

5. *Are all implications for the Promised Land limited to the Covenant between the God of Israel and His chosen people or is there a place to be for others, like descendents of Ishmael who have lived in the Land ever since?*

The answer to this question is emphatic: Yes! Ever since God made the former land of Canaan a covenantal issue, beginning with Genesis 12:7, its occupation both as a national homeland and a residential district have become strictly subservient to God's covenantal regulations. It is that simple.

1. It is only by covenant decree that the children of Israel were named caretakers and inheritors of the land.

2. It is only by covenantal decree that God instructed the Israelites to drive out all of the pagan nations from the Land when they took occupation of the Land. There are examples of people from those nations that submitted to the God of Israel and trusted in Him. Rahab and Naomi are but two of these examples.

3. It is only by the covenant stipulations that those who reside in the Land live. That is the essence of the Torah, the five books of Moses.

The Land was promised as a gift of God's grace to Abraham and his descendants through Jacob. When the Torah was given on Mount Sinai it was cast in a covenant format. Those who lived by this covenant were not granted eternal salvation. That grace gift was always by grace through faith in the finished work of the Messiah. Rather, those who live by the Covenant of the Torah were/are granted the covenantal privilege of enjoying the Land and bearing fruit in it.

The Torah itself made provision for the eventuality of covenant unfaithfulness. In Deuteronomy 27-30, we read that Israel, the covenant people, would have to suffer for their covenant unfaithfulness. As those sufferings are recorded in Deuteronomy 27-29, they, in reality, summarize the history of the Jewish people up to the present time.

It is important that we realize that those sufferings are covenant difficulties that Israel agreed to accept for covenant unfaithfulness. However, even though Israel, as a nation, would eventually become extremely unfaithful to the Covenant, as the biblical prophets testify, God, the other part of the covenant-making agreement, would always be faithful to the Covenant. This means that the very fact that Israel has suffered in banishment from the Land is proof that the Covenant actually is still in force — these sufferings and banishments are all parts of the covenant agreement.

Moreover, since God has always been faithful to the Covenant, He has the covenantal right to restore Israel to the covenant blessings at any moment. Thus, restoring Israel to the Land is within the covenantal right of God. This restoration is, in fact, promised in Deuteronomy 30. Here we see that such a restoration will not be based on any merit on behalf of Israel's part. Rather, the restoration is based on God's own covenantal prerogative.

The reader might notice that when we are writing this essay, we are having difficulty in determining whether or not to use past tense or present tense verbs, especially when discussing the Covenants. The reason is that we thoroughly believe that all of the Covenants that God made with Israel are still in force and the Covenantal stipulations, blessings, and problems remain active realities for the Jewish people. Hence, we speak of both the past and the present (and the future, for that matter!).

4. The Torah itself has made gracious provision for others who are not Israelites to live in the Land. This, we believe is something that the present government of Israel and religious establishment have failed to acknowledge. In fact, according to 2 Chronicles 2:17, "Solomon numbered all the aliens who were in the land of Israel, following the census which his father David had taken; and 153,600 were found".

Here are some of the covenantal stipulations for the non-Israelites or "aliens" who desire to live in the Land:

Leviticus 17: 8 — Non-Israelites could offer sacrifices

Leviticus 17:10, 13 — Non- Israelites were/are not permitted to eat blood

Leviticus 19:34 —Israelites were/are to treat non-Israelites in such a way that they should be as the native among the Israelites, and the Israelites were to you love him as themselves.

Leviticus 20:2 — Non-Israelites were/are never to worship any gods except the Lord. They could be liable for the death sentence, like the Israelites.

Deuteronomy 22:14 — Non-Israelites cannot be subject to Israelite oppression when they are in the Land.

Thus, the Owner of the Land has made adequate provision for anyone to live in the Land along with the inheritors, Israel. The only provision was that they were to conduct their lives in the Covenant Land according to the Covenant Stipulations.

Under other circumstances, this essay would be complete at this point. However, the question is worded in such a way that compels us to comment further on it. The second half of the question states, "or is there a place to be for others, *like descendants of Ishmael who have lived in the Land ever since*"?

To be sure, we have outlined our understanding of the scriptures as they address the issue (above) on whether or not others could live in the Land. But the second part of this question makes an assumption that needs to be clarified.

On the one hand, we have clearly indicated that others besides Israel can have the privilege of living in the Land, under the conditions outlined in the Torah. This, of course, includes the Ishmaelites. But the question makes a statement about the Ishmaelites that, in our understanding, is biblically unfounded. It might also be historically unfounded, but that point is for others to discuss, it is beyond the scope of this essay.

