WHY IS THERE NO PEACE FOR ISRAEL?

Series: Israel or Palestine? Thinking Biblically About the Land of Israel

Selected Scriptures

In Genesis 12, God told Abraham to get up and move to a land He would show him. In Genesis 13 & 17, God promised that land to him and his descendants forever. In Genesis 15, God ratified that promise with an unconditional covenant ceremony. If that's true, then why is it that the Jewish people rarely dwell securely the land? Why have they been dispersed throughout the world on more than one occasion? Why is there no peace in the Middle East, despite all the attempts to establish it? The Camp David Peace Agreements, the Oslo Accords, the Road Map for peace?

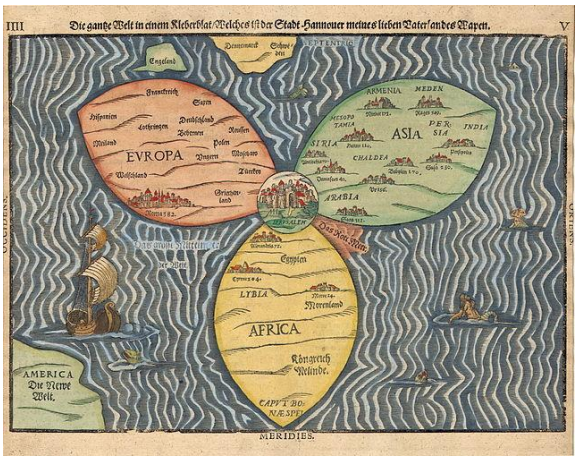
Today we're going to study some major reasons why, and they're a lot deeper than the talking heads in the universities and on tv make it out to be. But isn't that often the case? Behind the symptoms, below the surface, there is a root cause. Behind the behavior, there is often a more deeper reason for it. And the Bible shares those reasons for what we see in Israel. Our goal in this study is to think biblically about Israel and her land—to have our thinking shaped by Scripture rather than the worldly media bias. And if you're tired of not knowing what to believe because of all the conflicting information out there, the Bible is where you need to turn.

So far in this study we have observed some foundational concepts regarding the land of Israel:

1) God promised the land to Abraham (the first Jew) and his descendants.
2) God turned that promise into a covenant. He "cut a covenant" with Abraham (Jer. 34:18).[1] This was a unilateral, unconditional, everlasting covenant.

Then we asked the question, Why did God choose *this* land?

3) Answer: Israel was to be a godly influence on the wicked world.
4) This global influence was possible due to God placing Israel in the most strategic spot on the international highway of the ancient world. I should have included this in last week's teaching but in 1581, a German theologian by the name of Heinrich Büntine drew up this theological map. It's called the Büntine Clover Leaf Map, demonstrating the divinely providential location of Israel and Jerusalem at the center of the world to influence it.[2] Therefore, the land and the people are inextricably linked in God's purposes.



Today, we are to study Israel in the past, tracing the story chronologically, doing a lot of background work in Genesis still. It's amazing how little you will understand about the world or the rest of the Bible without understanding Genesis. So let's orient our thoughts through the

Genesis 15 covenant again. When God made that covenant, He said that Abraham's descendants would possess the land, but not for another 400 years. They would be *"strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years"* (Gen. 15:13) and *"in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete"* (Gen. 15:16). So God prophesied Jacob/Israel would go down to Egypt as a family and come out as a nation 400 years later, ready to take the land (Gen. 46:3). I point this out again because I want us to see is that at the moment of the covenant, Abraham didn't inherit the land immediately. In fact, he never would in his lifetime. The hall of faith in **Hebrews 11:9** describes him at this time as *"an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise."* So even though he settled in **Hebron (**Gen 13:18), he never built a permanent house. He lived in a tent. He was a sojourner in the land. The only land that we know he owned was a burial plot in Hebron that he purchased from a Hittite, where Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah would be buried also (Gen. 23:19; 49:30; 50:13).

At that time the land was occupied by the Canaanites, but God is going to give the land of Canaan, as promised, to Abraham's descendants. There's only one little problem with that: **descendants**. He didn't have any! Since Sarah had been barren her whole life, they thought they would try to help God out, involving a servant of theirs named Hagar. **Genesis 16:1-16** records this episode:

"Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had not borne him a child, but she had an Egyptian slave woman whose name was Hagar. 2 So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Please have relations with my slave woman; perhaps I will obtain children through her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. 3 And so after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave woman, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife. 4 Then he had relations with Hagar, and she conceived; and when Hagar became aware that she had conceived, her mistress was insignificant in her sight. 5 So Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be upon you! I put my slave woman into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceived, I was insignificant in her sight. May the Lord judge between you and me." 6 But Abram said to Sarai, "Look, your slave woman is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight." So Sarai treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence.

