



# 1948 - 2008 ISRAEL AT 60

## PART 1 OF 4: ISRAEL - GOD'S CHOSEN LAND

May 14th 2008 marks 60 years since the state of Israel declared its independence. What is it about this small country that has kept it constantly in our news headlines? Why is there so much controversy about it? What does the future have in store? Why should we even care?

Israel's dominance in world affairs is no coincidence. Although the *state* of Israel was formed only 60 years ago, Israel as a nation has existed for much longer than that; for around 3500 years in fact! And they are not just any old nation - they are God's chosen people; chosen for a specific reason. This is why they are unlike any other nation and have such a bearing on world affairs. This is why they are worth considering throughout this series.

### - Two important principles

There are two key points to stress at the outset; everything here is based on one source only - the Bible. Why? Because it is the Word of God, and can be easily shown to be such. For example, 2 Pet 1:19-21 and 2 Tim 3:14-17 indicate that although the words of the Bible were penned by men, they came from God and consequently are 100% accurate and reliable:



2 Peter 1:19-21 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: 20. Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. 21. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost [or Spirit]

2 Timothy 3:14-17 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; 15. And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17. That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

The other important principle is that this consideration of Israel is not intended to celebrate all that the modern nation has achieved: whilst their claim to the land should be supported by Bible students, the nation are by no means perfect and consequently not everything they do is to be condoned.

### - Why consider Israel?

What is the point in studying Israel? Why Israel over any other nation?

- The word appears 2575 times in 47 out of the 66 books of the Bible (most of the remaining 19 involve Israel in some way).
- The Bible records Israel's history in detail.
- God calls himself "the God of Israel".
- A study of the Bible will demonstrate that Israel are at the centre of God's purpose with the earth.

### - Israel in the past

For the origins of the land of Israel, we need to go back to 2000 BC to the time of a man named Abraham (or Abram). Abraham was described as the "Friend of God".

James 2:23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

We read of some significant events in Abraham's life in Genesis 12:

Genesis 12:1-3 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: 2. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: 3. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Genesis 12:5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

To summarise this, Abraham was told by God (who in return made promises to him) to leave his homeland and travel to a new land - the land of Canaan. According to Wikipedia amongst other places (including scripture itself):

In the Hebrew Bible, the "Land of Canaan" extends from Lebanon southward across Gaza to the "Brook of Egypt" and eastward to the Jordan Valley, thus including modern Israel and the Palestinian Territories

- We can conclude that the land of Canaan = the land of Israel, *including those territories disputed today*.

### - Promises to Abraham

As alluded to before, God made a number of promises to Abraham - one in particular stands out in the context of the land:

Genesis 12:7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land...

Genesis 13:14-17 And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: 15. For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. 16. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. 17. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

- In short, Abraham was promised that one day the land of Israel would be given to him and to his descendants for ever.

### - Abraham's descendants

Abraham had a son called Isaac, who in turn had a son called Jacob; Jacob's name was changed by God to Israel, and his twelve sons became known as the twelve tribes of Israel ie the Jews. As the nation grew, the land of Canaan became known as the land of Israel - seemingly in keeping with God's promise that Abraham's descendants would inherit the land for ever.

However, the nation had a turbulent history (as considered elsewhere in this series), culminating in them being expelled from the land in AD 70 by the Roman general Titus, and scattered across the globe. As God had promised they would inherit the land for ever, his promise clearly hadn't been fulfilled yet! To further underline this, the promise also included Abraham - but he is long dead!

Genesis 25:8-10 Then Abraham gave up the ghost [breath], and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people. 9. And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre; 10. The field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife.

## - God's promises

When men and women make promises, there is no guarantee they will be kept; sometimes they are broken deliberately, sometimes accidentally due to circumstances outside the person's control. What about God's promises?

Numbers 23:19 God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

Malachi 3:6 For I am the LORD, I change not...

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

- Unlike man, God ALWAYS keeps his promises!

There must therefore be a future time when his promises to Abraham are eventually fulfilled.

## - Israel today

So where does this leave Israel today?

- After 1900 years with no homeland, the Jews are finally back in Israel.
- For those 19 centuries the land lay desolate. How come no other nation made it theirs throughout that time?
- There have been, and continue to be, many efforts to wipe out Israel, but they have all failed, against overwhelming odds.
- It is clear that God is controlling events in order to keep his promise to Abraham!

## - Israel in the future

We learn from elsewhere in the scriptures that there is far more to the purpose of God than the land itself - the Bible speaks at length about a kingdom. This is worthy of a detailed consideration in its own right, but in brief we can establish the following facts:

- There will be a future kingdom which will overthrow all existing kingdoms on the earth and last for ever:

Daniel 2:44 And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

- This kingdom will be ruled over by Jesus:

Luke 1:31-33 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. 32. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: 33. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob [Israel] for ever; and of his Kingdom there shall be no end.

- Abraham will be a part of this kingdom in fulfillment of God's promises to him:

Matthew 8:11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

- Although the Bible speaks of a 'kingdom of heaven', this simply refers to a 'heavenly' kingdom, rather than one in heaven itself; the kingdom will be on earth:

Matthew 6:9-10 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. 10. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

- Although this kingdom will have authority over the whole world, it will be located in the land of Israel:

Acts 1:6-7 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? 7. And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

## - Summary

Clearly then, the land of Israel is indeed at the centre of God's purpose. There is far more to be said than has been possible here, and you are urged to investigate these things further (see the contact details at the bottom of this page) - later on in this series you will see how these things are relevant to yourself. To sum up our consideration of Israel as God's chosen land:

- The land of Israel was once known as the land of Canaan.
- God promised to Abraham and his descendants that he would give them this land for an everlasting possession.
- This promise involves an everlasting kingdom being established in Israel.
- God's promises have not yet been fulfilled.
- God always keeps his promises.
- There must therefore be a time in the future when they will finally be fulfilled.

GOD HAS CHOSEN ISRAEL AS THE LOCATION OF HIS EVERLASTING KINGDOM.

WE CAN THEREFORE BE CONFIDENT THAT GOD IS OVERSEEING EVENTS IN THE LAND TODAY TO ENSURE THAT HIS PURPOSE IS FULFILLED.