



ISRAEL, THE PROMISED LAND, THE GOLAN HEIGHTS, THE WEST BANK, THE GAZA STRIP AND JERUSALEM

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INTRODUCTION

The nation of Israel is about the size of New Jersey, is comparatively small compared to its Arabic neighbors, yet is one of the most contentious and well-known portions of land in the world. Israel dates back to the book of Genesis and although it is blessed with a rich history of biblical nuances, its history has also been periodically intermingled with disobedience to God, enslavement, evictions, persecution, wars, anti-Semitism, the German holocaust of World War II, and is currently engaged in a survival war with Hamas, Iran and radical Islamic organizations. However, in direct contrast with the preceding adversities, the Israeli people are the Chosen People of God, they have been given "*The Promised Land*" by God, and are a key element of end time biblical prophecies such as Ezekiel 38-39 and the book of Revelation.

Though it seems that Israel and Middle East politics often lead global news in addition to a world-wide news media that consistently presents a lack of accurate reporting concerning Israel (Figure 1), Israel has nevertheless been a recent focus with the cancelling of the Iran Nuclear Deal, the American Embassy being moved from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem, America recognizing the permanent



Figure 1. Israel Does Not Have The Support Of The Media

sovereignty of Israel over the Golan Heights and President Trump's close embrace of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and his policies. Due to the biblical and global importance of these newsworthy events by the American government in boldly and confidently supporting Israel against Arabic/Muslim/radical Islamic factions who repeatedly subject Israel to an extreme form of vitriolic hate, let's begin our discussion of Israel by first looking at (1) the history of the Jewish and Arabic people, then (2) Jewish-Arabic conflict and why these two groups have been in conflict for thousands of years (and will continue to be in conflict), (3) Muhammad and the Islamic Religion, (4) the Land of Israel, (5) The Promised Land and lastly, (6) the Capital of Jerusalem in addition to the strategic importance of the Golan Heights/Gaza Strip/West Bank to gain an understanding of the importance of the nation of Israel in current world affairs.

JEWISH-ARABIC HISTORY

Not surprisingly, the unrest between the Jewish and Arabic/Islamic people can be traced back to the story of Abram (later changed to Abraham) as found in biblical Scripture, beginning in Genesis 11, in addition to a longstanding misinterpretation of the Bible and Qur'an. The history of both the Jewish and Arabic people originates with Abram (likely an idolater, Joshua 24:2-3) when God directs him to leave his homeland and travel to a new home in Canaan.

Although Abram, which stands for “*exalted father*,” is first mentioned in Genesis 11:26 (part of a post Babel genealogy), the definitive story begins several verses later as follows:

“And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sari, his son Abram’s wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there.”
Genesis 11:31

As Abram is dwelling in Haran, God speaks to Abram and directs him to leave:

Now the Lord had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation, I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”
Genesis 12:1-3

Genesis 12:1-3 contains the introduction of the Abrahamic Covenant whose fulfillment extends from this passage all through Scripture to Revelation 20 and is comprised of the following elements:

- Introduced in 12:1-3
- Made in 15:18-21
- Reaffirmed in 17:1-21
- Renewed with Isaac 26:2-5 and Jacob 28:10-17
- Everlasting Covenant (Gen 17:1&8, 1 Ch 16:17, Ps 105:7-12, and Is 24:5).

The Abrahamic Covenant contains four promised fundamentals by God:

1. Seed (Gen 17:2-7, and Gal 3:8&16 where it refers to Christ)
2. Land (Gen 15:18-21, 17:8)
3. Nation (Gen 12:2, 17:4)
4. Divine blessing and protection (Gen 12:3)

Highlighting the next portion of the Abrahamic story that introduces the specific introduction of a Promised Land:

So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him. So they came to the land of Canaan. Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said – “To your descendants I will give this land. And there he built an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him”
Genesis 12:4-7

In this portion of Scripture we find two primary tenets:

- I will give this land (Gen 12:7):
 - This is the first indication of a Promised Land. However, the specific boundaries are first specified in Genesis 15:18-21 (*we will look at this in more detail later in this discussion*)
 - This specific land was also chosen by God as the most appropriate location for the coming of divine revelation and salvation of the world (birth, ministry, death and final return of Jesus Christ)
- Altar to the Lord (Gen 12:7). By this act, (1) Abram made an open confession of his religion, (2) established worship of the true God, and (3) declared his faith in God's promise. This was the first true place of worship ever erected in the Promised Land and would be repeated by Isaac (Gen 26:24-25) and Jacob (Gen 33:18-20)

From Genesis 12:7, let's skip over the journey of Abram to Egypt, dividing the land with Lot, Lot's captivity and rescue, to the 16th chapter of Genesis that begins the story of Hagar and Ishmael. However, note that between Genesis 12:7 and Genesis 16, God repeats his covenant with Abram in the following passages:

- Genesis 13:14-17
- Genesis 15:7, 18-21

Now, let's summarize the narrative story of Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 16:1-15 that sets the stage for the division of the Jewish and Arabic peoples:

"Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne no children. So Sarai said to Abram, see now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children from her. So he went into Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes. And when Sari dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence. Now the angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness"

Genesis 16:1-15

Because Abram and Sari decided to not trust God for an heir through Sari and used Sari's maidservant to fulfill that role, the next portion of Scripture details the beginning of a **"division"** in Abram's family that will ultimately lead to Abram being the father of two groups of innumerable descendants that will be known as Jewish and Arabic:

Then the angel of the Lord said to her (Hagar)," I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude." And the angel of the Lord said to her, "Behold, you are with child, and you shall bear a son. You shall call his name

Ishmael, because the Lord has heard your affliction. He shall be a wild man; his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of his brethren"

Genesis 16:9-12

This portion of Scripture describes Abrams firstborn son Ishmael as a "wild-man...against every man." This phrase best describes the fiercely aggressive and independent nature Ishmael would exhibit along with his Arabic descendants. Then, in Genesis 17, God changes Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah and informs Abraham that Sarah will bear him a son. Not surprisingly, Abraham does not believe God and replies "Oh, that Ishmael might live before you!" This plea indicates how impossible Abraham believed it was for them to have children. Then, God forcefully settles the discussion in verses 17-21 as follows:

*Then God said: "**No**, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes (sons), and I will make him a great nation. **But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this set time next year"***

Genesis 17:17-21

At the conclusion of Genesis 17:21, a two-fold covenant was promised to Abraham as follows:

- An everlasting covenant between God and Isaac
- The beginning of two diverse nations – Jewish and Arabic. **Ishmael would multiply exceedingly and become the father of a great nation (Arabic) and Isaac would be the heir of the "Everlasting Covenant" between the Jewish people and God (Genesis 17:19-21)**

JEWISH-ARABIC CONFLICT

Regrettably, history has proven there has been a significant amount of hostility and animosity between the Jewish and Arabic peoples, particularly in modern times. However, a familiarity with all of the preceding verses should indicate that at least some of this animosity goes back to an ancient measure of bitterness between Isaac and Ishmael as follows:

- Isaac was the promised son who would only inherit the blessings of Abram (Gen 21:1-3) and receive the covenant from God (Gen 17:17-21). In contrast, Ishmael was the son of a slave woman (Gen 16:1-16) but the father of a great nation (Genesis 17:20)

- As a result of this clear division, there was an animosity between Ishmael and Isaac from Abram sending Ishmael and Hagar away, Ishmael mocking Isaac (Gen 21:9), and Ishmael being described as a wild man and his hand being against every man, and every man's hand against him (Gen 16:9-12)

However, there are additional noteworthy factors that have made this animosity and hostility even more pronounced:

- The Qur'an (and the religion of Islam). In Islamic tradition, it is *typically believed* that Abraham is told to sacrifice his son Ishmael, not Isaac, although the Qur'an does not actually state which son (this story is found in Surah 37, verses 100-111, where it only refers to a son¹). As a result and according to the Islamic doctrinal scheme, Muslims celebrate the Islamic holiday of *Eid al-Adha*, also called *Festival of the Sacrifice*.² This holiday celebrates the sacrifice that God (Allah) commanded to Prophet Abraham of his beloved son, Ishmael³ (*who is also believed to be the son of Promise and the ultimate right to the Holy Land*). This viewpoint is in direct conflict with Genesis 17:17-21, Genesis 22:9, Hebrews 11:17, and James 2:21. However, Muslims believe that the Bible is corrupt, not reliable and has been changed over the years by men's alterations and narrations⁴

*Note: It must also be mentioned that the Qur'an, the Muslim holy book, actually affirms the fact that Allah made a covenant with the children of Israel to make them a vehicle of his message to mankind as follows:*⁵

"O ye Children of Israel! We delivered you from your enemy, and We made a covenant with you on the right side of Mount Sinai, and We sent down to you Manna and quails: Saying, Eat of the good things We have provided for your sustenance, but commit no excess therein, lest My Wrath should justly descend on you: and those on whom descends My Wrath do perish indeed"

Qur'an 20:80-81

- In 1948 Israel became a nation with set boundaries that were approved by the United Nations. The land at that time was primarily inhabited by Arabic peoples (Palestinians) and was vehemently protested by most Arabs. This hostility resulted in the Israeli-Arab war of 1948 that started immediately after Israel declared independence. This hostility between Israel and its Arabic neighbors has continued to escalate into modern times. Ezekiel 38-39 gives a clear account of Israel being attacked by Islamic countries sometime in the future and being miraculously delivered from annihilation by God

MUHAMMAD AND THE ISLAMIC RELIGION

As history will record in detail, the birth of Muhammad in 570 AD will lead to the establishment of the Qur'an, the Islamic religion, and a principal leadership (Muhammad) for the Muslim Arabic peoples.⁶ However, before we look at the next section on the Islamic religion, we first need to briefly consider the time period between Ishmael and Muhammad and the growth of the Arabic peoples.

From a time perspective, Ishmael was born around 1911 B.C. and Muhammad was born in 570 AD. Therefore, the pre-Muhammad time period we are considering is about 2481 years of a growth period for the Arabic people as they were dramatically increasing into one of the largest civilizations the world has ever known. For this discussion, this time period can be summarized by the following highlights:

- Initially and during the time of Abraham, Arabia was inhabited by the Bedouins (people with a nomadic life style) and could be described as a culturally isolated and economically underdeveloped region. As a side note, most of the land is desert, arid (rainfall is scarce), minimal vegetation and land suitable for farming. As a result, the nomadic lifestyle was the lone successful existence
- Ishmael's offspring would consist of 12 sons (Gen 25:13-16) who would initially comprise a portion of the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula (also descendants from Joktan, Shem, Keturah, and Essau)
- As the Arabic population increased, the nomads (or Bedouins) still lived according to ancient tribal patterns but were beginning to be influenced by neighboring and more sophisticated cultures of Ethiopia, Persia, and Byzantium
- 853 BC - First reference to Arabs found in an Assyrian inscription
- 350 AD - The first Aramaic script is developed
- 450 AD - The king of Mecca (Quasayy) unifies enough people to establish a city around the shrine of Mecca
- 500 AD - Southern Arabia ruled by a Jewish kingdom
- 500 AD - Northern Arabia is ruled by the Kinda
- 570 AD - Christian Ethiopia tries to capture Mecca but is defeated by the Arabs
- 570 AD - Muhammad is born
- 610 AD - Muhammad preaches a new religion (Islam) in Mecca
- 610-632 AD - Muhammad and his followers gain prominence and increasing followers
- During 627 AD, Muhammad kills 700 Jews and in 629 AD, Muhammad wins the battle of Khaybar and beheads all the Jews

- 632 AD - The Muslim army conquers the Arabian Peninsula
- Post 632 AD – Muhammad had unified most of Arabia under a single religion, the Muslim religion (as of 2015, there are over 1.8 billion Muslims in the world (24% of the world population) who profess – *“There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet”*

