

## Understanding Conflict in the Middle East—Part Two

*Why do the Israelis and Palestinians place so much attention on having a homeland in the geographic region that was anciently known as Canaan? Will there ever be an end to the conflicts and political tensions between the Israelis and the Arab world?*

Israelis see the city of Hebron as being the symbolic bedrock of their national conscience and identity in the Middle East, which is reasonably understood because the area of Hebron was an historical settlement of the patriarchs and is believed to be the familial burial place of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Hebron was also one of the five indigenous Amorite cities overthrown by Joshua during Israel's conquest of the land of Canaan beginning in the late 15th century BCE. Noting that Adonizedek, king of Jerusalem marshaled the assistance of Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhia king of Lachish, and Debir king of Eglon, to fight against the tribes of Israel who were at that time beginning their conquest into the ancient land of Canaan.

Then, in the period of the early monarchy, David was crowned king of Judah in Hebron, and he ruled from this city until he overthrew the Jebusites at Jerusalem, the city that later became the capital of the powerful regional empire that was the Commonwealth of Israel. What followed was a long history of the commonwealth's interactions with neighboring kingdoms and successively rising Eurasian-based empires that lasted for more than 1000 years, and these political interactions are notably evident in the histories of the former ancient empires of Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome.

What is helpful then about these interactions, and the historical narratives they create, is that they allow us to reasonably conclude that ancient Israel's place in history and its national identity is largely associated with the ancient land of Canaan—understood in the Arab world to be the general pre-1948 region of Palestine.

Consequently, it should not seem surprising for us to discover that the biblical narratives and the commonwealth's geopolitical history in this region had naturally combined to influence the political thinking of the great powers who sought to establish a homeland for the Jewish people in "Palestine" following World War II. Noting that this influence and political thinking eventually led to a mandate (Resolution 181) issued by the United Nations—promoted by the United States and the then Soviet Union—that proposed a two-state solution to the national movements of the Israelis and the Palestinian Arabs.

However, because of the diverse historical, religious and political views that have long existed between the Israelis and Palestinian peoples, and among those nations and peoples that have a vested interest in this region of Middle East, we see that the United Nations has not been able to fully implement any mandates that called for two separate sovereign states—one for the Israelis and one for the Palestinians. (Some consider Zionism to be the catalyst for a more cohesive national movement that developed among the Palestinian Arabs.)

Leaving us with a political situation that is quite apparent in the modern-day city of Hebron.

Now, in Hebron we find an interesting political and religious tapestry where the symbolic heart of Israel's national aspiration falls under

the jurisdiction of Muslim authorities, and where a Palestinian enclave has been formed by “occupying” Israeli forces that are precariously situated within the bounds of Palestinian territory in the West Bank. Creating a situation that brings us to examine the underlying common thread that runs through this tapestry, and one that forms a geopolitically unsustainable paradox that undeniably represents the proverbial “powder keg” that exists not only in Hebron, but also in the city of Jerusalem, and by extension—the Middle East.

So what then is the underlying common thread that weaves through this political and religious paradox in Hebron?

Simply, it is the definitive belief in the [promises given to Abraham](#)—a belief held by many Israelis—which they uphold as a God-given political “right” to claim the land “between the river and the sea,” and this thread has become intertwined with the Palestinian’s belief that they have a “right” to the same land based on the mandates granted by the United Nations. Citing also their long-standing occupation in the region, and the precedent of their earlier ownership in the area formerly known as Palestine. (Keep in mind that the Israelis too have used the mandates to form a nation-state, while many Palestinian Arabs in this area also claim to be descendants of the Patriarch Abraham.)

Now, from the biblical perspective the covenant by promise made with Abraham is understood to be the solution to the conflicts that exist in the Middle East, because this promise is foundational to the gospel of the coming kingdom of God (Mk. 1:14-15).

However, because this promise included a landed inheritance in Canaan for the descendants of Abraham—claimed by most Israelis and some Palestinian Arabs—it places these promises in an uncompromising situation, conflicting with several United Nations mandates regarding Palestine that

were originally based on the UN Resolution of 1947, establishing a Partition Plan for Palestine.

Which brings us back to a familiar and somewhat similar problem that was once addressed by the Apostle Paul, who asked: “Is the law then against the promises of God?”

Now, in Paul’s day, he was addressing the nature of the promises and their relationship to the commandments of God, but today we hear echos of this issue brought forward in the political rhetoric surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Which has created a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to a two-state solution for political “Palestine” as the weight of the “promises,” and a host of historical traditions and narratives and also religious interpretations, are brought to bear on the current political issues that now affect the Middle East.

Revealing then the knot in the thread.

Which is understood by a simple question: Are the United Nations mandates then against the promises of God to Abraham?

Interestingly enough the answer to this question is the same as the Apostle Paul’s response to the church of God in his day.

