

This Land Is Mine

When you approach the ancient land of Israel from the south, over the Sinai peninsula, you are impressed with two things--the stark beauty of the terrain and its utter desolation. Proceeding north, up the Great Rift valley, the nakedness of the Arabah and the Negev is even more intense. The Dead Sea basin and the surrounding wilderness of Judea continue the same pattern of a lifeless wasteland.

Approaching from the southwest, over the cool, blue waters of the Mediterranean, and entering the land south of Gaza, even the palms on the oases appear like a mirage through the rising dust of the desert.

The cities, too, of the southland of Israel, such as Dimona and Gaza, remind one more of an outpost on the moon than cities that belong to the twentieth century. The northern part of Israel, in the Galilee and the Golan Heights, while much more fertile than the south, is nevertheless a formidable land from which to scratch a living. Only in the lush valley of Jezreel, the broad plains of Sharon, and the fertile farmlands of the Shephelah, does the land seem to hold any promise at all. And yet, to both Jew and Arab, to both Christian and Moslem, it is just this land, hardly larger than the state of Illinois, that is viewed with reverence as . . .

The Promised Land. Religious Associations

In truth, it is not so much the land itself, although with irrigation and hard work it can be made extremely fruitful, as at the many kibbutzes, or again in the moshavs of the Negev; nor is it the mineral wealth of the potash factories around the Dead Sea at Sodom or the copper mines of Timnah; but it is religious associations that have made this a hallowed land.

The heartbeat of this religious fervor is the golden city of Jerusalem itself. The Mosque of Omar, and the silver-domed Mosque of El Aqsah, place Jerusalem as one of the most holy cities for the sons of Islam.

The tomb of David and the citadel which bears his name recall a bygone glory for the Israelis. The faithful orthodox of Jewry, rocking in earnest prayer at the Western Wall, rejoice that their prayer has finally been answered--that at last it is "This Year in Jerusalem."

For the Christians it is no less so. The sacred associations with the life of Jesus of Nazareth, especially in Jerusalem, make this holy ground for the followers of the Galileean also. It was here that Jesus died and it was here, whether in the tomb enshrined in the ornate Church of the Holy Sepulcher or in the simple, yet lovely, garden tomb adjacent to Gordon's Calvary, that Jesus was buried. And it was here, according to the New Testament scriptures, that Jesus rose again on the third day.

Thus it is little wonder that this ancient land is the most hotly-contested piece of real estate on the globe today.

Mid-East Tensions

Current Mid-East tensions can be readily traced to the formation of the State of Israel on May 15, 1948 and the subsequent hostility of its Arab and Palestinian neighbors, many of them uprooted from their ancestral homes. It is this hostility which erupted in the repetitive border wars of 1948, 1956, 1967, 1978, and the almost continuous skirmishes ever since.

The past century has seen two very different sets of claims and counter-claims upon the land. First, there has been the conflict between the Israelis and the Arabs in a search for borders that both sides would consider mutually secure and defensible. Second, there is the related debate between the Jews and the Palestinians as to who has a right to live on the land in the first place.

The first question is one of politics and security, while the second is one of history. Let us examine the second question more closely.

The discussion goes something like this. The Palestinian charges, "We have been uprooted from a land that our ancestors have lived on for over a thousand years."

The Israeli counters, "Yes, but before that, our ancestors occupied this land for over two thousand years."

"But," the Palestinian is quick with his counter-claim, "before that, our ancestors dwelt in this land as its original inhabitants." The Palestinian goes on to explain that his heritage is different from that of his Arab neighbor. While the Arabs are blood relatives of the Israelis, both being a Semitic people who trace their roots back to Abraham, the Palestinian claim is to Hamitic stock, descendants from the original Canaanites from which the land received its name, "the land of Canaan."

Biblical Borders

For many Israelis there is another significant factor in the conflicting claims for the land of the Middle East. Their position is that the proper borders of Israel should be nothing less-and nothing more-than those borders spelled out in the Old Testament as in the inheritance of the Jewish people.

To us, as Christians, this position seems eminently correct. This is the position we wish to examine in our investigation of the Bible and its promises considering the division of the land. These promises are not for Jews only but for Arabs and Palestinians as well.

This Land is Mine!

