

The Middle East & Prophecy #3

by: Ronald L. Dart

Who owns Palestine? Really? And how would you go about determining the title of such a vast tract of land? I gather it's a pretty important question because land for peace has always been one of the initiatives in the Middle East peace process. They call it a peace process, it looks a lot more like war to me.

The Palestinians claim the Israelis have moved in on their land. Okay, so who's land is it and how do we know the Palestinians have any right to it?

Who Owns Palestine?

Who does this blood soaked piece of property belong to?

It's an important question because the whole world seems to realize that the last chapter of man's troubled history on this planet will be played out on the stage of the Middle East. That's why I guess the whole world cares so much about what would otherwise be an irrelevant regional conflict.

Think about it, The same war going on in the southern part of Africa, who cares? But if it's in the Middle East then the whole world cares. This is why so many people turn to the Bible, looking at the prophecies of the end time to see if they can tease out an answer about what's going to happen next.

Who Are The Players?

The problem is, it's not always easy to identify the players. Who are these people and what are their claims to this ancient land? If you don't know who the people are and where they live, reading a prophecy about them won't help much.

We know the entire parcel of land from the Nile River in Egypt to the River Euphrates in Iraq comprises a giant land grant given to a man named Abraham. What isn't so easy, though, is to follow the distribution of Abraham's estate among all of his descendants.

We know the Arabian Peninsula was granted to Ishmael, the son of Abraham, by Hagar. They are the Arabs today who are quite prominent in all of our thinking.

We know that the generations following, the sons of Lot, Abraham's nephew, settled in the area on the other side of the Dead Sea, and all of the Bible maps of the period shows Moab and Ammon over there.

We know that Isaac's older son, Esau, settled to the south of Moab and Ammon, and he is shown on most biblical maps as Edom.

If we were to do a title search on this land, we had gone down to the courthouse, to try to track back and see where did this original grant come from and who were the different things passed on to. What kind of a claim could these people make? Is it merely a matter of possession, a question of who had it first, or does someone have the right to it, or did they give that right to someone else?

Okay, if we check the maps in the back of our Bible, you will see Ammon, Moab, and Edom on the other side of the Jordan River, by the Dead Sea, ranging north to south. The maps may be correct as to the settlements at different times in biblical history, but they are wrong when it comes to the deeds to the land, in other words, who has the proper right and can show a proper right to a given piece of land.

Ancient Rights to the Land of Palestine

There are three statements in the second chapter of Deuteronomy that make important declarations relative to the ancient rights to the land of Palestine. They come from a speech delivered by Moses near the end of his life. In the speech he rehearses the journey by which they had come to the place where they were ready to take the land of Canaan. Moses summarizes what they had done, what God's instructions were and in the process puts evidence in the record of the land rights of Edom, Moab and Ammon.

If you turn to the second chapter of Deuteronomy and verse one, you will find Moses speaking and he says "Then we turned and took our journey in the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea, as the Lord spoke to me; and we went around Mount Seir for many days. And the Lord spoke to me saying this, You have compassed this mountain long enough. Turn north. But I want you to command the people saying you are going to pass through the coasts of your brothers the children of Esau." That is Edom. "These people are your brothers, you're not supposed to go through here and take advantage of them. You are to go through there but they are going to be afraid of you, because there are so many of you. Be careful, don't meddle with them. I'm not going to give you of their land. No, not so much as a foot breadth, because I have given Mount Seir, unto Esau, that's Edom, for a possession. You can buy meat of them for money that you may eat and you can buy water of them for money that you may drink, but that's it!"

Most Bible atlases and some maps in your Bible will actually show the location of Mount Seir and sure enough, on most of them, you'll see near the word Edom, pointing out that this is the land that was owned originally by Esau, the first son of Jacob.

Later in verse eight of the same chapter Moses will say this "And then we passed by and away from our brothers, the children of Esau, at Mount Seir, we went by the way of the plain of Elath and turned and passed by the way of the wilderness of Moab. And the Lord said unto me, Don't distress the Moabites, don't fight with them in battle, because I'm not going to give you of their land for a possession because I have given Ar, this area of Ar to the children of Lot, that's Moab and Ammon, for a possession."

So now we know something very important that we might not have known before, that that area on the other side of the Dead Sea to the south, actually was given by God to Moab and Ammon, and to Edom for a possession and Israel had no right to that land. They were to leave them alone, not fight with them and not cause problems for them.

The children of Lot, are Moab and Ammon, and Ar is just north of Seir and the Edomites are on a map in the back of your Bible.

Now there falls quite a bit of discussion of the different giants in the land at that time, and it is an unusual discussion and something that you might find of interest. But we will pass over that.