Which brings us to recognize that any political proposition of [nation-building in this region will be fraught with problems](#), notably because nearly any proposed solution would have to face centuries-old ancestral beliefs—embraced by many different peoples—in a land that has long been subjected to the whims of mighty empires, both ancient and modern. Noting also that this political muddle has been subjected to many diverse and influential religious views, particularly from those who confess Judaism, and among those who are of the faith of Islam, and also among those who profess Christianity, all of whom believe they have a right to weigh in on the issue of landed rights respective to the

partition of pre-1948 Palestine. (This region holds many places deemed sacred to the world's foremost monotheistic religions—Judaism, Islam and Christianity.)

Bringing us then to consider the proposed two-state solution in the light of the Apostle Paul's allegory that associated two covenants with the lives of Sarah and Hagar.

Now, it is assumed within some Christian perspectives that Paul's allegory regarding Sarah and Hagar, and the familial conflict between Isaac and Ishmael, are past representations of the current conflicts that now exist between the Israelis and the Arab world, particularly the Palestinian Arabs.

But they are not.

Notably because this erroneous conclusion assumes that the current disputes between the Israelis and the Arab world are nothing more than a continuation of a family feud that has existed for centuries in the Middle East. And this misleading conclusion further assumes that the current conflicts between the Israelis and Arab world were inevitable and expectedly unavoidable for the peoples affected by the political mandates concerning Palestine. Which is a false assumption some have deduced from Paul's allegory that incorrectly associates the lives of Isaac and Ishmael with the people of Israel and the Arab world respectively, instead of correctly associating these two sons of Abraham allegorically with the administrations of the two covenants that pertain nationally to the twelve tribes of Israel.

Simply, Isaac and Ishmael came to represent two covenants associated with the people of Israel—all twelve tribes—and not to a supposed political division between the modern-day Israelis and the Arab world.

Importantly, then, it should be pointed out that the family issues regarding the birth-right promise became the basis for an allegory that represented the nature of two covenants

—one established at the mount in Sinai, and one to be established in the future at Jerusalem. And so the lives of Isaac and Ishmael allegorically came to represent those under the administration of two national covenants that pertain to the twelve tribes of Israel and also to all those who will become heirs of the promises in Isaac.

Allowing us to conclude that the conflict between Sarah and Hagar, and the conflict posed by the administration of the two covenants, do not represent the current Middle East conflict that now exists between the Israelis and the Palestinian Arabs and the Arab world. Because the reality is that the current conflicts are simply based on the long-standing and modern-day legal and political interventions of many nations, and also on the historical and religious interpretations that have been assumed by the Israelis and the Arab world, all of which has been politicized by a land-claim based on a promise of an “everlasting” inheritance centered in former pre-1948 Palestine. (It is inappropriate to use biblical descriptions of individuals to form judgments about the national character of peoples in the Middle East.)

Bringing us to consider something about the new covenant that will be established in the future with the twelve tribes of Israel.

Now, because the people of ancient Israel forsook the first covenant, a new covenant was needed, and because of sin a sacrifice was needed, all because the law of God revealed that sin stood in the way of a perpetual inheritance for the people of Israel. This explains why the new covenant required the death of a testator and that testator was Jesus. And because the new covenant (testament) is not yet established with the twelve tribes of Israel, we see that the first covenant is growing “old,” and because of their sins the people of ancient Israel were deemed to be unworthy inheritors of the Land of Promise (Heb. 8:13).

Thus, we may conclude that the “right” to claim a landed inheritance in Canaan became covenantally inapplicable for ancient Israel because they abdicated their responsibility respective to the first covenant established at the mount in Sinai.

Leading to the eventual eviction of the Davidic dynasty from the land of Canaan.

Consequently, Israel’s descendants cannot make a political “claim” based on a covenantal right to the land of political “Palestine” based on the promises given to Abraham. Which is to say that any current covenantal claim to a landed inheritance has no legal character because they abandoned the first covenant by means of their disobedience, and so any right by means of a covenant must wait until a new national covenant is established with the twelve tribes of Israel (Jer. 22:1-27; 31:31-40). (We recognize that the Bible acknowledges some promises made to Abraham were not legally bound to the first covenant, such as Abraham becoming a father of “many nations,” and therefore the modern-day tribes of Israel would expectedly occupy—by means of strife and conflict—their respective positions among the current nation-states of the world (Rom. 4:17-18).)

Likewise, the Palestinian Arabs and the Arab world cannot claim a “right” in Abraham to a landed inheritance in political “Palestine” because the promise was not afforded to them through both Abraham and Sarah, and so from the biblical perspective Ishmael—who was a bondservant—was not a recipient of the promises given to Abraham. Also, from a biblical and secular view, a verifiable genealogy cannot be established to authenticate a lineage that links the modern-day Palestinian Arabs and much of the Arab world with Abraham’s son, Ishmael. With the same being true for most of the extant twelve tribes of Israel whose national identities cannot now be established with the Patriarch Isaac. (It is expected that many of the tribes associated with Ishmael migrated westward,

and the descendants of Esau were scattered and have no representation in any particular nation and peoples today. This is understood in part from the specific blessings afforded to Ishmael through Abraham.)