The first text deals with the basic question as to what right anyone has--and if anyone, who?--to arbitrarily partition the land at all. The text is found in Leviticus 25:23. It deals with the jubilee law of ancient Israel, whereby purchasers of property were to return the land to the original possessors every fifty years. The text reads: "The land shall not be sold forever; for the land is mine: for ye are strangers and sojourners with me."

The basis of the entire matter, then, lies in the fact that, not only the ancient land of Canaan, but the land of the whole world as well, belongs to God who created it, and he has a right to divide it as he chooses.

A second foundation scripture deals with the intent of God in apportioning the real estate of the earth among all the nations of the world. This text is found in Deuteronomy 32:8, 9 and reads: "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob is the lot of his inheritance."

We admit that the Old Testament does have a bias toward Israel. After all, we read in Amos 3:2 that God says of Israel, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." The reason for this bias, this favoritism of God toward one nation over another, is the unique relationship which the nation of Israel possessed with God--a covenant relationship.

A Covenant with Abraham

In order to trace this covenant we need to turn to the twelfth chapter of the book of Genesis. There we find God approaching a man named Abram in the far-off city of Ur, in the land of the Chaldees. Abram is told to leave his land and journey to another, one which God would show him. There God would make a covenant, or pact, with him.

In obedience, Abram and his family trekked to the north and west, following the fertile crescent of the mighty Euphrates, to the country of Haran. This was where Abram's father, Terah, became ill and died. From thence it was that Abram and his entourage journeyed south, through the country of the Hittites into the land of Canaan.

It was there, close to Shechem, the modern Nablus on what the Arabs call the West Bank, that Abram first settled in the promised land. Further wanderings took him as far as Egypt, and then back to Canaan: first to Bethel, north of Jerusalem, then finally to Mamre, in the vicinity of modern Hebron. It was there that God fulfilled his promise and made a covenant with him. The covenant is recorded for us in Genesis 15:7, "I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it."

Verses 8 through 12 of this chapter are a historical record of the various animal sacrifices Abram offered to ratify the covenant. Then, in verses 13 through 15, Abram is informed that he would not personally inherit the land at that time. In verse 16 he is told that his descendants would be the ones to come into possession of the land in the fourth generation--in the time of Moses and Joshua. After sealing this covenant, in verse 17, God outlined the scope of the promised land in verses 18 through 21: "In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the River of Egypt unto the Great River, the River Euphrates: the Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.'"

Notice that the boundaries of the area promised to the descendants of Abram are defined in two distinctly different manners--first, by a geographical description; and second, by naming the inhabitants of the land at that time.

Let us note first the geographic description. Two specific borders are mentioned--the River of Egypt and the River Euphrates. Bible scholars are divided in their opinion as to the identity of the River of Egypt. Some say that it is the main trunk of the Nile. Others claim it to be the easternmost branch of the Nile near Suez. Still others argue for the Wadi el Arish, now a dry river bed in the eastern Sinai.

We cite six reasons, which include every use of the term "River of Egypt," for the belief that the description is of the Wadi el Arish.

The River of Egypt

In I Chronicles 13:5, 2 Chronicles 7:8, and I Kings 8:65, the River of Egypt is used to describe a boundary of Israel during the reigns of David and Solomon. No scholar holds that, historically, the kingdom of either David or Solomon included the entirety of the Sinai peninsula.

The River of Egypt is used as a southern boundary of Israel in Numbers 34:3-5 and Joshua 15:4, 47, where it is closely allied with the geographic sites of Gaza, Kadesh, and the southern end of the Dead Sea. All of these points are far removed from either the Suez or the Nile, but lie in proximity or on a line with the Wadi el Arish. It is interesting to note, in this connection, that the Joshua 15:4 reference mentions in connection with "Azmon," a site that has been tentatively identified by archaeologists with a recent dig in the area of el Arish.

The river is mentioned in Isaiah 27:12. The Septuagint version of this text, translated in the days before our common era, utilizes the word "Rhinocorua," a name archaeologically identified with the site of el Arish itself.

In 2 Kings 24:7 we have a passage that refers to Jehoiakim, a king of Judah defeated by Nebuchadnezzar in the sixth century before the common era. This text reads: "And the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land: for the King of Babylon had taken from the River of Egypt unto the River Euphrates all that pertained to the king of Egypt." It is a well documented fact that the Babylonian empire, at this time, did not control the Sinai peninsula.