7 Now the angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. 8 He said, "Hagar, Sarai's slave woman, from where have you come, and where are you going?" And she said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai." 9 So the angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her authority." 10 The angel of the Lord also said to her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count." 11 The angel of the Lord said to her further, "Behold, you are pregnant, And you will give birth to a son; And you shall name him Ishmael, Because the Lord has heard your affliction. 12 But he will be a wild donkey of a man; His hand will be against everyone, And everyone's hand will be against him; And he will live in defiance of all his brothers."

13 Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, "You are a God who sees me"; for she said, "Have I even seen Him here and lived after He saw me?" 14 Therefore the well was called

Beer-lahai-roi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered. 15 So Hagar bore a son to Abram; and Abram named his son, to whom Hagar gave birth, Ishmael. 16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him.

So though strange to us, and certainly not condoned, what Sarah suggested and Abraham agreed too was a legal practice back then. Abraham and Sarah seek to bear a descendant through Hagar. They're going to help God out. They're going to try to fulfill the promise in their own efforts and Hagar and Ishamel end up becoming a metaphor for works-based salvation that God won't accept (Gal. 4:21-31). But what happens next is that Hagar grows arrogant towards Sarah and Sarah despises Hagar. She treats Hagar harshly and Hagar flees into the wilderness with her son. And it's there that the Lord—the God who sees—meets with her. I've always found great comfort in that name for God, by the way. But He says to name the boy **Ishmael** and that he will have **innumerable descendants**. However, he will be a **wild donkey of a man**. His **hand will be against everyone** and **everyone's hand against him**. He will live in **defiance** of his brothers.

Many understand that this is a reference to the Arab nations that surround Israel that come from him. So not only does he become a works-based salvation metaphor, but he becomes the father of the Arab nations that live in hostility against Abraham's descendants of promise. And there is evidence for that. Ishamel's second eldest son, Kedar, is identified with "Arabia" in Isaiah 21:13-17. A fifth century BC inscription links Arabs with "the king of Kedar."[3] It is thought that his eldest son, Nebaioth, becomes the father of the Nabateans in the Arabian desert area with the city of Petera and all that. In **Genesis 17:20** God predicts that Ishamel would become a great nation and the father of **12 princes**. And that's interesting, isn't it? Because *both Isaac (through Jacob/Israel) and Ishmael* became a **great nation** and have **12 tribes**. **Genesis 25:12-18** records the fulfillment of that, naming his descendants, some of which we can clearly trace that settled south and east of Israel in the Arabian desert and Arabian Peninsula just **Genesis 25:18** records: *18 They settled from Havilah* [north central Arabia] *to Shur which is east of Egypt going toward Assyria; he settled in defiance of all his relatives."* So he settles to the south and east of his brothers in that Arabian Desert.

Interestingly, the **Muslims** who come along in the 7th century AD, in Arabia, trace their roots back to Ishmael and rewrite the Bible. The Quran claims Ishmael is the promised child. One of the myths you hear today is that Israel was always Muslim territory. Obviously, that a myth. Islam wasn't even invented until the 7th century. And I'll just say this: if an angel ever appears to you and gives you a different gospel, Paul says don't listen (Gal. 1:6-9). It's not a good angelic messenger. How strange the similarities between Muhammad and Joseph Smith. We don't have time for it, but you see this all throughout history since Genesis 3—Satan always has his counterfeit line of descendants. Islam is a Satanic counterfeit, and a jealous one. But it's not like Ishmael doesn't inherit any land. He doesn't get a raw deal. He inherits plenty of land and great blessings. He too becomes a great nation with twelve tribes. The trouble is that he isn't the promised child. In **Genesis 17:17-19** Abraham tries to present Ishmael as the promised child, but God says no. The second born son, **Isaac**, born by God's power and grace, will inherit it.

19 "No, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him."

Fact #1 – The land is promised to <u>Isaac</u>, not Ishmael.

Isaac is the son of the promise. From there, Isaac married Rebekah and had twins, **Esau** and **Jacob**. Esau comes out first so he is the firstborn, and it seems he would be the inheritor of the promise. But when Esau came out, Jacob had his hand on his brother's heel. That was a picture of what was to come in that Jacob would trip up his brother's birthright. You all know the story. They grow up and Esau is a burly man. He's a hunter. Jacob is more domestic. Well, after a failed hunting trip, Esau returns home to find Jacob cooking up some red stew. He is so famished—so hungry—that he trades Jacob his **birthright** for a bowl of beans (Gen. 28). He traded great spiritual and physical blessings for temporary pleasure. Not a wise choice.

