The Land of Israel: Whose Property Is It?

A Call for Christians to Recognize Israel's Homeland

Genesis 12:1—8

by Robert D. Pace

In recent years, the United Nations has vigorously pursued a plan for the Palestinians to become an autonomous nation within the Biblically etched borders of Israel. This two-State solution demands that the Israelis surrender the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem, territory that encompasses the ancient regions of Judea and Samaria, where Christ, the Prophets, and the Apostles ministered. Known as the "Land for Peace" doctrine, it comes with the pledge that Israel will have peace with its neighboring States as it surrenders land. But is this the solution that will assuage the Arabs' "ancient hostility" toward the Jews (Ezekiel 35:5)? And most importantly, what does the Bible say about this proposition?

While it is beneficial for the world to understand God's determinations, it is imperative that Christians understand them. In fact, God has placed a mandate upon Believers to support his purposes.

Thousands of years ago, starting in the book of Genesis, God made it clear that the Jewish people had a unique destiny. God chose them to give mankind the Holy Scriptures and the Savior of the world. Distinct in destiny, God also assigned a unique parcel of real estate to the Israelis that is to be theirs in perpetuity. When you compile the Scriptures that disclose Israel's borders, you discover they stretch from the Euphrates River in the North to the River of Egypt in the South and from the Jordan River in the East to the Mediterranean Sea in the West (Genesis 15:18; 32:28; Numbers 34:1-12; Joshua 15:20; 47).

In Genesis, Moses shows God bequeathing this property to the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That's what Genesis 15:18 means when God said to Abraham: "Unto thy seed have I given this land." And this is no obscure citation, because the Bible discloses fifty-five references to God giving the Israelis this territory. Notable among the many notations are the words God spoke to Abraham in Genesis 17:8, when he says, "The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

But the Bible furnishes yet more evidence to establish Israel's claim to this land. Three thousand years ago, King David purchased the entire Mountain of Moriah, where Solomon would later build the Temple. In so doing, David secured the entire 45-acre plot that is known today as the "Temple Mount" (2 Samuel 24).

Thus, the Bible supplies trilateral testimony that the Israelis own this property. They own it by (1) God's pledge to Abraham, (2) by the Lord's repeated pledge in Scripture, and (3) they own it by David's purchase.

Despite the witness of Scripture, Jerusalem and the Temple Mount remain the most disputed real estate on the planet. In recent months, there has been renewed determination among international leaders that a two-State Israeli-Palestinian solution is the right one. The "Land for Peace" doctrine is touted as the ultimate dealmaker. And this effort to transfer Israeli property to the Palestinians moves forward even though Palestinians are without artifacts from antiquity or cultural documentation to justify their claim to the land.

In the not-too-distant-future, Palestinian pressure will convince the international community (the United Nations) to grant Statehood to the Palestinians. While God has undying love for the Palestinians, he also has an undying commitment to his immutable Word!

> Psalm 105:8–9 says, God "Remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations, (9) the covenant he made with Abraham."
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> Leviticus 25:23 says, "The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is Mine."
> And especially notice the repeated warnings of the prophet Zechariah:
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> Zechariah 2:8 says, "whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye—(9) I will surely raise my hand against them."
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> Zechariah 8:2 records this: "This is what the Lord Almighty says: "I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her.""
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> Notice Zechariah 12:4 that says, "On that day I will strike every horse with panic and its rider with madness," declares the LORD. "I will keep a watchful eye over Judah, but I will blind all the horses of the nations."

> And finally, note Zechariah 12:9: "On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem."

The Bible couldn't be clearer in disclosing God's disposition toward the Israelis and the Holy Land: the Jews are forever God's chosen people and the land God pledged to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob forever belongs to their descendants—the Jews.

But there's one more notation that must be overlooked concerning Israel's land. The Bible repeatedly calls this property the "Holy Land" (Psalm 78:54; Ezekiel 48:12; Zechariah 2:12). This phrase identifies the sole proprietor of the land. And it belongs to the holy God who made this land holy! That means this land is actually God's property on loan to the Israelis.