The scriptures say that the immediate descendants of Abram, before inheriting the land, would go through a period of affliction in "a land that was not theirs" (Gen. 15:13). This alludes to the land of Goshen, on the east bank of the Nile river in Egypt. Therefore, if the River of Egypt referred to the Nile, they would not have been in "a land that was not theirs." Rather, in that case, they would have been afflicted in a land that would eventually become their rightful inheritance.

In the Genesis 15 text, referred to earlier, the "River of Egypt" is contrasted with "the great river, the Euphrates." Great as is the mighty Euphrates, it cannot be compared with the mighty Nile for greatness. The Nile is second only to the Amazon as the longest river in the world. Therefore, since the River of Egypt lacks the appellation "great," it must not be as great as the Euphrates, and therefore not the Nile. In fact, as the accompanying chart shows, the Nile is over twice as long as the Euphrates.

Great Rivers of the World length in miles

Amazon	3854
Nile	3600
Mississippi	3486
Yangtze	3200
Euphrates	1716
Tigris	1070

The Euphrates on the North

The river Euphrates can be shown from the Scriptures to be a northern, and not an eastern, border of Israel.

The River of Egypt mentioned in Numbers 34:3-5 and Joshua 15:47 is given as the southern border. The contrast to be anticipated, therefore, is that in the second phrase in Genesis 15:18-21, the river Euphrates would be the northern boundary.

Another description of the promised land is found in Exodus 23:31. Here it is described as extending (east to west) from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines (the Mediterranean); and (south to north) from "the desert" (the Negev) to "the River," the Euphrates.

In another description of the promised land (Deut. 11:24) the river Euphrates is listed in conjunction with Lebanon, to Israel's north, and not to one of the countries that lie to the east of Israel.

In Genesis 12, Abraham was to leave Ur of the Chaldees and journey to the promised land. Ur is located just west of the Euphrates, near the Persian Gulf, in the modern country of Iraq. If the Euphrates was meant to describe an eastern border of Israel, Ur would already be within the "promised land" and there would have been no necessity to "journey" to it.

A Complete Description

The most complete description of the land which Abram's seed was to inherit is found in Deuteronomy 1:7, 8:

"Turn you, and take your journey, and go to the mount of the Amorites [the Nebo ridge on the east bank of the Jordan], and unto all the places nigh thereunto [the Jordan valley, east of the river itself], in the plain [in Hebrew, Arabah, the Great Rift of the Jordan valley south of the Dead Sea], and in the hills [the Judean hills], and in the vale [in Hebrew, Shephelah, lying between the coastal plain and the Judean hills], and in the south [the Negev], and by the seaside [the Mediterranean coastal plain], to the land of the Canaanites [particularly the Plain of Sharon and the Jezreel Valley], and unto Lebanon [in the north--How far north?], unto the Great River, the River Euphrates. Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them."

Nations to be Dispossessed

Genesis 15:19-21

Joshua 3:10

**Kenites
Kenizzites
Kadmonites
Hittites
Perizzites
Rephaim
Amorites
Canaanites
Gigashites
Jebusites
Hittites
Perizzites
Amorites
Canaanites
Girgashites
Jebusites**

Ten Nations Dispossessed

Next, note the boundaries of the land as described by the list of inhabitants then living there. These nations, which Israel was to conquer, are listed many times. We will just cite two of them.

Ten enemy nations are listed in Genesis 15:19-21, while Joshua catalogs only seven of them. The harmony between these two accounts is simple. The Genesis record covers all the tribes whose land Israel was to inherit, while the record in Joshua, written years later, omits the names of those nations which had already been conquered.

Let us locate these early peoples on a map of Palestine. We will deal first only with those who are listed in the Genesis account and note that they are either located in the Negev or east of the Jordan river, territory which Israel had already made secure before the text given in the book of Joshua.

The Kenites are mentioned first. They were iron workers, living in the northern Sinai, near present-day Eilat. It was the Kenites who first mined copper at the spot known today as "King Solomon's mines."

The Kenizzites were hunters who reputedly lived on the western slopes of Mount Seir, in the Wadi Arabah. This is due south of the Dead Sea, close to the famous red rock city of Petra. The location of the Kadmonites is not definitely known. However, since their name means "easterners," it can be presumed that they lived east of the Jordan River. Tradition locates them at the foot of Mount Hermon in the Golan Heights.