It's another long story, but beyond that, Jacob ticks his elderly, blind dad into blessing him instead of Esau (Gen. 27). Isaac is not happy about it, but what has been done is done and in **Genesis 28:1** Isaac blesses Jacob willingly, saying, *"3 May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, so that you may become a multitude of peoples. 4 May He also give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your descendants with you, so that you may possess the land where you live as a stranger, which God gave to Abraham."* And in **Genesis 28:13-14**, Jacob has that dream about the stairway to heaven and the Lord speaks to him in it, saying, *"13 Then behold, the Lord was standing above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants. 14 Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed."*

Fact #2 – The land is promised to <u>Jacob (Israel),</u> not Esau.

The land, therefore, is promised to **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**. The Bible records this in great detail because it's so important. It clarifies which line of Abraham's descendants would receive God's promises.[4] It's through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob so far that the land is given too and through whom the Messiah will come. Neither Isaac nor Jacob were the firstborn, but contrary to culture, God chose to give the land to them. None of them deserved it. None of them did anything to earn it. Honestly, if you had to choose between Jacob and Esau, most would've chosen Esau. He's a manly man. Jacob was more domestic and a deceiver. But at the end of the day, it happened to bring about God's will which was declared even before they were born (Rom. 9:9-13). Esau ends up marrying into Ishmael's line and his descendants are the Edomites who live southeast of Israel. They prove themselves to be hostile at times as well.

Think about this: the whole earth is the Lord's and He can give it to whoever He wants. He is the one who created the concept of nations (Gen. 11) and Paul says He determines the boundaries and habitation of all mankind. He establishes a nation's borders (Acts 17:26), including who to give

the promised land too. But what we've seen so far gives us the first reason why we don't see Israel dwelling securely in the land: ancient spiritual animosity.

Reason #1 – There is <u>ancient</u> <u>animosity</u> over the promised land.

To discover a second reason, we need to fast forward to Mt. Sinai. Jacob's descendants, Israel, have developed into a great nation during their time in Egypt. They come out, being led by Moses and the Lord, and they are given the **Law**. The Law, remember, is their national constitution. It's how they are going to govern themselves with this holy God Yahweh dwelling in their midst. We talked about that last week. But the Law was given in connection with another covenant that we call the **Mosaic Covenant**. Unlike the Abrahamic covenant, this is a **bilateral** and **conditional** covenant. It's bilateral in that both parties (God and Israel) are to keep it. It's conditional in that it has "if/then's" attached to it. *If* Israel obeyed, *then* they would be blessed. *If* they disobeyed, *then* they would be disciplined/cursed. God guaranteed blessings on them—security and prosperity in the land—if they agreed to that covenant, and they did! **Exodus 19:7-8** says, *"So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, "<u>All that the LORD has spoken we will do!"</u>*

So they agreed to this conditional (Suzerain-Vassal Treaty) covenant at Sinai. About 40 years later in Deuteronomy after that generation of Israelites died in the wilderness, the next generation is getting ready to enter the land. In preparation for that, they have the Law recited to them again (Deuteronomy basically means, "Second Law-Giving". Deutero=second; nomos=Law). After the stipulations of the Law are read to Israel again, Moses and the elders of Israel command the people to *obey* God and find *blessing* or *disobey* and find *cursing*. In Deuteronomy, chapters 27 & 28, you see the **blessings**:

- "Blessed shall you be in the city and in the country" (28:3)
- "Blessed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground and the offspring of your beasts, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock." (28:4)
- "Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl." (28:5)
- "Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out." (28:6)
- "The Lord shall cause your enemies who rise up against you to be defeated before you; they will come against you one way and will flee before you seven ways." (28:7)

The blessings go on and on, and in **28:9-10** it says, *"He will bless you in the land which the Lord your God gives you. The Lord will **establish you** as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways. So <u>all the people of the earth will see that you are called</u> by the name of the Lord, and they will be afraid of you."*

But then he lays out the **curses**. **Deuteronomy 28:15** says, "But it shall come about, if you do not obey the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statues which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:"

- "Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country." (28:16)
- "Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl." (28:17)

- "Cursed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock." (28:18)
- "Cursed shall be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out." (28:19)
- "The Lord will send upon you curses, confusion, and rebuke, in all you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken Me." (28:20)

The curses seem like they go on forever in chapter 28. I consider it probably the ugliest chapter of the Bible. It's absolutely awful, but I always keep in mind when reading it that this is what I too deserve as a sinner before a holy God. I deserve nothing good. I deserve cursing for my sin. But one of the curses relevant to our main question today is in verse 64, **the curse of dispersion/scattering**: *"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. Among those nations you shall find no rest, and there will be no resting place for the sole of your foot."* If Israel doesn't obey the Lord, they will be dispersed from the land, scattered to the four corners of the earth.

