



## *Promised to Who?*

The question over who has the title deeds to the Promised Land has been the most hotly debated topic in international politics for decades. But the right to this Land has already been determined by the only One who has the authority to determine it – God Himself.

At the very beginning of the Book of Genesis the LORD made a binding covenant with Abraham, who became the father of both the Jewish and Muslim peoples. The provisions of that covenant were recorded by Moses in these terms:

*Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.*

*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 shall be blessed."*

*(Genesis 12:1-4)*

Here God's covenant with Abraham consists of some incredible unconditional promises. First, God promised that He would bless Abraham, and if we read on through the Book of Genesis, we learn that He faithfully kept His Word.

Second, God promised to make Abraham a blessing to many peoples, another promise that has been kept down through the centuries.

Just think, without the Jews we would have no Bible. But more importantly, without the Jews there would be no Jesus, no Christianity and no hope of salvation, as Jesus Himself said to the Samaritan woman, “*salvation is from the Jews.*”

In addition to this, God promised to give Abraham and his offspring the Land of Israel as a perpetual holding. He told Abraham:

*Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.*

*I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.*

*(Genesis 13:14-17)*

However, Abraham lamented he had no children and that the heir of his house was his slave, Eliezer. God then made a promise to give Abraham a son, who would be the heir with him to the covenant promises quoted above. God spoke to Abraham in these terms:

*This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir. He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.”*

*Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.*

*Then he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess."*

*(Genesis 15:4-8)*

Concerning the promise that Abraham's descendants would inherit the Land of Israel, God did something next that would be strange to modern culture, but familiar to Abraham.

He told him to take some animals and to cut them in two and leave a pathway between them. Then, when the Sun had gone down, and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between the pieces. The smoking fire pot and the flaming torch represented the presence of God, which passed between the divided animals.

What was this all about? In that period when two parties were making a contract or land deal, they would not go to a solicitor like in modern times. Instead, they would cut animals in two pieces, pass between them and make an oath to this effect: "Let God, or the gods, do to us as we have done to these animals if we fail to keep our word." In other words, those entering into the covenant were invoking a curse upon themselves, if they broke that contract.

By doing this without having Abraham also pass between the divided animals, the LORD was demonstrating that the covenant with the Patriarch, by which He was giving him and his offspring the title deeds to the Holy Land, depended on God's faithfulness to the covenant and not theirs!

## *Sarah's Rushing Ahead*

Now Sarah, Abraham's wife, was barren and getting on in years. Concerned about this, she came up with the idea that Abraham should have sexual relations with her servant, Hagar; something which she later deeply regretted.

Hagar gave birth to a son named Ishmael, but fourteen years after the birth of Ishmael, Sarah and Abraham had a son called Isaac, who Scripture clearly teaches was the child born according to God's promise and the heir to the Abrahamic Covenant:

*Your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.*

*(Genesis 17:19-20)*

The LORD repeats the very same promise again when talking to Isaac, Abraham's son through his wife Sarah:

*Do not go down to Egypt, settle in the land that I shall show you. Reside in this land as an alien, and I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfil the oath that I swore to your father Abraham.*

*(Genesis 26:2-4)*

And many years later, when speaking to Isaac's son, Jacob, the Lord again repeats the Covenant Promise. Moses wrote:

*And the Lord stood beside him and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring."*

*(Genesis 28:13-15)*

As we can see, from a biblical perspective, the promise was given to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and was to be the basis on which God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and into the Promised Land.

However, the Bible also teaches us that from the very beginning of their relationship there was conflict between Ishmael and Isaac, the two sons of Abraham:

*The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. But Sarah saw that the son of Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."*

*The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring."*

*(Genesis 21:8-14)*

Ishmael's behaviour toward Isaac greatly bothered Sarah. The Hebrew word for *mocking* means *playing, teasing or reproaching*.

## *Ishmael Not Forgotten!*

Even though Ishmael was not the child born according to the promise, God still had great compassion and love for him. Further on in Genesis we read:

*And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him."*

*(Genesis 21:17-19)*

God had already promised Abraham prior to this in Genesis chapter seventeen that Ishmael's descendants would be fruitful and exceedingly numerous and that he would be the father of twelve princes.

## *Herein Lies the Problem*

Today Muslims have as their great ancestor Ishmael. However, there are many problems with the teaching of Islam and the Qur'an.

It teaches that it was Ishmael and not Isaac whom Abraham almost sacrificed on Mount Moriah. It also teaches that the Jews rewrote the Bible to teach that Isaac and Jacob were the only heirs of the Abrahamic Covenant, and not the Arabs through Ishmael.

But as our article demonstrates, the Holy Land belongs to God and He has already decided to whom it belongs. And until the world acknowledges this fact, and the authority of God's Word, all international controversy and solutions on the issue will continue to be an exercise in futility!