In Deuteronomy 2:17 God says, the Lord spoke to Moses, saying "You are to pass through Ar, the coast of Moab, this day and when you come near against the children of Ammon, don't distress them, nor meddle with them. I am not going to give of the land of the children of Ammon for a possession, because I have given it to the children of Lot for a possession."

Now this is important, because Moab and Ammon were not descendants of Abraham, they were sons of Abraham's nephew Lot, from an incestuous relationship with his two daughters. One could presume that Moab and Ammon were mere squatters, but if that had been so it no longer was.

God now declares that he has given them a land grant across the Jordan Valley south of the river Arnon, which you can find on a good biblical map.

Now this is important from the standpoint of the ownership of the land. The people of the Middle East, are composed of the Ishmaelite Arabs, the Moabites and the Ammonites, the Edomites and Israelis.

No one but the Israelis can make any ancient claim to the original land grant for Palestine, because Moab, Ammon, and Edom were given their own land on the other side of the Dead Sea.

The Amorites

There is another group of people we will deal with in a moment.

"Get up, take your journey (Deuteronomy 2:24) and pass over the river Arnon, I have given into your hand Sihon the Amorite king of Heshbon, and his land, begin to possess it, and you can fight with him."

So from the river Arnon North, the land of Israel begins and if you remember, we are still on the other side of the Jordan River. We're in the area that today would be called Jordan. If you take a look at the land on your biblical maps you will find the river Arnon coming into the Dead Sea from the East about halfway up the coast of the Dead Sea. Now this was the land of the Amorites that we are crossing into now.

God had made Abraham's descendants wait 400 years to possess this land because, as God put it, the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full.

The Amorites had settled on this land, when they came West from the original scattering of the people from Mesopotamia. They had no divine grant to the land at all. But God was not going to dispossess them until their iniquity, their evil, demanded that something be done about them.

God went on to say in verse 25, "Today, I'm going to put the dread of you, the fear of you upon all the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of you, shall tremble and be in anguish because of you, and I sent messengers out of the wilderness of Kedemoth unto Sihon king of Heshbon with words of peace."

Moses actually sent ambassadors of peace to this man and said "Let me pass through your land, I will go along by the highway, I won't turn right, and I won't turn left." He made them the same deal that he made with Moab, Ammon, and Edom in the South.

"You can sell me meat for money that I can eat and you can sell me water for money so that I may drink, only I will pass through on my feet. But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him but the Lord your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate that he might deliver him into your hand, as it appears this day."

It says in verse 34, "We took all of the cities at that time and we utterly destroyed the men and the women, and the little ones of every city, we left no one to remain."

Now that is a tough equation.

Something That Really Bothers People

Something that really bothers people often when they read the Old Testament is that as they come across these things dealing with the conquest of the land by Israel, where basically something that could be called genocide is carried out. Whole populations are supposed to be erased, wiped out or run out of the land or killed off. You read where they destroyed the men, women, and the little children and leave nothing behind. That's tough.

There are some hints in the modern world that could cause us to start thinking a little bit about what they might have been up against and there are some scriptures in the Bible that kind of give us a look inside of it.

For example in Africa today, AIDS is decimating the population and leaving literally millions of orphans many of whom will die of AIDS and the destruction of the African population by AIDS is absolutely incalculable and the spread of various and sundry diseases throughout the population, even including children is a terrible, terrible tragedy. On the other hand, if you look up in the Middle East, in some parts the Middle East children have been so thoroughly corrupted with hatred that they have eliminated any possibility of peace with those children and their descendants for generation after generation to come. Sometimes it almost looks like the only solution is the cauterization of the land. That must be what it looked like when Israel came into the land under God's direction.

There's a little passage in Deuteronomy that I look at and think about. God says in Deuteronomy, chapter 12 in verse 29 God speaks to Israel and says "When the Lord your God shall cut off the nations before you, where you are going in and possess them, and you dispossess them, and you dwell in their land; I want you to be very careful that you're not snared by following them after they are destroyed before you and that you don't inquire after their gods saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I will do the same that they have done'."

I want you to consider something very carefully. This is not a racial issue. This is a religious issue and I think that it's almost impossible for 21st century man to understand the depths of depravity of some of the religious customs and practices of the ancient world.

They Burned Their Children in the Fire

God said "I don't want you doing that to me, for every abomination which the Lord hates they have done to their gods, even their sons and daughters they have burned in the fire to their gods, whatever thing I command you, observe to do it. Don't add anything to it. Don't take anything away from it."

It's really hard to get your mind around it of how someone could take their own child, the fruit of their own loins and burn that child in the fire to a pagan god. It was done, but surely you think the Israelites would never have followed that kind of example.

