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B0617—April 30, 2006 – Israel: The Land Of Israel

I wasn't planning on picking up this class until about two weeks ago and so here I am, trying to pray and come up with something and here's what I have for you. In a few months I will be traveling to Israel (June 14-28th) and over the next eight weeks I will be preparing by in-depth study of the land and the people and I want to take you with me in preparation. I'm going to get to see with my own eyes where Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea, where Elijah contested with the worshippers of Baal, where the armies of the world will gather at Armageddon, where Jesus was raised in Nazareth, to the Mount of Beatitudes where Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount, to Caesarea Philippi where Jesus said, "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God", we will go to the Jordan river, we will overlook Jericho where God fought for Israel, we will see En Gedi where David met Saul, and trudge on to Qumran to see the Dead Sea Scrolls and learn about that community, even as far south as the Gulf of Aqaba where Solomon kept his fleets and where God parted the Red Sea and Israel passed through on dry land. And of course, we will go to Jerusalem and will walk in the footsteps of the Messiah; visiting the place of His birth, His life and teachings, His sufferings, His death, His glorious resurrection, and His ascension to heaven. So, to help me get as close to the biblical peoples and events which are the foundations of our Christian faith will require a tremendous amount of research ahead of time. I will be entering a new geography, a new culture, a new language, a new people and all these gaps must be bridged in order to enjoy a full-orbed experience. To do that I have to back up in the biblical narrative and build firm foundations. I ultimately hope to bring us into the present Middle-East Conflict. But to really understand it we have to plunge back into history. This week, let's start with the land.

I. WHO OWN'S THE LAND?

A. A Land of Debate

There is great debate over this piece of land over in the Middle-East and the people who dwell there, Israel. It stands at the center of world politics and much evangelical Christian discussion. “What are we to do with this people who were dispersed for 2,000 years and now return to their ancient homeland?” “Why is their war over this land?” Many forget that shortly after WW2 ended for America another war began; the Arab-Israeli conflict began the morning after Israel proclaimed statehood on May 14, 1948. The war has raged ever since on different levels but the same aim has continued; the annihilation of Israel. With Arab nations surrounding tiny Israel on every side they are hemmed in with their enemies continually pressing inward. So, “Whose land is it anyway?”

Most of us only think of the land as a piece of real estate over in the Middle East somewhere. It’s much more than that and I hope to impress its significance on you because two basic errors prevail in our day. The first is called replacement theology. A group of replacement theologians stated in an open letter to evangelicals,

Recently a number of leaders in the Protestant community of the United States have urged the endorsement of far-reaching and unilateral political commitments to the people and land of Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, citing Holy Scripture as the basis for those commitments...At the heart of the political commitments in question are two fatally flawed propositions. First, some are teaching that God's alleged favor toward Israel today is based upon ethnic descent rather than upon the grace of Christ alone, as proclaimed in the Gospel [Christian Zionism]. Second, others are teaching that the Bible's promises concerning the land are fulfilled in a special political region or "Holy Land," perpetually set apart by God for one ethnic group alone. As a result of these false claims, large segments of the evangelical community, our fellow citizens, and our government are being misled with regard to the Bible's teachings regarding the people of God, the land of Israel, and the impartiality of the Gospel.ⁱ

The ministers who signed this statement believe that the church has replaced Israel. That Israel has fulfilled her purpose of bringing the Messiah into the world and that after that God scattered them for their disobedience and now God is done with the Jews as a nation. They don’t believe in a future for Israel and would not consider this course even valid discussion. Generally speaking, they discard the modern state of Israel as the result of man, not God and even blame dispensational evangelicals for its establishment. To various degrees this has fueled anti-Semitism. The second error is called Christian Zionism. Christian Zionism believes that there are two ways of salvation. Jews are saved by ethnic descent and Gentiles by faith in Christ.ⁱⁱ The result is that politically speaking,

Christian Zionists are so pro-Israel that everything the state of Israel does is right no matter what. We want to avoid both of these errors. Contrary to these errors the Bible does teach a future for Israel in the Promised Land but not everything the present political state of Israel does is right.

That the land is central to biblical history and prophecy seems apparent. The Hebrew word “land”, *eretz*, is the 4th most common Hebrew noun (substantive) in the OT. Indeed, if we were to excise “the land” from the pages of Scripture the story that we know would be another story completely. The historical events of Scripture happen in connection with this land and the return of Christ happens in this land. One author said, “Land...is such a comprehensive symbol in the Old Testament that it could be ranked next to God in importance.” Another said, “The land where the Word-made-flesh dwelt with men is, and must ever be, an integral part of the Divine Revelation.”