The God who created 196,940,400 square miles of earth's surface has sanctified a mere 12,000 square miles of landmass and called it the "Holy Land." That means, in God's eyes, the issue is settled! He has eternally etched the borders of Israel and then issued a "Hands-Off!" ultimatum to man. Had Israel's borders been negotiable or temporarily assigned to the Jews, the Lord would have noted that, but he didn't! This is why world leaders get it wrong when they insist that the Israelis must "Give peace a chance!" and redraw their borders. God has strongly warned of the consequences of "dividing his land," and it's always to man's detriment to disregard that warning (Joel 3:2).

While God wants everyone to recognize this, evangelical Christians, who recognize that the sacred Scriptures are fixed, must especially acknowledge that the Israelis are the sole proprietors of this hallowed property. Christians must look deeply into their hearts, solemnly pledge allegiance to God's Word, remain steadfast on this volatile issue, and pray for the welfare of all people living in the Middle East.

Alexander the Great once said, "I am not afraid of an army of lions led by a sheep. But I am afraid of an army of sheep led by a Lion." And this describes God's relationship with the Jews. Christ, the divine Lion of God, is the indomitable One who leads the sheep of his pasture—Israel—before the world.

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Additional Material

Does the Land of Israel Belong to The Jewish People?

Sixteen Biblical Facts you Can't Ignore
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Two peoples claim the same land in the Middle East. Whose land is it? Who is right: Israel or the Palestinians? Does it belong 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. God has much to say about the Land and people of Israel in his supernatural revelation, the Bible, which is the very Word of God.

Fact #1. The Jewish people are the Chosen People: After Adam and Eve sinned, humanity deteriorated so badly that 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, their descendants abandoned God, became idolatrous, perverse and evil. Then God created a special nation to be a light to the other nations. The Creator of the universe specifically chose the nation of Israel to be that unique people who would witness to his reality. "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession out of all the people who are on the face of the Earth" (Deuteronomy 7:6).

"You are My witnesses," declares the Lord, "and My servant whom I have chosen, in order that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me. I, even I am the Lord; and there is no Savior beside Me" (Isaiah 43:10-11). If the Chosen People were faithful to our calling, God promised to bless us above all the other nations, so that the nations of the world would know that the God of Israel is the true God who alone can save us, by reconciling us to Himself, thereby restoring us to peace, joy, blessing and life. But if we were disobedient to our calling, the Lord promised to severely punish us so that the nations of the world would learn a lesson from us, and know that it is a terrible thing to disobey the God of Israel. Either way, through our obedience or disobedience, the Chosen People would witness to the other nations of the world that the God of Israel is to be reckoned with.

Fact #2. 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, and he specifically gave the nations their lands based on the Jewish people's right to 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. For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the allotment of his inheritance" (Deuteronomy 32:8-9).

Fact #3. 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). 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.

Fact #4. The Land of Israel was given by God to the descendants of Abraham 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 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. And 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" (Genesis 17:7-8).

Fact #5. 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).

Fact #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.

Fact #7. 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.

Fact #8. 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 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 not to understand that God is assuring the Jewish people the perpetual right to the Land of Israel in the strongest possible language.

Fact #9. 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). Our exile from Israel was meant to 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."

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.

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 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. 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 5.3 million Jewish people regathered from more than 70 countries, just as Israel's Messiah predicted.

Fact #10. 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). 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). Ultimately this regathering to our own Land will be greater than the Exodus out of Egypt!

Fact #11. 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.

Fact #12. 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. 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.

Fact #13. 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.

Fact #14. God will severely judge any nation who divides 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.

Fact #15. 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 Islamic 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 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 defeated; God will destroy all those nations that fight against Israel; Israel will be miraculously saved and recognize Yeshua as the Messiah!

Fact #16. 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). The fires of anti-Semitism will reach their hottest point in the near future, 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.

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). 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).

Someone observed that 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 Christian history? 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 visible 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 King Messiah back to Jerusalem, so he can rule on the throne of David, bringing peace to Israel and the other nations. There will never be peace in the Middle East, or on Earth, until Messiah Yeshua is ruling from Jerusalem over a restored Israel populated by Messianic Jews. We 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, 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, 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 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 bring us the Good News.

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