

# The Epic and Biblical Battle for God's Land

Commenting on the first verse of Genesis, Rashi (1040-1105), the most prominent Jewish biblical commentator, asked why the Torah did not start in Exodus 12, where the commandments concerning Passover are given. After all, this is the beginning of the legislative portion of the Torah, and the Torah is all about God's instructions to the people of Israel.

This is the answer Rashi gave more than 1,000 years ago:

*Now for what reason did He commence with "In the beginning" Because of [the verse] "The strength of His works He related to His people, to give them the inheritance of the nations" (Ps. 111:6). For if the nations of the world should say to Israel, "You are robbers, for you conquered by force the lands of the seven nations [of Canaan]," they will reply, "The entire earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He; He created it (this we learn from the story of the Creation) and gave it to whomever He deemed proper When He wished, He gave it to them, and when He wished, He took it away from them and gave it to us."*

How striking it is to read those words today, as millions of voices around the world claim that the Jewish people have no right to be in the land. That is for God to decide.

The fact is, from a biblical perspective, the whole earth belongs to the Lord, and He apportions it to nations and peoples as He desires and sees fit (see Deut. 32:8, Ps.24:1, Acts 17:26). As for the land of Israel, in the Scriptures, it is uniquely "His land" and "His inheritance." As He said when admonishing His disobedient people in the days of Jeremiah, "I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled *my land* and made *my*

*inheritance* detestable.” (Jer. 2:7, NIV, author’s emphasis).

The Lord took this personally.

It was this land and this land alone—“His land”—that He promised to Israel, and He did so in the most emphatic and clear terms imaginable.

Look closely at the different ways the same point is made in these verses: “He is the Lord our God; his judgments are in all the earth. He remembers his covenant forever, the promise he made, for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant: ‘To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit’” (Ps. 105:7–11).

Some claim that this promise was fulfilled in the days of Joshua (even though this psalm was written centuries after Joshua), pointing to these verses: “So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their ancestors, and they took possession of it and settled there. The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their ancestors. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the Lord gave all their enemies into their hands. Not one of all the Lord’s good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled” (Josh. 21:43–45).

The problem is that: 1) The same book of Joshua tells us that this was a general statement and that much land still remained to be taken (see Josh. 23:1-5 and read Judg. 1-3). 2) God did not fulfill His promises by giving the land to His people only to uproot them and drive them out forever. That would be like me promising to give you a car, then the day after I gave it to you, taking it back.

Remember that the psalmist said in Psalm 105 that the land promise was based on God’s oath, not on Israel’s performance. As Paul stated, “The law, introduced 430 years later, does not

set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise" (Gal. 3:17). In other words, the conditions of the Sinai covenant do not undo God's unconditional promises to the patriarchs.

As God spoke through the prophet Ezekiel when He brought the exiles back from Babylon 2,500 years ago (and with reference to the current return to the Land), "Therefore say to the Israelites, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone'" (Ezek. 36:22)

Not only so, but Psalm 105 states that the divine oath and covenant was forever, it was everlasting, it was for a thousand generations. And nowhere in Scripture does God say that He rescinded this covenant. Not once.

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As for Jesus coming into the world and making salvation available to all peoples, through whom both Jew and Gentile become spiritual children of Abraham (see Gal. 3:28-29), this does not nullify the literal, physical promises He made to the literal, physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As Paul wrote, "For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews [literally, "the circumcision"] on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed" (Rom. 15:8).

Yes, Jesus confirms the promises to the patriarchs. He does not cancel them.

To quote Paul again, writing to Gentile Christians with reference to Jewish people who did not believe in Jesus, "As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on

account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:28–29).

This applies to the land promises as well, which is why the prophet Joel said this, on behalf of the Lord: "For behold, in those days and at that time, when I shall reverse the captivity and restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations and will bring them into to the Valley of Jehoshaphat, and there I will deal with and execute judgment upon them for [their treatment of] My people and of My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations and [because] they have divided *My* land. And they have cast lots for my people, and have given a boy for a harlot and have sold a girl for juice [of the grape] and have drunk it" (Joel 3:1-3, AMPC, author's emphasis).

Notice again the reference to "My land." To say it again, when people divide up His land, He takes it personally.

In short, the battle today is over God's land, which is why the whole world is so agitated over this little plot of real estate.

It is the Lord who scattered His Jewish people around the world, preserving us in the midst of divine discipline and through centuries of satanic attempts to wipe us out. And it is He who brought us back to the land in His sovereign purpose and plan.

To be sure, that same God calls on the people of Israel to treat their neighbors justly and with compassion, and these requirements stand to this day. (Among many relevant verses, see Exodus 23:9 [NIV]: "Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt.")

But make no mistake about it: This is a battle about God's own land, and He will have the final say. {eoa}

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