What the Bible Says About Israel and Its Land

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The great crisis in the world today that underlies most of its international problems is the issue of authority. This current generation speaks continually about "Rights." We discuss the rights of individual human beings on this planet, the rights of nations, the rights of various minority groups within those nations and the rights of various political-religious views as they relate to life, liberty, wealth, human dignity, and of course, property. But a basic question still remains: "Who has a right to say what our rights should or should not be?" Does that right or authority belong to the one with the most money, the most people, the greatest need, or the most powerful military machine? Are questions of authority based on who is the strongest?

Closely related to the problem of authority is the problem of morality. Can we have morality without authority? What makes anything right or wrong? Who has the authority to determine that? When we ask, "What is the right thing to do?"—who can give the answer? Secular humanism and its relative standards of morality have not given us any help. Man left to himself provides no solutions but rather places us in a moral vacuum with little or no authority or leadership.

When we come to the issue of Israel and its land, people ask, "What rights does Israel have to its land?" Arguments are continually brought forth concerning the rights of the Palestinians and the rights of the Israelis that seem logical to the people who present them and to the people who want to listen. But a basic question still remains in my mind as I listen to the many conflicting viewpoints concerning Israel's right to its land: "Who has the ultimate authority to determine what rights Israel has to his land?"

The Christian answer to that question is that God alone determines the rights that any of us have. Something is right or wrong because of Divine decree, not human feeling or reason. The existence of God previous to the creation of the universe and mankind gives Him the right to determine our rights. Morality exists because God exists. Authority exists because God exists. The apostle Paul wrote in the New Testament book of Romans, chapter 13, verse 1: "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God."

The Bible does not try to prove the existence of God. It rather assumes it. The thesis of the Bible is that "God has spoken." The Old Testament rings with authority as the prophets of old proclaimed over five thousand times, "Thus says the Lord." The writers of Scripture claimed divine revelation. Often they said, "And the word of the Lord came to me." Israel's history was bathed in Divine authority and direction. There were no great debates over the existence of God. On the contrary, the psalmist David said, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" In describing the response of pagans to the knowledge of God that is found in the universe, Paul wrote in Romans 1:25, "[For they] exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."

Almighty God has already determined the rights of Israel to its land. Lest you think God is a passive observer to all that takes place in the land of Israel, listen to the words of Deuteronomy 11:12, "a land for which the Lord your God cares; the eyes of the Lord your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year."

Before we examine what God says about the land of Israel, let's define what we mean by the word *land*. What land are we talking about? Genesis 15:18 gives us some dimensions: "The

Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river Egypt to the great river—the River Euphrates."

On many occasions, God refers to this land by calling it "the land of Canaan." When the Lord spoke to Moses about this land in Numbers 34:1-15, He gave some additional insight as to its dimensions. He specifically laid out the southern, western, northern, and eastern borders of the land. There are many interesting details in that Scripture affecting several disputed territories in Israel's present situation.

In order to answer the question, "What rights does Israel have to its land?" I would like you to consider the following biblical facts:

Fact One: This land belongs to God.

Leviticus 25:23 states: *"The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me."*

Fact Two: The land was given by God to the descendants of Abraham.

In Genesis 12:7 we read: *"Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.'"*

In Genesis 13:15, He repeated His promise when He said, "for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever." He said the same thing in Genesis 15:18, "To your descendants I have given this land."

Fact Three: The gift of this land to Abraham and his descendants was based on an unconditional covenant from God.

Genesis 17:7-8 states:

"And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

The sign of that covenant for Abraham and his descendants was circumcision. Twice in this passage God mentioned the everlasting nature of this covenant. There are some today who say that this covenant was conditional, that it was based on Israel's faithfulness to God. The Bible teaches otherwise. In Psalm 89:30-37 we read:

"If his sons forsake my law And do not walk in My judgments, If they break My statutes And do not keep my commandments, Then I will visit their transgression with the rod. And their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My loving kindness I will not utterly take from him, Nor allow My faithfulness to fail. My covenant I will not break, Nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: His seed shall endure forever, And His throne as the sun before Me: It shall be established forever like the moon, Even like the faithful witness in the sky."

We agree that God promised to judge His people if they disobeyed Him. We do not agree that Israel's disobedience would forfeit their right to that land. The promise of the land was not based upon Israel's performance but upon God's oath and character—He will not lie!

Deuteronomy 7:7-9 reminds us:

"The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments."

Fact Four: This land was not given to the descendants of Ishmael, but rather the descendants of Isaac.

I have no bitterness toward the descendants of Ishmael, nor do I wish to be unkind to our Arab friends. However, I must be faithful to what I know the Bible teaches. Abraham himself considered Ishmael as a possible descendant to whom God would give this land. In Genesis 17:18 Abraham said to God, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!"

But God's answer was and is very clear. In verse 19 of chapter 17 God said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him."

God promised to bless Ishmael and to make him a great nation, but His covenant to Abraham and his descendants was to be accomplished through his son Isaac, not Ishmael. The New Testament agrees with this when it says, "In Isaac your seed shall be called" (Hebrews 11:18).

