

3. *To whom belongs the Promised Land? What Scriptures reveal that the Promised Land does not belong to Israel, if any?*

A. There is such an entity called "The Promised Land."

The Promised Land is a genuine piece of geography on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea.

B. Others besides Israel first populated the Land.

This Land was first inhabited by loosely affiliated city-states of various people groups called the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Gergashites, and the Jebusites." (Genesis 15:20-21) Since the most populated of these groups were the Canaanites, the land acquired the name "Land of Canaan," such as in Genesis 12:5.

C. The Covenantal Promises

In Genesis 12, God called Abraham to live in the Land and told him that He was going to give him and his descendants the Land of Canaan. These covenantal promises were repeated to Isaac (Genesis 26:3-4) and to Jacob (Genesis 27:29; Genesis 35:10-12). Thus, the inheritance of the Land passed from Abraham to the descendants of Israel, as it is to this day.

D. "The Land I swore to your Fathers"

Throughout the history of ancient Israel, the Lord repeatedly referred to the Land as "The Land I swore to your Fathers," or similar words. Even when God was speaking of the future of Israel, He told them He will bring them back to "the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it" (Deuteronomy 30:5). This connection from the past to the future is one of the reasons that we say the Covenant is still in force and the Land still remains an inheritance of the physical people of Israel.

E. Israel might be removed from the Land, but not the Land from Israel.

This is an important issue concerning the Land. In Deuteronomy, God warned Israel that if they were unfaithful to the Covenant of Torah as a nation, they would face many different consequences. One of those consequences was that they would eventually be removed from the Land (Deuteronomy 28:63). However, as we have already pointed out, just two chapters later in Deuteronomy, the Lord also promised to bring Israel back to this same Land. That return would be on the basis of His grace, and not on any merit on their part.

While absent from the Land, the Scripture indicate that Land would become desolate and not given to any other as an inheritance. For example, read the following passages from the prophets (All from NASB.):

Isaiah 62:4 – "It will no longer be said to you, "Forsaken," nor to your land will it any longer be said, "Desolate". But you will be called, "My delight is in her", and your land, "Married". For the Lord delights in you, and *to Him* your land will be married.

Ezekiel 36:34-36 – "The desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passes by. They will say, 'This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste, desolate and ruined cities are fortified *and* inhabited.' Then the nations that are left round about you will know that I, the Lord, have rebuilt the ruined places *and* planted that which was desolate; I, the Lord, have spoken and will do it."

These passages, and other similar to them were written thousands of years ago. Yet they speak of a reality concerning the Promised Land that existed up until very recent times. For example, when the American writer Mark Twain toured Palestine in 1867, he wrote with remorse what he saw

Stirring scenes...occur in the valley [Jezreel] no more. There is not a solitary village throughout its whole extent—not for thirty miles in either direction. There are two or three small clusters of Bedouin tents, but not a single permanent habitation...To find...the sort of solitude to make one dreary, one must come to Galilee for that...these unpeopled deserts, these rusty mounds of barrenness, that never, never, never, do shake the glare from their harsh outlines, and fade into vague perspective; that melancholy ruin of Capernaum, this stupid village of Tiberias, slumbering under six funeral palms...We reached Tabor safely...We never saw a human being on the whole route...Nazareth is forlorn...Jericho the accursed lies a mouldering ruin today...Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes...desolate and unlovely...it is a dreamland.¹

F. Others may inhabit the Land.

The Torah made provision for other people besides the Israelites to reside in the Land. These people would be considered inhabitants and not inheritors. Moreover, any such resident was/is commanded to abide by the instructions of the Torah while in the Land. See Exodus 12:49; Leviticus 16:29; 17:12, 15; and 18:26, for example.

G. The Land belongs to Immanuel.

The Scriptures designate the physical descendants of Israel as the inheritors and caretakers of the Land. However, the Scriptures also are

¹ Joan Peters, *From Time Immemorial*, 159–160.

clear when they indicate that the true owner of the Land was God, especially Immanuel (Isaiah 8). Here are but a few examples:

Leviticus 25:23 The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are *but* aliens and sojourners with Me.

Deuteronomy 32:43 "Rejoice, O nations, *with* His people. For He will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance on His adversaries, And will atone for His land *and* His people" (NASB).

Jeremiah 2:15 "The young lions have roared at Him, they have roared loudly and they have made His land a waste; His cities have been destroyed, without inhabitant " (NASB).

Jeremiah 12:15 "And it will come about that after I have uprooted them, I will again have compassion on them; and I will bring them back, each one to his inheritance and each one to his land" (NASB).

Thus, the rightful owner of the Land was/is the Lord Himself. This has some important implications. First, since He is the owner, He has a right to designate whomever he wishes as its caretaker. Secondly, His choice does not depend on any perceived merit by the caretaker. His choice is made based on His criteria, which He is not obliged to reveal. Finally, He has designated that whomever lives in the Land must carefully follow His Covenant that governs the Land, His Torah, revealed at Mount Sinai and renewed as a Covenant in the Book of Deuteronomy. Moreover, in Deuteronomy, He specifically states that the condition for living in the Land and enjoying its fruit was/is faithfulness to the Covenant of Torah.

H. Resident Gentiles

We have seen in other essays that in the future, gentile believers would be granted the privilege of living in the Land and will be considered to be as native-born Israelites (Ezekiel 47).

I. No Other

In light of the foregoing evidence, we cannot see anywhere in the Bible where a different owner for the Land is named, nor that He has changed the guardianship of the Land to a different people group.