

*“In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice” (Romans 11:5)*

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## IT’S STILL THE PROMISED LAND

by Galen Peterson

A key aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant is the Promised Land. The first reference to the land followed God’s promise in Genesis 12 that a great nation would come from Abraham, which would become the nation of Israel. God then told 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” (Gen 13:14-15,17).

The extent of the Promised Land was based on everywhere that Abraham could *see* as he walked during his journey. In Genesis 15, God finalized the covenant by declaring the specific boundaries allotted for the nation that would later arise from Abram:

On that day Adonai 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” (Gen 15:18).

It is generally believed that the “river of Egypt” is a reference to the Wadi El Arish a river valley that separates Egypt from the land of Canaan. The northeastern border of the Promised Land is the headwaters of the Euphrates River where Abraham began his journey. Then in Genesis 15:19-20, God confirmed the extent of the rest of the territory by describing all of the Canaanite tribal lands that He was giving to Israel. Finally, as the book of Joshua begins, God made it clear that the Promised Land extended to what is now called the Mediterranean Sea (Jos 1:3-4).

When the Israelites actually entered the land, the twelve tribes were assigned territories within those boundaries, but they didn’t dwell on the full Promised Land.

Under David and Solomon the kingdom of Israel was extended to all of the borders originally designated by God (1 Ki 8:65), with two exceptions—the southern coastal region of Gaza

held by the Philistines, and the northern coastal region inhabited by the Phoenicians. So while David and Solomon came very close, there has never been a time when Israel possessed the entire Promised Land.

As time passed, the borders began shrinking, with the dividing of the kingdom, and then being conquered by Assyria, Babylon, Greece and Rome. After the failed Bar Kokhba rebellion against Rome in 135 A.D., Jewish possession of the Promised Land came to a complete end. All of it had been lost.

But the promise was never forgotten. Jewish people scattered around the world maintained hope

for a restoration of their homeland.

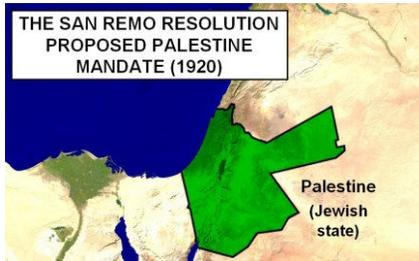
As the twentieth century began, the ancient land of Israel was part of the Ottoman Empire. However the Ottomans made a strategic error when they aligned with Germany during the First World War. In 1916, anticipating a victory in the war, British and French leaders made an agreement how to administer the defeated Ottoman territory. Known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement, it established official policy that called for France to control the northern part of the empire, and the British to control the south. They could establish states within their respective areas however they saw fit.

At that time, Arthur Balfour, the British Foreign Secretary, saw the need for finding a place where Jews could live in safety. The potential demise of the Ottoman Empire in the midst of WW1 presented such an opportunity. In 1917, Balfour issued a letter to Lord Rothschild, a leader of the British Jewish community, that expressed the official position of the government in what became known as the Balfour Declaration:

“His Majesty’s government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.”

In 1920, two years after the war ended, representatives of the victorious allied nations met in San Remo, Italy. They adopted the

position of the Balfour Declaration and incorporated it into the official policy for the creation of states from the fallen Ottoman Empire.



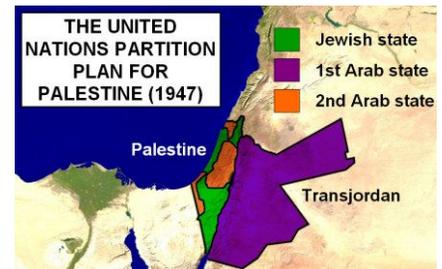
In keeping with the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, the San Remo Resolution gave France a mandate for the creation of Syria and Lebanon. And Britain received a mandate for the creation of Iraq and Palestine, with the latter being the “national home for the Jewish people” set forth in the Balfour Declaration. The borders of the Jewish state of Palestine were to encompass much of the biblical Promised Land.



But wanting to appease the Arab population in the region who intensely opposed a Jewish homeland, British leaders began backing off their original intentions. So when the League of Nations ratified the Palestine Mandate in 1922, instead of a Jewish state extending close to the biblical Promised Land according to the San Remo Resolution, it was partitioned into two states, a Jewish state called Palestine on the west bank of the Jordan River, and an Arab state called Transjordan on the east bank of the river.

The dividing of the land did not stop there, however. The creation of the new states of Palestine and Transjordan were put on hold for over two decades. During that time, a series of commissions discussed how the remaining portion of the Palestine Mandate could be divided again, with a second Arab state being taken from the Jewish homeland.

Eventually, in 1947 the newly



formed United Nations approved a plan in which Jews could have a patchwork state on 13% of the original Jewish homeland that had been determined 25 years earlier.

Remarkably the Jewish leaders approved the plan, even though it was both a small portion of the land originally intended for a Jewish homeland, as well as a token portion of the actual Promised Land in the Bible.

Arab leaders, on the other hand, rejected the partition plan. The reality is that the Arab world at that time did not want a single inch of land to be a Jewish homeland. And in light of the words and actions that are evident today, it is not difficult to see how that position is still widely held.

In any event, when Israel received its independence in 1948 on those minimal lands, the new nation was immediately invaded by the surrounding Arab countries, who sought to take away every last plot of ground designated for Jews. But that move ended in defeat, and Israel was able to regain some of the land that had

been taken away by the politicians who went back on their commitment years before. Those borders were ratified in a series of armistice agreements with each of the invading Arab nations the following year.

In the midst of Israel's War for Independence, Transjordan invaded and gained control of the West Bank of the Jordan River. So in reality, that nation, which was renamed Jordan in 1949, was the one who occupied Palestine. The West Bank was never part of their legal mandate. It was to be included in the Jewish state, which was called Palestine at that time.