At this point, a question is usually asked regarding the appearance of Islam in Arabic history. So, let's briefly look at the history of Islam:

ISLAM

- Islam is the second-largest religion and may be the fastest growing religion in the world
- Islam is a monotheistic belief (there is only one God)
- Allah is the Arabic word for God and is primarily used by Muslims to refer to God in Islam
- The Qur'an is a collection of revelations and teachings of Muhammad who Muslims believe was the last prophet from God to mankind
- Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the unaltered and final revelation of God
- Muslims maintain that previous revelations, messages, and the Bible have been partially misinterpreted or altered over time

MUHAMMAD⁷

- Muhammad was a man, born in Mecca, Arabia (present-day Saudi Arabia) in 570 AD and died in Medina, Arabia (present-day Saudi Arabia) in 632 AD at the age of 62. The name of Muhammad means “Praiseworthy”
- Muslims believe that Muhammad restored the unaltered and original faith of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, etc., and is the founder of Islam
- While working as a merchant, Muhammad would occasionally retreat to a cave for prayer and seclusion. At age 40, Muhammad allegedly was visited by the angel Gabriel and received his initial revelations from God
- Three years after this event, Muhammad began publicly preaching these revelations, emphasizing:
 - God is one
 - Complete surrender to Him
 - Islam is the only way acceptable to God
 - That Muhammad was *the* prophet of God
- In 622 AD, Muhammad and his followers migrated to Medina. This event marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar
- In Medina and after 8 years of fighting the Meccan tribes, Muhammad collected an army of 10,000 Muslim converts and marched on the city of Mecca, capturing the city with little resistance

- Muhammad had all pagan idols in the city destroyed and all remaining pagan temples in eastern Arabia were destroyed
- Shortly after, Muhammad became ill and died. However, most of the Arabian Peninsula had converted to Islam and Arabia was united into a single Muslim religious organization
- Muslim law is the result of Muhammad's practices and teachings
- After the death of Muhammad, Abu Bakr (a friend) was appointed successor and the first Caliph (chief Muslim civil and religious ruler)
- Within 10 years, Islamic Arabs had conquered Mesopotamia, Byzantine Syria and Egypt, and large parts of Syria that led to the establishment of the first Caliphate (Islamic state under the leadership of a caliph)
- History has graphically indicated that Islam has significantly increased to the status of a large and active religion since the death of Muhammad. Today, the militaristic side of Islam (radical Islam) has dominated the global media

THE LAND OF ISRAEL

From a geographical perspective, the *current* Land of Israel is a unique sovereign state as it is a God-given topographical portion of land that is nestled at the southeastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea (Figure 2) and also shares land



Figure 2. The Current Land Of Israel And Palestine

borders with the Muslim states of Lebanon to the north, Syria in the northeast, Jordan on the east, and Egypt to the south. Within the *current* boundaries of Israel is the Palestinian Territories (conquered by Israel during the 6-day war of 1967) of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights. Following are some items of interest (in no particular order) that summarize the Land of Israel from a biblical, historical, and geographical perspective:

- Israel is the size of New Jersey
- Israel is the land promised to Abram in the Bible
- Israel is located in a strategic location of the junction of Africa, Asia, and Europe
- Israel is a democratic country
- Israel is central to the Jewish religion
- Israelis and Palestinians both claim Jerusalem as their capital
- Israel is home to more than 1/3 of the world's Jews – and that number continues to increase
- Over 20% of Israel's citizens are not Jewish
- Zionism comes from the word Zion (the heavenly city), and over time was referred to as the Jewish idea of utopia
- Israel is holy to three primary faiths:
 - Jews
 - Christians
 - Muslims
- Christ ministered in Israel and will once again return to Israel as the conquering King
- Israel is often referred to as the "*Holy Land*." However, this expression occurs only once in Zechariah 2:12 – "*And the Lord will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the Holy Land and will again choose Jerusalem*" – and not once in the New Testament