The statement in question is that Ishmaelites "have lived in the Land ever since." First, it is unclear what is meant by the words "ever since". Ever since what? If the words are intended to mean that Ishmaelites have lived in the land ever since Ishmael, then we have a biblical problem. When we examine the biblical evidence on the issue, we find that it cannot be substantiated that neither Ishmael nor his descendants have always lived in the Promised Land. What is the evidence for this statement?

1. To be sure, God gave Ishmael a great blessing. The Lord said, "As for Ishmael... I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation" (Genesis 17:20, NASB). This blessing, however, does not include the same Promised Land that God swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In fact, it does not include the promise of any land at all. The Scriptures are unclear where Ishmael was to make his homeland.
2. In Genesis 21:14 we are told that Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away from the family. Then it says "she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba." In all fairness, this region, "the wilderness of Beersheba" (the northern Negev today), is, indeed, part of the Promised Land. However, we are not told that this was to be Ishmael's permanent homeland. Moreover, we are never told where Ishmael and his family eventually permanently settled.

However, Genesis 37:25, the story of Joseph mentions the fact that when Joseph and his brothers were in Dotan, just below the Galilee region, "Then they sat down to eat a meal. And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead... ". Does this mean that by the time Jacob's sons were adults, the Ishmaelites dwelt permanently in Gilead? Gilead was in the plateau east of the Jordan River. It is not clear if the text is informing us that this was their homeland or not.

3. Genesis 25:13 tells us that Ishmael had four sons: Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael, and Kedar and Adbeel and Mibsam. There is not much biblical information about these four sons. For instances, there are only 2 verses that deal with Abdeel, 3 verses that mention Mibsam, and 5 verses that talk about Nebaioth. In none of these incidences do we find any mention of where they resided.

The case is somewhat different about Kedar. There are a few places where Kedar is mentioned in the Scriptures. When he is, that is his descendants, it is always in a context which seems to indicate that the descendants of Kedar lived far away from the Promised Land. For example, The psalm writer testifies that once he sojourn in Meshech, and dwelt among the tents of Kedar (Psalms 120:5). Being a *Psalm of Ascent*, it appears that he was saying that he lived about as far away as one might imagine from being in the presence of the Lord at the Temple in Jerusalem. In addition, Isaiah writes over a thousand years after Ishmael lived that the descendants of Kedar lived in the wilderness and among settlements that were apparently close to Sela (Isaiah 42:11). Sela was in the mountains of Edom, south and east of the Promised Land. In fact, Psalm 83:6 hints that the Ishmaelites may have settled in Moab and/or Edom when it says, "The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites, Moab and the Hagrites."

Next, in Jeremiah 49:28, we read how the Lord commanded Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, well over a thousand years after Ishmael and Kedar lived, to destroy the kingdoms of Hazor "Arise, go up to Kedar. And devastate the men of the east. It is unclear what is meant by the expression "men of the east." In Hebrew it is *b'nei kedem* (בני קדם). It is more likely an expression used in connection with nomadic tribes living east of the Promised Land, perhaps in the present Jordanian or Arabian deserts.

However, when Jeremiah mentions Hazor, "This refers to the country of the *ha'as'erim* rather than to the city of Hazor in the upper Galilee region."¹ And, more to the point, the descendants of Kedar are one of the north Arabian tribal groups. The name appears in Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian texts suggesting that this was a particularly powerful group. The reference here may be to Nebuchadnezzar's campaign into Arabia in 599–598 and may in fact refer as much to the geographical limit of his army's march as it does to the people they had to deal with.²

Finally, Isaiah mentions a prophetic reference to the descendants of Kedar. He says in 21:16-17

For thus the Lord said to me, "In a year, as a hired man would count it, all the splendour of Kedar will terminate; and the remainder of the number of bowmen, the mighty men of the sons of Kedar, will be few; for the Lord God of Israel has spoken.

We have spent time discussing Kedar because that is the only part of the Ishmaelite family of which any substantial information is provided from the Scriptures. We have found no indication that the descendants of Ishmael have been "living in the Land ever since." In keeping with the information discussed earlier in this essay, if they have lived in the Land, it would have been biblically permitted, providing they lived there under the Covenant conditions outlined in the Torah and with the understanding that they were "foreigners and aliens in the Land of Promise."

¹ *The IVP Bible Background Commentary Genesis—Deuteronomy* by John H. Walton and Victor H. Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas from InterVarsity Press, Accordance digital version.

² *Ibid.*