The chronicle of shifting borders has continued ever since, including Israel gaining control of the West Bank when it was attacked again by Arab nations in 1967. And Israel has subsequently relinquished part of that land, with international calls for more changes yet to come.

But much of the confusion evident today is that the world neglects all of the legal commitments made prior to 1948, leaving the assumption that the present conflict is entirely a matter of Israel controlling "occupied land." It is clearly not that simple.

We are able, however, to identify several biblical principles that relate to the Promised Land.

### **The entitlement of the Promised Land was given permanently**

The land promise shares the overall nature of the Abrahamic Covenant, most notably, its permanence. This sense is clearly indicated in the 105th Psalm. This passage brings out the permanence of the covenant four ways:

- It is remembered by God forever (v. 8).
- It endures to a thousand

generations (v. 8). This phrase is a hyperbolic figure of speech that implies a number that exceeds one's ability to count.

- It is an everlasting covenant (v. 10)
- The land is an inheritance, which implies being passed on from one generation to the next indefinitely (v. 11).

Altogether the land aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant is described in such a way in Scripture that it conveys the sense of a promise that remains intact throughout all time.

### **Our response to God's stated will is an indicator of our acceptance of His sovereignty**

The terminology associated with the Promised Land is consistent with what is found in wills. In these documents, heirs and beneficiaries are identified, and the owner of the estate is free to specify the inheritance they specifically receive. In other words, God is free to bless human beings in different ways and He calls us to different purposes while dwelling on this earth. The same is true regarding land, so that no amount of jealousy and protesting will alter God's stated promise.

According to Ephesians 1:5-18, God has added Gentile believers to His will, promising an eternal inheritance to all who believe in Yeshua (Jesus). But He never annulled the provision of His will regarding the entitlement of a specific territory to specific heirs while living on this present earth.

That does not stop people from disregarding the will of God, however. The way that they act is described perfectly in Psalm 83, which states that the enemies of God "make shrewd plans against Your people [Israel] and conspire together" (v. 3). And they decide

to "wipe them out as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more" (v. 4). We are told that their plan is to "possess for ourselves the pastures of God."

Those words are a very accurate description of what has taken place in our world historically, and will continue to occur. By taking the Promised Land of the Jewish people, indeed by attempting to wipe out the Jewish people, it is a way of doing away with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. No Promised Land and no remnant of the people means no way to fulfill God's promises to them. And that means the Lord is defeated. So the Adversary, who is the power behind false religions, is the winner. That is why this is such an important spiritual battleground.

Ultimately it comes down to the recognition of the identity of the true God of this universe. And even if you *do* believe in the God of the Bible, are you willing to let Him exercise His sovereign will over this earth?

### **The present circumstances are not an indication of the reality of the land promise of the Abrahamic Covenant**

There has never been a time in history when God's promise regarding the land has been completely fulfilled. Abraham was the rightful owner of the land that he saw while he walked. But he was never recognized by the people dwelling on those lands as the holder of the deed. The same was true for Abraham's heir, Isaac, and his heir, Jacob.

Certainly that was the case while their descendants lived enslaved in Egypt. Surely the inhabitants of Canaan had no clue that the land they were living on at that time actually did not belong to

them by divine declaration. And it has been the case in every generation since then. The point is that you can't look at the circumstances of the day and decide what the ultimate reality is.

We still await the day when God's promise to Abraham and his descendants will be fulfilled completely. What will it take for that to happen? Since we live in a world in which the Bible is not the final authority for most people, the land of Israel, like all nations, faces administration according to international standards, whether they are biased or not.

In light of the present opposition to Israel on the world stage, the return of Yeshua to this earth, and the advent of His Messianic kingdom, is the most biblically consistent determining factor for the final realization of the Promised Land. The authoritative power of Yeshua is the only way that this world will allow it to happen. As a result, we have to look beyond the present circumstances to the way that God views this world and wait upon Him to accomplish His purposes.

### **We are called to be intercessors for Israel and the Jewish people**

When we recognize this spiritual battle centered around the land of Israel, how can we not

stand up and join the battle?

But we have to engage this battle using the weapons we have been given by God, namely what is called the "full armor of God" (Eph 6:11). And that includes prayer, especially that which is intercessory in nature (v. 18). It means not praying for yourself, but for others.

That is the nature of the 62nd chapter of Isaiah:

"For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep quiet. . . On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; all day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the Lord, take no rest for yourselves; and give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth" (Isa 62:1,6-7).

In the Ancient Near East watchmen had the assignment of seeing threats coming upon a city, and alerting those inside to defend it. In the same way, watchmen for Jerusalem are called to identify the threats that come against the Jewish people and the land of Israel, and then calling out to their great defender—the Lord. It means not waiting until it is too late, and as the prophet declares, it is a call to give God no rest.

It is also a calling with a goal in mind. A day is coming when the Lord will make Jerusalem a praise in the earth. That can only be a day when Yeshua has returned to this earth in glorious fashion, and with the power to rule the nations, including granting the totality of the Promised Land to those God designated as heirs long ago.

In the meantime, Isaiah makes it clear that all believers are called to "say to the daughter of Zion, 'Lo, your salvation comes'" (62:11).

Our ultimate calling as watchmen is to intercede for the Jewish people to recognize Yeshua as Messiah and to receive salvation through faith in Him. It is a calling that comes with the promise that one day, "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26).

Let it be said that the Lord is still a promise keeping God. He has given believers the promise of everlasting life. And Israel still is the Promised Land. Thus we are called to remind God of those promises in our prayers.

May we all recognize that we can count on God to do exactly as He has promised, regardless of the apparent circumstances of this world.

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