Allowing us to conclude from the biblical perspective that neither the Israelis nor the Palestinian Arabs or the Arab world have any right to a national presence in political Palestine based on the promises established with the Patriarch Abraham.

Therefore, because a “new covenant” is yet to be established with both Israel and Judah, the fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham must wait until the return of Jesus.

What remains then are the mandates issued by the United Nations.

Giving us then something else to think about in regard to the continuing conflicts between the Israelis and the Palestinian Arabs.

That is there is only one solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, and that is the mediation of a new covenant through Jesus the Christ, and so what remains to be applied in the current political climate are the mandates of the United Nations.

Therefore, any continuing conflict with the mandates, based on ancestral, historical and religious interpretations, would presume to bring a greater scrutiny to the geography of Palestine by invested countries who make up at least part of the UN Security Council. Noting that one of the things these nations and peoples will see on the geographic landscape is the “security” barrier or wall that has been built in the area of Hebron. A barrier that is part of the same security wall that can be found in the area of Jerusalem, which may someday garner significant international attention for both the Israelis and Palestinians. (Hebron is a divided city with area H1 being under Palestinian control and area H2 being under Israeli control in accordance with the Hebron Protocol.)

For just as there are two sides to the security barrier or wall affecting the State of Israel and the Palestinian territories there are also two sides to the conflicts that exist between the Israelis and Palestinian Arabs. And even though it is asserted that the security barrier is not political and that it does not represent the borders of Israel, it is nonetheless geopolitically symbolic of the stalemate arguments and opposing views offered by both the Israelis and the Arab world. (For some the wall represents safety and security and for others it represents divisiveness and apartheid.)

Therefore, it could be said that this “wall” was built by both the Israelis and Palestinian Arabs because the national aspirations of these two peoples are—for the most part—founded upon the mutual belief that each has a right to claim a landed inheritance in this region based on the promises given to Abraham, and also on the will of the nations, which is embedded in the mandates of the United Nations.

Thus, for some the law of the land is seen to be in conflict with the promises of God.

Allowing us to surmise that this barrier in Palestine could someday—given certain political circumstances—come to symbolically represent two geopolitical camps as nations and peoples place their political interests on one side of the wall or the other, which would certainly [reveal more political divisions](#) that can further complicate the implementation of a two-state solution in mandated Palestine.

All of which is complicated by the unwavering promises given to the Patriarch Abraham.

A complication that may bring the international community to someday conclude that the only right to any national presence in the region of Palestine would be that granted by the United Nations. Meaning that the international community may assume the right to impose a two-state solution in the former region of Palestine that will likely lead

to unforeseen consequences and possibly greater instability in the Middle East.

Bringing us then to ask this.

Who has the right to claim a landed inheritance in the historical region of Palestine?

From the perspective of the majority of nations, the answer is to be guided by the mandates issued by the United Nations, which propose a division of the land for both the Israelis and the Palestinians.

From a biblical perspective it is understood from [the covenant by promise](#) that the coming new covenant will be foundational to the governance of the twelve tribes of Israel in the future at Jerusalem. Making it evident then that the promise of a landed inheritance remains for the twelve tribes of Israel in those lands promised to Abraham, including the State of modern-day Israel (Gen. 13:14-17; Rom. 4:13; 11:18-21).

Something that was well understood by the disciples of Jesus when they asked him: “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:16.) A question that tells us the disciples knew that Jesus was the “mediator of the new covenant,” and so we find that the apostles were not negligent in informing the church of God that a new covenant was in the offing for the twelve tribes of Israel. An issue that was brought forward by the apostles when they referenced the prophecy of Jeremiah, who wrote: “I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:8; 12:24).

Thus, we should consider that the twelve tribes of Israel will someday be expected to have a future inheritance in all the lands promised to Abraham, which would be centered around the city of Jerusalem.

But not at the expense of the Arab world.

Such is the power of Jesus to mediate for the nations in the future.

Until then the promise given to Abraham will remain in conflict with the national aspirations of those peoples who currently claim a right to settle in this region of the Middle East. Troubling any proposed solutions to the issues facing the Israelis and Palestinian Arabs today.

But it should also be understood that the right to claim a landed inheritance in Abraham—in the future—is dependent upon who is able to claim the mutually inclusive promises of immortal life and a landed inheritance by their personal covenant with God through the Christ. Leading us to conclude that all the lands promised to Abraham will be given to all those who become an heir to the kingdom of God through Christ and an heir to the promises in the context of being children of Abraham (Jer. 24:6; 32:37; Isa. 10:20-27).

Leaving us then with the only real current solution to the conflicts in the Middle East, which is an active cooperation between the Israelis and the Arab world to bring peace and prosperity to the region, which would include a constructive participation in helping those who are the most disenfranchised in this region of the Middle East.  **(End of two-part series.)**

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