The Rephaim were large men, giants as it were. According to Deuteronomy 3:11 they lived in Bashan, which lies east of the Jordan, south of the Sea of Galilee.

The next grouping we want to examine are those names found in both the lists of Genesis and the book of Joshua. There are six tribes in this list, all located west of the Jordan River, from

the Negev on the south through Lebanon on the north.

First, in this grouping, are the Hittites. There are two ancient people, both known as Hittites. One of these lived in the far north, in the present day country of Turkey. These are the ancestors of the current Armenians. However, the Hittites referred to in the Genesis record are more probably the people known as the "Hurrians" by archaeologists. They dwelt in Lebanon, from the Mediterranean to the slopes of Mount Hermon.

The Perizzites are believed to have lived in the Shephelah, east of the Philistines of the Gaza strip, but to the west of modern Hebron.

While the Genesis account locates the Amorites in the area of Gebron and Mamre, they are also found just north of the Arnon river in the Trans-Jordan. It was here that the Israelite troops, under the command of Moses, made the first approach to the promised land and engaged in battle with Sihon, king of Heshbon. Heshbon has been recently excavated by archaeologists and lies between Amman and Madaba in today's country of Jordan.

The Canaanites lived in the fertile farming area of the Plain of Sharon and the Valley of Jezreel. Their famous fortress city was Megiddo, whose location is undisputed today by archaeologists.

We are informed in Joshua 24:11 that the Gergashites dwelt west of Jordan, presumably in the Jordan valley itself, northward from Jericho to the city of Adam.

Finally we come to the Jebusites, the early occupants of the city of Jerusalem. So strongly had they fortified this city, in fact, that it held out against the Israelites for nearly 500 years before being captured for David by his nephews, Joab and Abishai.

There is one more tribe to consider--the Hivites, who, while not listed in the Genesis account, are named in the book of Joshua. They were probably omitted in Genesis because they were not recognized as a people in Abram's time but sprung up shortly thereafter. Two generations later, however, they evidently had come into existence and were located in the so-called "West Bank" area, at ancient Shechem, modern Nablus. It was a Hivite, a resident of this town, who defiled Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, in one of the uglier incidents in biblical history (Gen. 34).

From the map on page 7 it can be clearly seen that the combined area of these eleven nations is the very same area encompassed in the geographic description of the promised land--a second witness to the title deed of the land which Israel was to inherit.

The History of Israel

It is also significant that the land was theirs by conquest, taken as spoils of war (Deut. 2:31). However, much history has elapsed since Joshua's day. After the initial conquest, Israel soon became tributary to such nations as the Philistines, Midianites, and others during the 450-year period of the judges.

In the early days of their kings, under David and Solomon, their power reached its zenith, encompassing most of the promised land of Genesis 15. But this did not last long. The kingdom was soon divided--ten tribes breaking off to form the nations of Israel, while two, Judah and Benjamin, maintained the kingdom of Judah. During these years both their power and their territory waned.

Finally, the last king of Judah, Zedekiah, was dethroned by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and the following judgment was pronounced against him in Ezekiel 21:25-27: "And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, Thus saith the Lord God; Remove the diadem, take off the crown: this shall not be the

same: exalt him that is low, abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it; and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him."

Jubilee Law Ends

This was to become a captivity that would directly relate to the land itself, whereas prior defeats only made Israel a tributary people while remaining on their land. This captivity nullified the very contract under which they occupied the land--the Jubilee arrangement. That contract, having been broken, was declared null and void. In this regard, note Ezekiel 7:12, 13: "The time is come, the day draweth near: let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn: for wrath is upon all the multitude thereof. For the seller shall not return to that which is sold, although they were yet alive: for the vision is touching the whole multitude thereof, which shall not return; neither shall any strengthen himself in the iniquity of his life."

Although the Jews were not to return to their lands under the same arrangements as before, the land still remained in the possession of God. Only now there were to be new lease-holders--the Gentile nations. In steady procession, they relentlessly paraded through and conquered the land--the Babylonians, the Medes, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Crusaders, the Franks, and the Turks.