Fact five: This land was not given to the other sons of Abraham, but only to Isaac.

Abraham had another wife besides Sarah and the Egyptian concubine, Hagar. Her name was Keturah, and she bore him six sons, ancestors of many Arab peoples today. Genesis 25:5-6 tells us this fact:

"And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east."

The Bible is quite clear about the giving of this land to Isaac, the unique son of Abraham. In Genesis 26:3, God said:

"Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father."

Fact Six: The land was not given to the descendants of Esau, but only to Jacob.

When Isaac and Rebekah finally had children, the first twin to come out of her womb was Esau, rather than Jacob. According to the Bible, Esau sold his birthright as the firstborn son to Jacob. Later on, the blessing of Isaac, which should have gone to the firstborn son Esau, was placed upon Jacob. Esau lost the birthright and the blessing.

Some people have argued that the birthright and blessing still belong to the descendants of Esau, rather than Jacob, because of the unusual circumstances involved and because Esau was the firstborn son. But as you know, it is not always the firstborn son that is chosen by God. In the New Testament book of Romans, chapter 9, verse 10-13, we read these words.

"And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

Make no mistake about this—God did not choose Jacob because he had done many things to deserve it. He did not choose him because he was better than Esau. He did not even evaluate the deeds of his life—He made the decision before he was born! Who has the right to say whose land this is? God Almighty!

In Genesis 28:3-4, Isaac said to Jacob:

"May God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may be an assembly of peoples; and give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham."

But it wasn't simply the words of his father Isaac that guided the future of Jacob. It was a direct revelation from God himself that convinced Jacob of his destiny. In Genesis 28, verses 10-17, Jacob had a dream of a ladder reaching up to heaven, and angels of God ascending and descending upon it. The Lord God revealed to Jacob His message about this land. In verses 13-15, we read:

"I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."

In Genesis 35:9-15, God again appeared to Jacob, changed his name to Israel, the name of this land, and made this promise to him (verses 11-12):

"I am God Almighty, Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land."

According to Genesis 36:6-9, Esau took his descendants and all his possessions and went to another land away from his brother Jacob. Esau lived in the hill country of Seir. The Bible tells us that Esau is Edom. It specifically tells us that the descendants of Esau are the Edomites, and that this land was not their land.

In Genesis 46:4, when Jacob was considering the move to Egypt during the days of famine, God once again appeared in a vision and said these comforting words: "I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again." That this truth was clearly in the heart of Jacob is evident even when he was old and near death. In Genesis 48:3-4, Jacob said to Joseph, his son: "God Almighty appeared to me, and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.'" "Everlasting" is obviously a long time.

The fact that this land belongs to the children of Jacob was clearly pointed out by Joseph himself, who died in Egypt but wanted his bones to be taken to this land. He said to his brothers in Genesis 50:24: "I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of [Egypt] to the

land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." God's oath is behind God's promise!

Fact Seven: God continued to remind the children of Israel of this covenant during their bondage in Egypt and wilderness wanderings.

In the midst of their intense affliction in Egypt, Exodus 2:24 says: "So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob." The purpose of the Exodus from Egypt was to take them to their promised land. Exodus 3:8 says this clearly when God speaks to Moses:

"So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites."

The Lord repeated these words to Moses in Exodus 3:15-17. In Exodus 6:1-8, God again spoke to Moses and reminded him of His covenant. He said, "I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers." In verse 8 god said "And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: I am the Lord."

In giving instructions concerning the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, God said in Exodus 13:5, "And it shall be, when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall keep this service in this month." In verse 11, He said, "And it shall be when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and your fathers, and gives it to you. . . ." In the Song of Moses in Exodus 15:17, Moses said, "You will bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which You have made for Your own dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established." Moses had his theology right! It was God's land and His place of dwelling.

Moses repeated God's promise back to God in Exodus 32:13. While on the mountain receiving God's laws and commandments, the children of Israel were worshiping the golden calf. Moses pleaded with God to spare their lives, appealing to His promises: "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'"

In Leviticus 20:24, God said "You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey." In Leviticus 25:38 we read, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God." Constantly throughout the wilderness wanderings, God was reminding them of His covenant—His promise to give them their land.

Fact Eight: God told Israel to conquer the land He had given to them.

In Deuteronomy 1:8 we read:

"See, I have set the land before you; go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to your fathers—to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—to give them and their descendants after them."

God told Moses that Joshua would be in charge of this project. In Deuteronomy 3:27-28, it says:

"Go up to the top of Pisgah, and lift your eyes toward the west, the north, the south, and the east; behold it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan. But command Joshua, and encourage him and strengthen him; for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which you will see."

It was not because Israel was righteous that God had them drive out the nations living in the land. It was because of the wickedness of those nations and the oath that God had made to give that land to Israel. Deuteronomy 9:3-5 says:

"Therefore understand today that the Lord your God is He who goes over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and bring them down before you; so you shall drive them out and destroy them quickly, as the Lord has said to you. Do not think in your heart, after the Lord your God has cast them out before you, saying, 'Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land'; but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out from before you. It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

God said to Joshua, "Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory." God promised to be with him in this effort, and promised him success.