We see in these chapters **the patternable divine program of God for Israel**. The Jewish people's entire future is outlined, striking in its details.[5]

1. **Dispersion** (Lev. 26:27-28; 26:33; Dt. 28:64-66) followed by…
2. **Preservation** (Lev. 26:44; Dt. 30:1) followed by…
3. **Restoration** (Lev. 26:42; Dt. 30:3) followed by…
4. **Reconciliation** (Lev. 26:45; Dt. 30:5-6; Jer. 32:37-41)

They will enter the land, they will disobey God and be dispersed. Though dispersed, they will be preserved, restored, and reconciled to God. Deuteronomy 4 and 30 speak of dispersion and restoration in the *short term* and *long term*. *Short term* being the Assyrian exile of the northern 10 tribes (Israel) in 722 BC and the Babylonian exile of the southern two tribes (Judah) in 586 BC. *Long term* referring to end times events, or "the latter days" (4:30) when a generation of Israelites, after a time of distress, enter into the new covenant and are given hearts to truly obey God (30:1-3). In fact, Deuteronomy 4 and 30 becomes the basis that the prophets build upon. More on that another time. Point being, even though they experience dispersion, they experience restoration because of God's faithfulness.

Psalm 89:30-37 sums it up well: *"If his sons abandon My Law and do not walk in My judgments, 31 If they violate My statutes and do not keep My commandments, 32 Then I will punish their wrongdoing with the rod, and their guilt with afflictions. 33 But I will not withhold My favor from him, nor deal falsely in My faithfulness. 34 I will not violate My covenant, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips. 35 Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David. 36 His descendants shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me. 37 It shall be established forever like the moon, and a witness in the sky is faithful."*

Reason #2 – The land always belongs to the Jews, but disobedience brings exile from it.

Israel's expulsions did not change their right to the land. They own it forever. But if they fail to obey God, they are expelled. With their rejection of Christ as the Messiah, Israel is still in exile today. While approximately 7 million Jews are in the land today, many millions (6 million in America; 9 million around the globe) still live outside the land.[6] And those who are dwelling in the land, are not dwelling securely. They suffer constant attacks from their neighbors. Israel is surrounded by 22 Arab states and 39 Muslim states. Yet Israel is the bully?

The reality is that there is more to this than what the headlines are telling us. But isn't that always the case? How often do we find that below the surface, below the symptoms, there is a root cause—a deeper problem. The same holds true in antisemitism and anti-Zionism. It's an ancient, spiritual reality and rivalry.



And Satan knows God has a plan for Israel and if only He could wipe them out, He could destroy that plan and God's credibility. But we all know he won't be successful because God is faithful and He always preserves His people. Let's go home with that in mind and go home with the fact that we all need Christ. Only the gospel of Christ can bring peace now between individuals and that the ultimate reason why there is no peace in the Middle East is because the Prince of Peace has not yet come to rule over the nations. However, someday He will. In that day all of Israel's neighbors, Lebanon, Assyria, Egypt, Jordan and Saudia Arabia will worship the Jewish King Jesus (Is. 2:1-4; 60:7, 13; 19:23-24).

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[1] Christopher J. Katulka, *Israel Always: Experiencing God's Pursuit of You Through His Chosen People* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2022), 18.

[2] Ibid., 24-25.

[3] *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 84.

[4] Michael Rydelnik, *Understanding the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2007), 126.

[5] Elwood McQuaid, *It Is No Dream* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 2019), 21.

[6] Stephen Davey, *A Christian Perspective on the State of Israel*, https://shepherds.edu/a-christian-perspective-on-the-state-of-israel/

FALL 2023
Life Group Questions

Series: Israel or Palestine? // November 19, 2023

Why Is There No Peace for Israel? // Selected Scriptures

Introduction

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group. However, due to your leader's preference or the natural flow of discussion in your group, it should not be expected to cover every question each week.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 10-15 min)*

A **new warm up question** just for fun: What are looking forward to in the next month?

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion:

1. Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
    a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth.
    b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives unto the glory of God.
    c. For grace to hear and apply what God's Word is teaching you.
2. Choose someone to read the passage aloud for the group or read together as each person takes a couple of verses.

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

Question 1:
Was today's sermon on the history of the conflict between Israel and her neighbors helpful? What was new to you? What haven't the headlines told you?

Question 2:
Can you recall the difference between the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic covenant? What do these have to do with Israelites right to the land and their expulsions from it or their struggle to dwell securely in it?

Question 3:
What other counterfeits has Satan inspired? How do you recognize them?

Question 4:
How does God's faithfulness to Israel apply to your life today?

Question 5:
What part of the sermon was most relevant for you and how can you apply it to your life?

Prayer *(Suggested time: 10-15 min)*

A significant part of coming together and "connecting" in Christian fellowship is being open and honest with our lives. Praying with a group of people may be new or it may be familiar to you. While we encourage everyone to pray out loud, please do not feel obligated to do so.

Take a few moments to share any prayer requests. Consider praying about what God teaching you through His Word and the recent discussion that seems the most applicable. Consider what you notice about your own relationship with Jesus. Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?