There were brief recurrences of hope among the Jewish people, among which was the return under Nehemiah with the subsequent rebuilding of their temple under Zerubbabel. Later came the reform of the Macabees, but never did they regain the glory that they had before--and never full independent national existence. Finally, from A.D. 69 to 73, under the strong hand of the Roman general, and later Emperor, Titus; and even more under the sheer power of Hadrian and Severus, who put down the Bar Kokhba rebellion some 65 years later, the Diaspora became a harsh reality for the Jewish people.

Christians were quick to point to the Diaspora as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Jesus against Israel, recorded in Matthew 23:37, 38:

A Parade of Conquerors

Babylon	625 BC
Medo-Persia	536 BC
Ptolemais	270 BC
Hasmoneans	165 BC
Rome	66 BC
Byzantium	324 AD
Muslims	636 AD
Crusaders	1099 AD
Saladin	1187 AD
Franks	1229 AD
Mamluks	1258 AD
Tartars	1291 AD
Ottomans	1516 AD
Britain	1878 AD

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."

Paul Preaches Favor to Israel

Does this pronouncement of Jesus make the promises of the Old Testament of none effect? Not according to the great Christian writer, the Apostle Paul. Note his words in Romans 11: "I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew.--Verses 1 and 2

"Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness.--Verse 12

"For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?--Verse 15

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliver, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. For as ye in time past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"--Verses 25 to 33

Israel Yet to Inherit Land

Notice that the central core of Paul's argument is in verse 15: "for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." This means that once God makes a promise, he cannot and will not retract his word.

As we have seen in Genesis 15, God made a covenant promise that the seed of Abraham would inherit a certain portion of land.

Add to this the testimony of the Christian martyr, Stephen, as found in Acts 7:5, "And he [God] gave him [Abraham] none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him when as yet he had no child."

If, therefore, the land was promised to Abraham's seed; and if it has not yet been given to that seed; and if the gifts and calling of God are without repentance; then, of necessity, it follows that it will yet, at some future point in time, be given to the seed of Abraham, the people of Israel, for a possession.

When Will Israel Inherit the Land?

But when? When will be the fulfillment of these promises? When will Israel inherit the land? There are two lines of Bible prophecy that address this issue. A useful way to understand these avenues of prophetic evidence is to view the expulsion of Israel from their land--the "promised land"--as a prison sentence. If we can determine the length of that sentence and when it began, we can determine the date at which we might expect them to be released from that sentence.

The Times of the Gentiles

The first of these lines of time-prophecy goes back to the days of the last king of Judah, King Zedekiah, and his overthrow by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. We earlier noted that the lease arrangement which God had made with Israel was transferred at that time to the Gentile nations. This appears to be the background for the statement of Jesus of Nazareth in Luke 21:24, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

Note the expression "times of the Gentiles." How many "times"? How long is each "time"? When God first established his law with Israel, in the days of Moses, he promised them certain blessings for compliance with that law, and certain punishments for infractions of it. Some of these punishments are recorded in Leviticus 26. A repeated phrase in this chapter is: "I will punish you seven times for your sins."

The word "times" is frequently translated "year" in the Bible. In the book of Revelation, chapters 11 and 12, it can be demonstrated that the term can encompass a period of 360 "prophetic" days, each day signifying an actual year of elapsed time (Ezek. 4:6). In the Revelation chapter, the same time period is listed as "1260 days" (11:3), "42 months" (11:2), and a "time, times, and half a time" (12:14). This latter expression is idiomatic for three and a half years.

How long is a "time"?

Revelation 11:2	42 months
Revelation 11:3	1,260 days
Revelation 12:14	3 1/2 years* *"Time, times and half a time"

When we multiply this scriptural length of a "time," 360 years, times the number 7, as suggested in Leviticus 26, we arrive at a punishment period of 2,520 years.

Thus:

360 Years
x 7 Times
2,520 Years

If this were to begin at the time of the dethroning of Zedekiah by Nebuchadnezzar in B.C. 606, it would point directly to the year 1914, the beginning of World War I.

Thus:

2,520 Years

- 606 B.C.

1914 A.D.

Israel's Double

The second biblical time line is suggested in Zechariah 9:12, "Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope; even today do I declare that I will render double unto thee."

The word translated "double" in this text has the meaning of "doubling," as of a sheet of paper folded in half. In other words, it is descriptive of a duplicate, or like amount. The suggestion is that Israel would have a period of chastisement equal in length to her period of favor.