Well, much, much later, not long before the fall of Jerusalem, when Jeremiah was a prophet in Jerusalem, God spoke to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 7:28) and told him to tell the people this, "You shall say to them, This is a nation that obeys not the voice of the Lord their God, nor receives correction, truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth. Cut off your hair Jerusalem and throw it away and take up a lamentation on the high places; for the Lord has rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath." Why? What in the world could they have done to cause this to come upon them?

God answers in Jeremiah 7:30, "For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight, saith the Lord, and they set their abominations in the house which is called by my name, to pollute it. They have put the abominable things that the heathen did, right in the Temple alongside God's altar, mind you. They have built the high places of Tophet in the valley of the son of Hinnom to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire."

They did exactly what the pagans who were in the land before them had done.

Cauterization of the Land

Where God said, "Drive them out, get them out of the land, destroy them completely. Don't do what they did for they have completely polluted the land." God was calling for a cauterization of the land as Israel came into it.

"Therefore, the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no longer be called Tophet, the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of slaughter for they shall bury in Tophet till they can't find anyplace." I don't know whether you know it or not, but this valley of Hinnom is a place called Gehenna, the image of hell.

Now this happened because the Israelites did not finally drive out all of the Canaanites from the land, but they adopted a lot of their religious customs and they were completely corrupted by the people that they were supposed to drive out and supplant.

Now remember something very important, this is not a matter for race, it was a matter of a corrupt religious system that even corrupted and destroyed children. God did not want any vestige of this system remaining. He wanted the land rid of the infection of the Amorites completely.

Now along with this, you need to keep in mind, one very important principle that God declares in the 32nd chapter of Deuteronomy, He says in verse 39, "See now that I, even I, am he, and there's no God with me. I kill, and I make alive, I wound and I heal and neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand." Yes, God can kill, but the reason that God can kill is because He also can make people alive again. For these people who are being destroyed, this may not have been the end for them because of what God can do.

God says in verse 40, "I lift up my hand to heaven and say I live forever, and I whet my glittering sword, and my hand takes hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to my enemies. I will reward them that hate me." Now, far be it for me to apologize for God. God is sovereign and His ways are right.

My job is to tell you who is who. Whose claim to the land might be just and what the Bible says about these people at the time of the end.

Distribution of the Land

So Israel crossed the river Arnon and began to conquer the people, just north of it, and this made possible the beginning of the first distribution of land to be deeded to one of the tribes.

You will find the story in Deuteronomy 3 verse 12. "This land, which we possessed at that time from Aroer, which is by the river Arnon, and half of Mount Gilead, and all the cities, I gave to the Reubenites and to the Gadites. The rest of Gilead, and all Bashan I gave to the half tribe of Manasseh; all the region of Argob, with all Bashan, which was called the land of the giants."

Verse 16 "And to the Reubenites and to the Gadites I gave from Gilead even to the river Arnon half the valley, and the border even to the river Jabbok, which is the border of the children of Ammon."

So it would appear that we have found a disturbing piece of information about the deeds and titles to land in the Middle East. The land, even on the other side of the Jordan where the city of Amman sits today was originally deeded to guess who? To the children of Israel.

But who are the Palestinians then and what is their claim? If they're Arabs, Moabites, Ammonites or Edomites they have no ancient claim to the modern land of Israel. They may have had their rights of possession for little while, but the fact of the matter is they have their own land on the other side of the Jordan down by the Dead Sea and on down to the port of Eilat.

Now there were some long-term implications of what Israel was supposed to do regarding the inhabitants of the land as they went through and conquered it. You can find this in Numbers the 33rd chapter. I am going to begin at verse 50 and there is some extremely important things for us to know about what happened in the Middle East at that time and the implications that reach on down to us right now.

"The LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho." Now we are on the other side of the Jordan and have not entered the land yet in the area called the plains of Moab, but they're really quite north of where the legal holdings of Moab were.

God spoke to Moses and said "Speak to the children of Israel, and tell them this, When you pass over Jordan into the land of Canaan, you shall drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you and destroy all their pictures, destroy all their molten images and demolish their high places." This is not mere jealousy, this is a matter of getting rid of corrupt religious practices that went all the way down to burning peoples own children in the fire and God only knows what else.

"You should dispossess the inhabitants of the land that live there: for I have given you the land to possess it, you shall divide the land by lot for an inheritance from among your

families and to the more you shall give more inheritance, to the fewer you shall give less inheritance." What this means is simply this, they divided the people up according to the size of their tribes. Those tribes that were bigger would get more land and tribes that were smaller would get less land. And that's fair.

Then it was decided by lot. A lot to an external observer is nothing more than drawing straws or throwing dice. It's a simple matter of an appeal to God to decide who gets what.