As history has recorded in detail, the pathway for Israel to become a sovereign state has been a long and contentious journey. However, to better understand Israel, let's briefly consider the terms *Palestine* and *Palestinians*^{8,9} as they are often used interchangeably when discussing Israel, and then look at the historical perspective of Israel becoming a sovereign state:

- Palestine (Palestinian Territories):
Modern Palestinian Territories (also referred to as occupied Palestinian Territories) encompass the specific areas of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip of which the boundaries are located within

Israel (Figure 2&3) and are typically only recognized by the international community

- Palestinian:

Generally considered as descendants from people who have lived in Palestine and are largely linguistically and culturally Arab and Islamic

Now, let's continue our discussion by considering the historical perspective of Israel becoming a sovereign state. In biblical times, Palestine included the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and was controlled at various times by the Egyptian, Assyrian, Persian and Roman Empires before being conquered by the Arabs in 634 AD. It was then part of the Ottoman Empire from 1516 to 1918. The name Palestine was used as the official political title for the land west of Jordan mandated to Britain in 1920.

As momentum began to increase for Israel to become a recognized state, the United Nations General Assembly recommended on November 29, 1947, the implementation and resultant adoption of a Partition Plan named Mandatory Palestine (that was subsequently rejected by the Palestinians). On May 14, 1948, Britain withdrew its control of Palestine with the expiration of its mandate, and was rapidly followed by David Ben-Gurion (president of the Jewish Agency for Palestine and Executive Head of the Zionist Organization) boldly declaring "*the establishment of a Jewish State in Eretz Israel, to be known as the State of Israel, and independent upon the May 15, 1948, official termination of the British Mandate for Palestine.*" Even though this declaration came to be sanctioned by the United Nations with additional approval from the United States, neighboring Arab armies (comprised of Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Iraq) were incensed they had lost their proposed land and invaded the newly declared State of Israel the next day (May 15) but were miraculously defeated in the war that is referred to as the 1948 Arab-Israeli War (lasting until March 1949).¹⁰

The armistice lines that were agreed upon at the end of fighting in 1949 served as Israel's boundaries until the brief Six-Day War of 1967 between Israel and the adjacent Arab armies of Egypt, Syria and Jordan. This conflict ended with Israel again being victorious and now occupying the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt, East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Golan Heights in Syria (Figure 3).¹¹ Although these five territories were now occupied by Israel, the Israelis made the following concessions in the *interest of peace*:

- The ***Sinai Peninsula*** was returned to Egypt in stages during 1974-1982
- A 1994 peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) resulted in the ending of Israeli occupation of the ***West Bank***. Although most of the West Bank is administered by Israel, about 40% is

under varying degrees of autonomous rule by the Fatah-run Palestinian Authority

- The *Gaza Strip* is currently under the control of Hamas as Israel disengaged from this area in 2005
- The *Golan Heights* was seized from Syria in the Six-Day War resulting in Syria and Israel signing an armistice in 1974. It has been under an UN observer force ever since
- Israel captured and controlled all of *Jerusalem* in 1967 but its current status remains disputed with Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem that is considered illegal under international law. However, administration of the Temple Mount is by the Jordanian government under an Islamic religious trust (Waqf) in Amman with Israel responsible for control of security



Figure 3. Israel And Captured Land After The Six Day War Of 1967

Referring to Figure 4, it is visually apparent that the modern boundaries of Israel have been significantly reduced from 1967 (in the interest of peace) and yet has not resulted in any form of reduced hostility from Israel's Islamic neighbors and/or organizations. In fact, history has demonstrated that hostility towards Israel has significantly increased and yet is under-reported by the global media.