B. A Land of Many Historic Names (Gen 11:31; 12:5; Exod 13:5)

Let’s start with what we call “the land of Israel” or, in the Hebrew *Eretz Israel!* This has not always been the name of the land. This land, or parts of it, have been called

- “the land of Canaan” (Gen 12:5)
- “the land of the Kenite” (Gen 15:18-21 et al)
- “the land of the Kenizzite”
- “the land of the Kadmonite”
- “the land of the Hittite”
- “the land of the Perizzite”
- “the land of the Rephaim”
- “the land of the Amorite”
- “the land of the Girgashite”
- “the land of the Jebusite”
- “the land of the Philistines” (Gen 21:34)
- “the land of Israel” (1 Sam 13:19)

These are all names of the people who dwelled in the land. Most importantly for us is the fact that it is called “the land of Israel”, but surprisingly, it is not called this until 1 Sam 13:19. Not one mention of “the land of Israel” in the entire Torah. In more recent times another name has been given the land.

- “the land of Palestine”

This name needs to be taken note of because of the fact that there is no such people as the Palestinians and they have never been recognized as a nation in the land called Palestine. How then did the land become known as Palestine? The land was given this name in 135AD after the Bar Kochba revolt. Bar Kochba was a Jewish leader who led the Jews in a revolt against the Roman Empire in 132AD. The revolt was put down by the Romans after two years of war. But the war was extremely costly to Rome and because of Emperor Hadrian's displeasure he renamed the province of Judea, Syria-Palestine, named for the Philistines, Israel's most hated and vicious enemies. The Philistine people have long since perished but British writers in the 19th and 20th centuries often called the Arabs of Palestine "Philistines". Hadrian's purpose in renaming Judea "Palestine" was, of course, to humiliate the Jewish population. And so, the name "Palestine" persists to this day.ⁱⁱⁱ Knowing this, when we come to the modern Israel-Palestinian conflict we realize how much propaganda is behind so-called Palestinian claims. They are not Palestinians and they have never been a nation in the land. This lie is just a propaganda device to sway world opinion to have sympathy for the self-inflicted plight (along with their fellow Arabs). And this self-inflicted plight is designed to do one thing; foster hatred for Israel so as to finally annihilate Her.

C. A Land Owned by God (Lev 25:23; 2 Chron 7:20; Isa 14:25; Jer 2:7, 16:18; Eze 36:5, 38:16; Joel 3:2)

Why is the land so important? Out of billions of galaxies God chose Israel to be His land and Jerusalem to be His habitation (1 Ki 11:13). God declares "the land is Mine" (Lev 25:23)! This is the crucial doctrinal point today. The land is God's and He has staked His reputation to this land. So, the land is important because God's is important. To see this turn to Ezekiel 36:17.

Ezekiel 36:17-28 "Son of man, when the house of Israel was living in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds; their way before Me was like the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity. ¹⁸ "Therefore I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they had shed on the land, because they had defiled it with their idols. ¹⁹ "Also I scattered them among the nations and they were dispersed throughout the lands. According to their ways and their deeds I judged them. ²⁰ "When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name, because it was said of them, 'These are the people of the LORD; yet they have come out of His land.' ²¹ "But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went. ²² "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, 'It is not for your sake, O

house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. ²³ "I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD," declares the Lord GOD, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight. ²⁴ "For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶ "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. ²⁸ "You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God. (cf Ezek 36:5, 9, 17-28, **32**, 33-36, 38)

God is deeply concerned about His reputation and His reputation is connected to this land. At times, Israel defiled His land and so He poured out his wrath on them and scattered them among the nations and when they arrived the nations profaned God's holy name, YHWH, because His people had been expelled from the land and the only reason, the only reason God will gather Israel back into the land is to vindicate His holy name. So, to do this God says back in verse 9 "I am for you, and I will turn to you", Israel, and He will sprinkle clean water on them, that is, regenerate them, and cleanse them from all filthiness and idols so they will not defile the land and so they will live in the land. But the reason God will do this, the only reason, is to vindicate His holy name. So, the land and Israel's occupation of the land is tied intimately to God's reputation.

So, you wonder why, in the future Tribulation, when the kings of the east and other nations converge on Israel, entering the land and gathering at Armageddon for deployments that God says in Ps 2 "the kings of the earth take their stand against God and His anointed"? The answer is because they are in His land, their very entrance into His land is defiling and God has decreed to establish His king on the holy Mountain of Zion. So, they are taking a stand against God and against His anointed King.

Because God is holy and the land is His He doesn't permit sin in His land indefinitely. Yet He does permit sin in His land long periods of time and this reveals one of the big misunderstandings about the OT. The secular people always say the OT presents a wrathful God and the NT a loving God but if you read the OT carefully, what you will find is that God is actually very patient, or as the Hebrew says it, God has a "long nose".