But where does this period of favor begin? What is the focal point of its "fold," its middle, from which we can date the period of disfavor?

The beginning of the period is easy to trace. We find that the first time the "twelve tribes of Israel" are described as a nation is at the death of Jacob in B.C. 1812, as recorded in Genesis 49:28. It is from this point that they are considered a nation, and not just an extended family.

To the Christian mind, it is just as easy to date the turning point as being that marked in the Zechariah reference. Just three verses earlier, in Zechariah 9:9, the "day" in which he declared that he would "render double" unto them was the very day in which Jesus rode into Jerusalem on an ass. This was four days before his death, in the year A.D. 33. It was on that very day that he uttered the prophetic words of the desolation of Jerusalem, noted earlier in our study (Matt. 23:37, 38). This, we believe, is the turning point between Israel's favor and disfavor from God.

The period from B.C. 1812 to the year A.D. 33 is 1,845 years. An equal portion from that point would point forward to the year A.D. 1878, a most significant date.

It was in 1878, at the ending of the Turko-Russian war, that the Berlin Congress of Nations opened the land of Palestine to Jewish colonization for the first time since the Diaspora.

It was in 1878 that the first Jewish colony, Petach Tikvah, a name aptly meaning "Gate of Hope," was established by Jewish refugees from Russia.

It was in 1878, according to David Ben Gurion, that the first Aliyah, or wave of immigration, can be dated.

Another View

But this "double" can be looked at from a still different standpoint. A Jewish scholar might well say that the Diaspora did not really fully begin until the armies of Titus began to amass against Israel and drive them out of their homeland in the year A.D. 68.

If we take this date, A.D. 68, as the turning point of this double, the period of favor stretches out to 1,880 years. An equal period of 1,880 years, going forward from the year A.D. 68 brings one to the spectacular date of A.D. 1948, the very year in which the State of Israel became a reality.

Look at the events of this past century:

In 1878 we have the three events previously noted--the Berlin Congress of Nations, the establishment of the first Jewish colony at Petach Tikvah, and the onset of the first wave of immigration.

In 1896 Theodor Herzl of Vienna called the First Zionist Congress to issue a call to Jewry everywhere to return to their ancestral homeland.

In 1917 the government of Great Britain, through the intervention of the Jewish chemist, Dr. Chaim Weizmann, issued the Balfour Declaration, placing His Majesty's government of England on record as favoring the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.

In 1948, following the passage of a United Nations' resolution, the State of Israel was formally proclaimed.

Thus, in steady progressive steps, Israel has slowly regained her place among the nations which was promised to her by God.

Up to now we have looked at the promise of land in the Bible for the Jewish people. What about the claims of the Arabs and the Palestinians? Are they to be left without a homeland of their own?

God's Promises to the Arabs

The claims of the Palestinians and those of the Arabs are very different, and thus we will treat them separately. We will first look at the promises of God recorded in the Bible for the Arabs. Most of the Arab nations have sprung from one of four biblical ancestors--Ishmael, Esau, Moab, and Ammon.

In Genesis 16:12 we read about Ishmael, the older brother of Isaac, and the son of Abraham by Sarah's bond-maid, Hagar. There is a positive promise made concerning his descendants: "He shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren."

This implies a shared inheritance with the children of Abraham through Isaac--the people of Israel. Since the main descendants of Ishmael today are represented by the Bedouin tribes, who are already living in Israel, this promise seems peculiarly fitting.

There are further promises for Ishmael in the Bible. "As for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation" (Gen. 17:20). Again, "And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed" (Gen. 21:13). And yet again, "I will make him a great nation" (Gen. 21:18). Similarly of the descendants of Esau it is written that God has given them a distinct territorial grant of their own. We read of this in Deuteronomy 2:5, "Meddle not with them [the Edomites, sons of Esau, ancestors of many of today's Arabs]; for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as a foot breadth; because I have given Mount Seir unto Esau for a possession."

The territory of Mount Seir is in present-day Jordan, between the Moabite territory at the southern end of the Dead Sea, southward to Aqaba, on the Red Sea. The other two noted ancestors of the Arab tribes were Moab and Ammon, the children of Abraham's nephew, Lot.