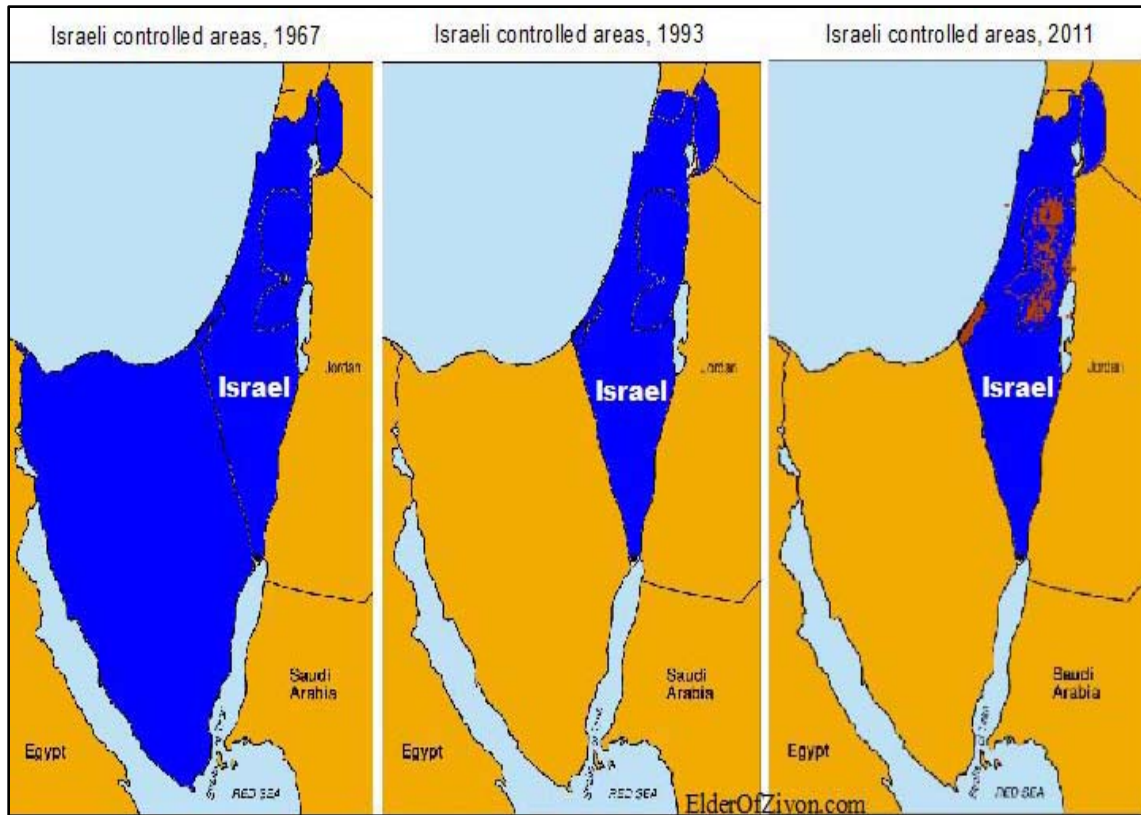


Figure 4. Israeli Controlled Areas From 1967 To 2011

THE PROMISED LAND

The Promised Land is the land originally promised by God to the Israelites, and was first promised to Abram in Genesis 15:18-21 and then renewed to his son Isaac and to the descendants of Isaac's son Jacob (Genesis 28:13). Related historical terms for The Promised Land include:

- This Land
- The Land of Canaan
- The Holy Land
- Palestine
- Dan to Beersheba

Interestingly, the boundaries of The Promised Land vary somewhat between biblical Scriptures such as Genesis 15, Exodus 23, Numbers 34, Ezekiel 47, and Joshua (as an example, Figure 5 illustrates the boundaries as defined in

Numbers and Ezekiel). Starting with Genesis 15, the boundaries are categorically defined as follows:

Genesis 15:

In Genesis 15:18-21, the Borders of the Land are defined as *“the land promised to the descendants of Abraham, through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob.”*

Exodus 23:

Exodus 23:31 gives a more detailed description and defines the borders as *“from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, and from the desert (Negev) to the River Euphrates.”*

Numbers 34:

Numbers 34:1-15 further defines the land given to the Israelite tribes after the Exodus – *“Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh were to receive the land east of the Jordan”* (Numbers 34:14-15), and Numbers 34:1-13 describes – *“the land west of the Jordan to be received for the remaining tribes.”*