Fact Nine: Israel's sin and captivity did not change their divine right to this land.

Many people have said that God's promise to give Israel this land was based upon Israel's faithfulness to God's laws, and that when they were disobedient and sent into captivity, this nullified God's promise. The Bible teaches otherwise. In Leviticus 26:40-45 we read that God would punish Israel for their disobedience and send them into captivity. But, according to verses 44-45, God will bring them back!

"Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God. But for their sake I will remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God; I am the Lord."

In Deuteronomy 30:3-5, God promises:

"[Then] the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you. If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the Lord your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers."

Jeremiah 16:15 gives this promise from the Lord, "For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers." Jeremiah 31:10 says, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock." Isaiah 43:5-7 tells us that God will bring Israel's "descendants from the east, and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, 'Give them

up!' And to the south, 'Do not keep them back!' Bring My sons from afar and My daughters from the ends of the earth." Amos 9:14-15 thunders forth these remarkable words:

"I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them. I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them," says the Lord your God.

Fact Ten: God's promise to Israel is as certain as the existence and order of the universe.

Jeremiah 31:35-37 leaves no doubt in our minds on this fact.

Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, who disturbs the sea, and its waves roar (the Lord of hosts is His name): "If those ordinances depart from before Me," declares the Lord, "then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever," Thus says the Lord. "If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done," says the Lord.

What a wonderful and faithful God we have!

Fact Eleven: The name of this land is not Palestine, but Israel.

Twenty-five hundred years ago the prophet Ezekiel spoke of the restoration of Israel to its land in the last days. Ezekiel spoke of dry bones coming to life. Never before in history has a nation been destroyed and scattered all over the world and then brought back to life. It is a miracle, and a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. We read in Ezekiel 37:11-12:

Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!" Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.'"

Notice that the name of that land is Israel. The land that so often is called the "land of Canaan" in the Bible. God says that in the last days it will be called "Israel."

Fact Twelve: The full restoration of Israel to its land with complete peace and security will require the coming of Messiah.

Many people want to know why Bible-believing Christians all over the world have such a heart for Israel and its land. What brings the Jews and Christians together? How can their hearts beat as one? Have they not disagreed sharply over the Person of Jesus of Nazareth? Have not the Jews suffered terribly at the hands of so-called Christians throughout the history of the church? What draws the Bible-believing Christian to the support of the people of Israel during this difficult hour in the history of the world? What makes these Christians stand by the nation of Israel when most nations of the world refuse to stand by her?

There is only one answer. It is because of the Bible itself. If you believe the Bible, then you know, whether you are a Jew or a Christian, that it is through the promise given long ago to Abraham that even the Gentiles of the world will be blessed. Gentile Christians believe they are spiritual sons of Abraham. They have come to believe that the only hope of the world is the coming of the Jewish Messiah promised by the writers of Scripture.

Zechariah tells us that the Lord will come and place His feet on the Mount of Olives. He will fight for His people Israel against all the nations of the world. All the land of Israel will dwell in safety and peace when the Messiah comes. He will rule and reign from Jerusalem, the Son of David, sitting on His throne. Regardless of Israel's sins of the past, the Lord will forgive, cleanse, and restore. Jeremiah 31:31-34 says:

"Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. My covenant which they broke, through I was a husband to them," says the Lord. "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, says the Lord, I will put my Law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of the to the greatest of them," says the Lord. "For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Zechariah13:1 says, "In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness." The prophet Isaiah said in chapter 59, verses 20-21:

"The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," says the Lord. "As for Me," says the Lord, "this is My covenant with them: My spirit who is upon you and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the Lord, "from this time and forevermore."

Ezekiel 39:25-29 speaks of this great day of restoration:

"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD" 'Now I will bring back the captives of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy name—after they have borne their shame, and all their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, when they dwelt safely in their own land and no one made them afraid. When I brought them back from the peoples and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and I am hallowed in them in the sight of many nations, then they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who sent them into captivity among the nations, but also brought them back to their own land, and left none of them captive any longer. And I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel,' says the Lord GOD."

Yes, the day of Israel's full restoration is near! Messiah will make it possible and we shall all live in peace. Until He comes, we who believe the Bible is God's Word and that every promise of God will come to pass, must stand and support Israel's right to its land. It is a Divine right.

We are patient with those who do not believe the Bible nor accept Israel's right to the Land, but with love for all, we must strongly support Israel's right. We cannot do otherwise and have clear consciences. We cannot say on the one hand that we believe there is a God Who has revealed His perfect will in His Holy Scriptures, and on the other hand deny Israel its right to the land God promised to her. Our commitment to Israel is that which the psalmist penned so long ago:

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, Prosperity within your palaces," For the sake of my brethren and Companions, I will

now say, "Peace be within you." Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek your good. (Psalm 122:6-9) (End of document.)

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