Of the former of these we read in Deuteronomy 2:9, "Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battle: for I will not give thee of their land for a possession; because I have given Ar unto the children of Lot for a possession."

"Ar," meaning "mountain," or "mountain range," is well identified with the mountain range to the east of the Dead Sea, just south of the Arnon river. This is to be a possession forever for the children of Lot.

Likewise, of Ammon, we read in Deuteronomy 2:19, "When thou comest nigh over against the children of Ammon, distress them not, nor meddle with them: for I will not give thee of the land of the children of Ammon any possession; because I have given it unto the children of Lot for a possession."

This "land of Ammon" is the western portion of present day Jordan. Indeed, Jordan's capital city, Amman, takes its name from this ancient heritage of the children of Ammon. Thus, with the Ishmaelites (the Bedouins) living amongst the Israelis; and with provision for the other Arabs--whether they descended from Moab, Ammon, or Esau--to the east of the Dead Sea, the Bible lays the groundwork for a peaceful solution with equality toward all--both for Jews and for Arabs.

The Palestinians

But what will be the inheritance of the Palestinians? That is still another question. This is particularly so if their own claim be true that they are not genetically Arabs, but Canaanites, of Hamitic stock. If that claim is true, it would seem to nullify any title deed to the land of Palestine, for the Canaanites were one of the people the Israelites were to dispossess in order to inherit the promised land.

Yet, some say that their ancestral claim to being Canaanites is a little faulty, that there is good genealogical reason to identify them, not with the Canaanites, but with their cousins, the Philistines, from whence Palestine derives its name. Genesis 10:14 substantiates this relationship.

If this is the case, their claim to Palestine as an ancestral homeland is also flawed. Although the Philistines were not listed as one of the tribes which Israel was to dispossess in order to occupy the promised land, their land was considered as being attached to that of the Canaanites.

In this regard, note the testimony of Joshua 13:2, 3: ,I."This is the land that yet remaineth: all the borders of the Philistines, and all Geshuri, from Sihor, which is before Egypt, even unto the borders of Ekron northward, which is counted to the Canaanite: five lords of the Philistines; the Gazathites, and the Ashdodites, the Eshkalonites, the Gittites, and the Ekronites; also the Avites."

It is important in this text to note the specific mention of the Gazathities, inhabitants of the Gaza strip. This is one of the hotly contested pieces of land in controversy today. Here it is specifically listed as part of the eventual inheritance of Israel.

Where are the Palestinians to go? The Bible is not specific, but it seems logical that they would return to the lands where they originated--the Mediterranean isles of Crete and Cyprus, and the coasts of Lebanon. In any event, we can be assured that God will provide adequate homelands for all the peoples of the world.

Life from the Dead

But the most fascinating event in connection with the phenomenon presently occurring in the Middle East is of far greater consequence than any of the points we have noted up to now. Read again the Apostle Paul's words, quoted earlier, from Romans 11:15, "What shall the receiving of them [Israel] be, but life from the dead."

The return of Israel to her ancient homeland is closely linked scripturally with the greater biblical promise that the entire world of mankind will return to life from the captivity in the prison house of death where they have been held.

Their return will be the answer to the Christian's oft-repeated prayer: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

This is the kingdom that will replace war with peace, as we read in Micah 4:3: "And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks; nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

This is the kingdom that will replace sickness with health, as we read in Isaiah 35:5, 6: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert."

This is the kingdom that will replace poverty with security. Micah 4:4 reads: "But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it."

This is the kingdom that will replace death with life and sadness with gladness. Revelation 21:4 predicts: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

This Generation

The nearness of this kingdom is noted in what has come to be known as "The Lord's Great Prophecy." Using the symbol of Israel as a fig tree, Jesus says in Luke 21:29-31: "Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand."

And then he adds, more specifically, in verse 32, "Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled."

May it yet be that the generation which has seen the establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948 will be the same generation which finally witnesses the fruition of every Christian's prayer, of every Jewish dream, and the desire of all men--the establishment of God's kingdom of peace and righteousness upon the whole earth. This kingdom will bring peace and security, not only to Jew and to Arab, but to all men. For this reason we should all join with fervor in the prayer of David found in Psalm 122:6:

*"Pray for the peace
of Jerusalem: they
shall prosper that love
thee."*