Eventually, God will make Himself known to them in such a way that they will recognize Jesus as their Messiah and turn to Him. The Apostle Paul said it best when he wrote, *“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: **Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved**, as it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”(Romans 9:25-27)*

In the May issue of The Atlantic Magazine, Wajahat Ali, a Muslim journalist wrote an excellent article on his experiences in Israel as an American Muslim. After many interviews with both Jews and Muslims, this was his conclusion: *“Is this land worth all the pain and suffering and bloodshed? I couldn’t ask God, because I’m convinced that he’s now an absentee landowner. He sold Abraham’s children a lemon.”*

Many people may agree with Wajahat Ali if they are unaware of the God of the Bible, or reject what the Scriptures teach. No, God did not sell Abraham’s children a lemon or anything of the kind. Instead, God **GAVE** that Land to His people whom He chose for reasons known only to Himself. And in my lifetime, He has gathered His people from the nations, brought them back to the Land. Today we await the rest of God’s promise to put His Spirit into their hearts, turn them to their Messiah, and place His Son on the throne, reigning from Jerusalem until He creates a new heaven and new earth. Until that time, we are responsible for proclaiming His good news to Jew and Gentile alike and turn people from the darkness to the light, and from spiritual death to new life in Christ.