There's something you should know that's very important about this. In biblical law, once your tribe inherited a piece of property by lot, and the deed was given to your tribe, then it could never be sold. All these properties were held by the families in perpetuity. You could sell it off to somebody else for up to 50 years, but every Jubilee year, the property returned to its original owner. Now what does that tell you about the ownership of the land right now, today?

Pricks in Your Eyes and Thorns in Your Side

Now God goes on to say this in Numbers 33:55 "If you will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, it will come to pass that those you let remain will be pricks in your eyes and thorns in your side, and shall vex you in the land wherein you dwell."

Not a bad description of the situation the Israelis face right now in Palestine.

So it seems fair to say that the Israelis today have thorns in their side and briars in her eyes, that they have to live with it day in and day out.

But who are the Palestinians? Are they the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites? Could be? But there's another candidate for this that we have to consider.

Later, Joshua would make a similar speech just before his death, similar to the one that Moses made. He will say in Joshua 23 verse 4, God is speaking and He says, "I have divided unto you by lot all these nations that remain to be an inheritance for your tribes from Jordan with all of the nations that I have cut off even to the great sea west." (That's the Mediterranean.) "And the Lord your God shall expel them before you and drive them out of your sight, and you shall possess their land, as the Lord your God has promised you." Now what this suggests, even at this late date, the conquest of the land was far from complete, so the warning comes, be really careful about these nations that you are moving in among.

Drive These People Out

He said be careful not to mention the name of their gods, don't cause anybody to swear by them, don't serve them, don't bow yourself to them, have nothing to do with them. He says "Drive these people out!"

Then in verse 11 of Joshua 23, "Take good heed therefore unto yourselves that you love the Lord your God, because if you in any wise go back, and cleave to the remnant of these nations that remain among you, if you make marriages with them, you go into them, and they to you, know for certainty, that the Lord your God, will no more drive out any of these nations ahead of you. They shall be snares and traps to you and scourges in your sides and thorns in your eyes until you perish from off this good land which the Lord your God has given you."

Now, I understand that. Do you understand it? It seems clear enough. So how did they do? Well, not very well.

Israel's Conquest of the Land

The book of Judges begins to deal with Israel's conquest of the land after the death of Joshua. The story begins right at the beginning of chapter 1 verse 1 of the book of Judges.

"After the death of Joshua, it came to pass that the children of Israel asked the Lord, saying, who shall go up for us and fight against the Canaanites first, to fight against them? And the Lord said, Judah shall go up. I've delivered the land into his hand. So Judah said the Simeon his brother, you come up with me to my lot that we may fight against the Canaanites, then I'll go with you to fight against your lot, so Simeon went with him." They worked and they fought together and they slew the Canaanites, and they utterly destroyed them and took over their cities. Verse 18, "Judah also took Gaza, (a familiar name to us today) with the coast there of and Ashkelon and the coast there of and Ekron, and the coast there of." They took it all right down through there, both Judah and Simeon did.

But now begins the problem. Judah drove out the inhabitants of the mountain, but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had chariots of iron (Judges 1:19). So he gave Hebron to Caleb as Moses had said and expelled there the three sons of Anak."

Now Gaza and Hebron are prominent names in the news all the way to this day. And guess who they belong to in the ancient title? Judah, the Jews.

In verse 21, "The children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem, but the Jebusites dwelt with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day".

In verse 27, "Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Bethshean and her towns", or these other towns, all kinds of towns in the north, and they did not empty them out and the Canaanites would continue to dwell in the land.

Verse 28, "It came to pass, when Israel was strong, they put the Canaanites to tribute, but they did not utterly drive them out," as they have been told to do.

In verse 29, "Neither did the Ephraimites drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer", but they stayed there. "Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron." They stayed there.

Verse 31, "Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Accho," and place after place after place, the Israelites left the Canaanites, particularly the Amorites, in place. God told them "You do this and these people will be thorns in your side and briars in your eyes for generations to come and forever."

In verse 34, "The Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain and they would not allow them to come down into the valley" and in time as Israel was doing this, God stopped driving the Amorites out ahead of them and they were left there to be briars in her eyes and thorns in their side.

So perhaps we now know where some of Israel's problems come from. They left far too many of the Canaanites in the land who would down through history, be thorns in their side, and briars in their eyes and suicide bombers in their shopping centers and on their buses.

So are the Palestinians the modern descendants of the Amorites? There's no way to be sure after all these years, but we know who the candidates are. We know who owns the land legitimately. I'm afraid the record is clear. Israel owns all the disputed land in Palestine.

Until next time, I'm Ronald L. Dart.

This article was transcribed with minor editing from a message given by
Ronald L. Dart titled: "The Middle East & Prophecy #3" (MEP3) 12/13/01
Transcribed by: bb 12/13/10

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