

Church of Scotland: Jews Shouldn't Take Promises of God Literally

In a new report titled "The Inheritance of Abraham? A Report on the 'Promised Land,'" the Church of Scotland, once a staunch supporter of the Jews' right to their ancient homeland, casts serious doubt on the biblical Jewish claim to the land.

The report is a culmination of more than a decade of increasingly strident anti-Zionism and pro-Palestinian activism by the church, especially by its local Palestinian Christian chapters.

"Promises about the land of Israel were never intended to be taken literally, or as applying to a defined geographical territory," it concludes. "The 'promised land' in the Bible is not a place, so much as a metaphor of how things ought to be among the people of God. This 'promised land' can be found, or built, anywhere."

Local Jewish leaders fear that if the church adopts the document at its annual general assembly, it may become official church policy, the London Jewish Chronicle reported. The Church of Scotland's annual general assembly is to vote on the report later this month,

In the report, the church states that there has been a "widespread assumption" by many Christians and Jews that the Bible supports an essentially Jewish state of Israel.

"This assumption of biblical support is based on views of promises about land in the Hebrew Bible, and that the modern State of Israel is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, as well as the fulfillment of biblical prophets such

as Ezekiel, who spoke about 'the barren mountains of Israel' becoming fruitful and 'the ruined towns' being rebuilt as the people returned from exile. These views are disputed," the report says. It adds that the New Testament provides help in answering some of the "difficult questions" that arise from these disputed assumptions.

On God's promise to Abraham to make the Land of Israel a home for the Jewish people ("To your offspring I will give this land," Genesis 12:7), the Church of Scotland says that a purely literal reading does show that God promised the land to Abraham and his descendents, but that the exact geography of the land is unclear, and in any case the land was given "conditionally to the Jewish people, on the understanding the land is God's, given in trust to be cared for and lived in according to God's instruction."

The report then quotes from a slew of anti-Zionist writers who argue that Israel and Zionism are acting "unjustly" toward the Palestinian population on the land, in an effort to make the point that the current State of Israel is not acting according to God's instructions.

The New Testament, the report states, contains a "radical re-interpretation" of the concepts of "Israel," "temple," "Jerusalem," and "land."

"The boundaries of the land are described in different ways in different situations," the report says. "Abraham's descendants, 'numerous as the stars in the sky', will receive 'all these lands,' and through them 'all nations on earth will be blessed'" (Genesis 26:4). This suggests a more inclusive picture than "the land of Canaan" (Genesis 12:5) or even "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18).

"The lack of detailed archaeological evidence supports the view that the range of scriptural material makes it

inappropriate to try to use the Hebrew scriptures to determine an area of land meant exclusively for the Jewish people," the report says.

Making a theological leap from this geographical "lack of detailed archaeological evidence," the report then concludes that "the new 'place' where God is found is wherever people gather in the name of Jesus. If Jesus is indeed the 'yes' to all God's promises, the promise to Abraham about land is fulfilled through the impact of Jesus, not by restoration of land to the Jewish people."

The church admits that from the early 19th century, some influential Christians encouraged the concept of the land of Israel being promised to the Jews. It may well have been a church minister, the Rev. Alexander Keith, who coined the phrase "a land without people for a people without land," the report states.

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities Director Ephraim Borowski said the church should withdraw the report.

"On behalf of the Jewish community of Scotland, we call upon the church to withdraw it [the report] from the forthcoming general assembly. If the Church cannot build bridges, can it at least refrain from burning them?" Borowski told the London Jewish Chronicle newspaper.

Board of Deputies Vice President Jonathan Arkush said, "The document ... appears to have been produced with no consultation with the Scottish or national Jewish community. It is littered with misrepresentations of Jewish history, values and beliefs, as well as basic factual errors.

"It is an ignorant and tendentious document masquerading as a theological statement. The church has done a deep disservice to itself by producing a document without any regard to the trust, respect and dialogue on which interfaith relations should be based."

For the original article, visit .