His patience in dealing out wrath against those nations who defile His land is startling. For example, the Amorites. God let them dwell in His land for 400 years before destroying them. So, what we have is the cup of God's wrath filling very slowly but once the cup is full then there's nothing left to do but judge. So, it's grace, grace, grace and then finally judgment. The same was true with Israel. God was very patient with their idolatry but finally God said, "That's it!", and He sent the northern kingdom into exile in Assyria (722BC) and the southern kingdom into exile in Babylon (586BC). There was a partial restoration of the southern kingdom but it was only partial and there are prophecies that came after this partial restoration which claim that the whole house of Israel will be restored (cf Zech 10:6-12).

So, today we have a unique situation. Israel has not been a sovereign state for over 2,500 years until 1948. But with the mass immigration of Jews to the land of Israel and the re-birth of the state of Israel, once more we are hearing the Jews cry, *Eretz Israel!* And we have to deal at some point with the present state of Israel since this is a political movement and not a religious one; they are in the land but they are in unbelief so we have to deal with this anomaly. The present state of Israel just doesn't fit with the descriptions of God's final regathering in the Bible. So, we have to have some explanation and some direction in terms of our support for the present state. But, in the end, it's God's land when God does re-gather Israel finally, He will do it for His names sake, that's the key point.

D. A Land Promised To Abram (Gen 12:7; Gen 13:15, 15:18; Dt 34:4; Acts 7:5)

This raises the question "who has rights to the land?" Since the land is YHWH's He has every right to give it to whomever He pleases and the abundant testimony of Scripture is that He gave this land to Abram and his descendants as an everlasting possession.

1. God's Command (12:1-3)

It begins in Gen 12:1-3 with "God's command" to Abram to leave all that made him who and what he was so that he could become someone entirely new.

Genesis 12:1-3 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; ² And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; ³ And I will bless those who bless

you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

2. Abram's Obedience (12:4-6)

Genesis 12:4-6 So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵ Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan. ⁶ Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite *was* then in the land.

So, first we have "God's command" and then "Abram's obedience". Then, and only then, does "God promise" the land to Abram and his descendants.

3. God's Land Promise (12:7)

Genesis 12:7 The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land."

This is very important because now God has made a promise. And since God is faithful He has obligated Himself to fulfill this promise. So, there is this unconditional promise of the land. But that's not all, God went beyond this promise and entered into covenant with Abram as well (Heb 6:13ff).

E. A Land Covenanted to Abram and His Descendants (Gen 15:18; Dt 34:4; Acts 7:5)

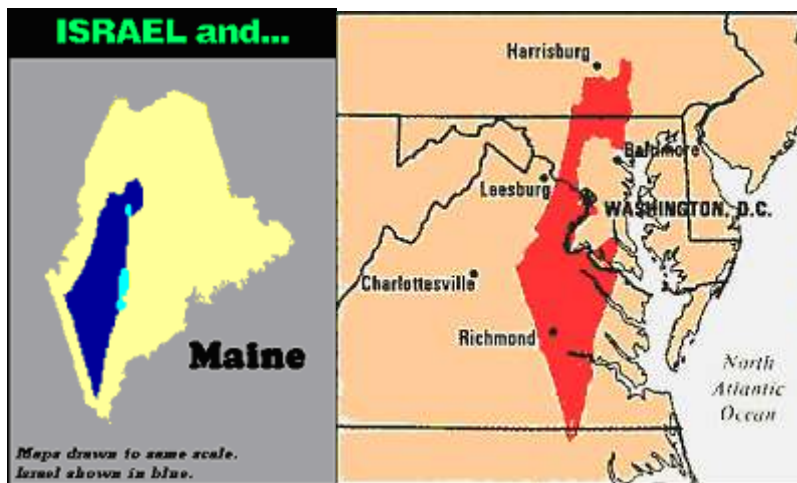
In Gen 15 God appears to Abram in a vision. It is crucial to realize that Abram had already believed (perfect tense in the Hebrew) and had therefore already been credited as righteous (Gen 15:6). God did not enter into a covenant with Abram until Abram had faith. Then God cut a covenant with Abram (*berith*). The way this happened in the ancient world was that animals were cut in half and the pieces were laid opposite one another. The parties of the covenant would walk between the pieces. Any party who walked through was saying, "if I do not fulfill what I have promised may what happened to these animals be done unto me". But, if you recall, Abram was in a deep sleep and so he did not walk between the pieces; only YHWH did and so only YHWH is responsible

to fulfill the terms of the contract. By walking between the pieces YHWH was saying, “let Me be cut into pieces if I do not fulfill My word to you”. Then what once rested on a promise now rested on both a promise and a covenant. On that day the LORD 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). Then, a few chapters later, when Abraham was 99 years old, God said the land would be his and his descendants forever (Gen 17:8)! It is their land forever and yet they do not have all the Promised Land today! The covenant was then confirmed to Isaac (Gen 26:3) and not Ishmael and then to Jacob (Gen 28:4, 13) and not Esau and then to the twelve sons of Israel (Exod 6:3-8).

II. WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LAND?

A. A Small Land

The land of Israel is astonishingly small. It is only 150 miles from the north to south and averages only 30 miles from east to west. What Israel possesses today is ~ 10,000 square miles while the original promised boundaries are ~ 300,000 square miles (Gen 15:18).



Yet its geographic location is important. It is the land bridge between three continents; Asia, Africa, and Europe. For its small size it is the most significant region in the world.

B. A Good Land (Exod 3:8, 17; Dt 8:7-10)

This land is “good”. It has, intrinsically, the ability to produce an abundance of produce so great that the nation could dwell within the land with no need for external help from

other nations. Ultimately they would not need to import any items and they would be the world's leading exporter. The goodness and produce of the land is described in

Deuteronomy 8:7-10 "For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; ⁸ a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; ⁹ a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. ¹⁰ "When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you.

Other passages describe the land as "spacious" and "flowing with milk and honey" (e.g. Exod 3:8; 13:5). The phrase "flowing with milk and honey" denotes a land that will produce an abundance, more than sufficient for their needs.^{iv} What else would we expect from the kind hand of God?

C. A Good Life in the Land (Exod 3:8, 17)

It is here that we enter into the important connection between the land and its people. To enjoy the blessings of a good land would require Israel to remain in the land. "The land was...the concrete part of God's blessing for His people...the land is described as...flowing with milk and honey (Exod 3:17), which is to say that it is a land in which life is pleasant and in which living is marked by abundance. The land comes before long to symbolize life with God in ideal conditions, like Adam and Eve enjoyed with God in the garden of Eden before their tragic Fall. We would characterize this life as the abundant life. Thus, the land was far more than just a piece of real estate. It was a symbol of all that was good in living as His people under His blessing. So, the phrase "the land of Israel" is filled with all of this meaning.

III. CONCLUSION

Today we have answered several questions. First, "Who owns the land?" No matter how much geo-political debate surrounds the land, its historical occupants and names, the Bible is clear that God owns the land and that Jerusalem is His habitation. He has never relinquished His rights to the land. Instead, He staked His reputation to the land and therefore the land is extremely important. Also, He has every right to give it to whomever He wishes and after Abram obeyed God's command to leave his country God promised the land to Abram's descendants. After Abram believed God and his faith was credited to

him as righteousness God entered into a covenant with Abram and his descendants. Only God passed through the cut animals and so only God is responsible to fulfill the terms of the contract. Since God is faithful He will. On that day the boundaries of the land were revealed to Abram. When Abram was 99 years old God said the land was the everlasting possession of Abram and his descendants. As such, all Replacement Theologies are wrong. The Church has not replaced Israel.

Second, “What are the characteristics of the land?” Today, the land Israel inhabits is small area of ~ 10,000 square miles in comparison to the promised boundaries of ~ 300,000 square miles. Israel does not and has never possessed the full extent of the land as God promised. Since God is faithful rest assured that Israel will possess the entire land in the future. This land is intrinsically good, able to provide such abundance that those who dwell in the land can be self-sufficient in terms of agricultural produce. There would be no need to bargain or trade with other nations in other lands. The land “flows with milk and honey”. Before Israel’s present occupation of the land it was a desert but since they have developed it significantly. In the millennium it will be lush like the garden of Eden. Life in this land is good; we would say it is the physical parallel to the abundant life that the Christian enjoys when he abides in Christ. But in order for Israel to enjoy the good life she must be in the land.

ⁱ http://www.knoxseminary.org/Prospective/Faculty/WittenbergDoor/#_ftnref33

ⁱⁱ G. Richard Fisher, *The Other Gospel of John Hagee: Christian Zionism and Ethnic Salvation*, (The Quarterly Journal, Jan-Mar, 1999), pp 5-13.

ⁱⁱⁱ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bar_Kochba

^{iv} “The term *milk* speaks of the herds and flocks of the Hebrew peoples. The modern dairy cow is not indicated; rather, the milk would come from goats. This means that the land will provide the forage necessary for the care and raising of goats and attendant sheep and cattle. There would be milk—dairy goat milk. The modern, Western reader may not appreciate this fact, having perhaps a negative attitude toward goat milk. But in many places even in our modern world, the care and breeding of goats is highly valued, for it produces delicious milk that has many uses, both fresh for drinking and processed for cheese and yogurt; not to mention the meat that the herds provide.” “The term *honey* refers to the bee, of course, and that which the bee represents, agriculture.” The abundance of agricultural product, sweet fruits and rich vegetables, gifts of the land that God had so graciously given.

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