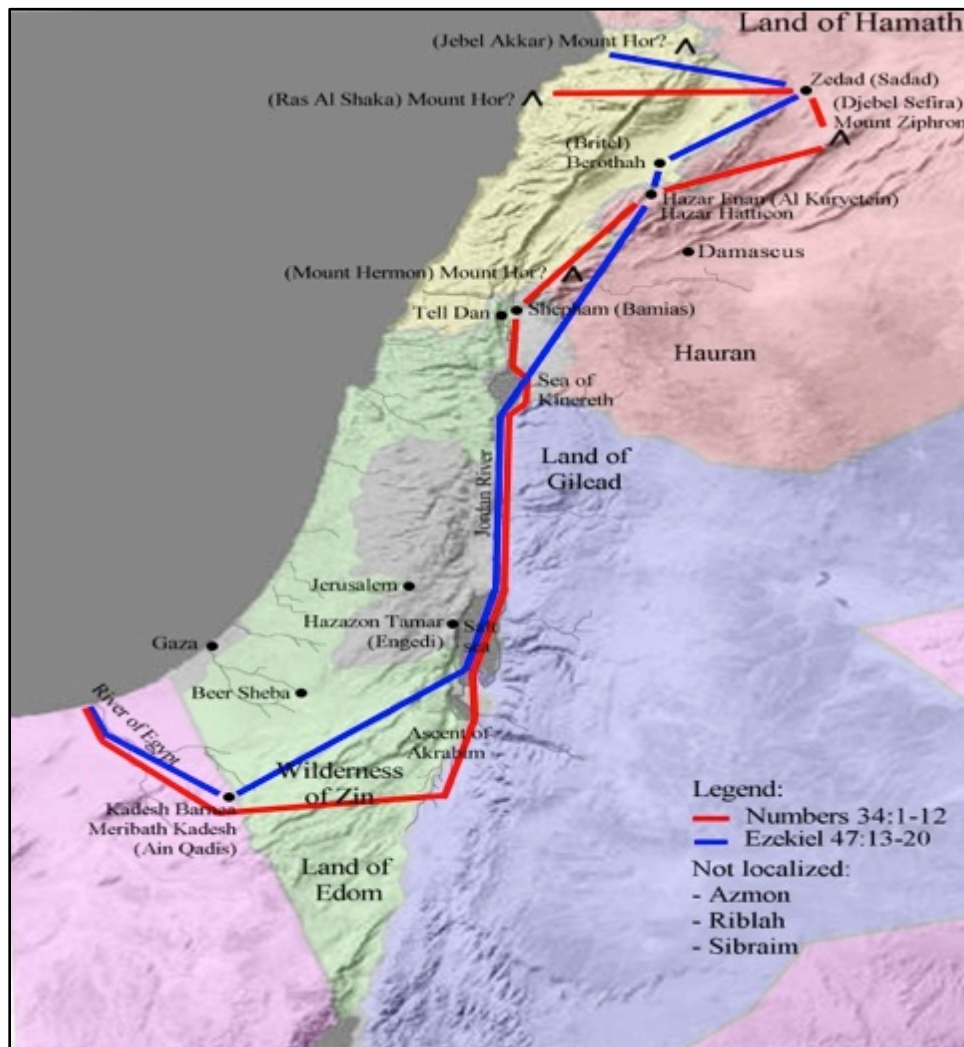


Figure 5. The Promised Land As Defined In Numbers And Ezekiel

Joshua:

Joshua 1:4 reviews the land promise just prior to the Israelites invading The Promised Land.

Ezekiel 47:

Ezekiel 47 provides a description of the land in which the twelve tribes of Israel will inhabit – “*at the end of days.*”

In summary, lets look at some current relevant questions regarding The Promised Land:

What is the Promised Land?

The Promised Land as defined in Genesis 15:18 and Joshua 1:4 (Figure 6) consists of everything from the Nile River in Egypt to Lebanon (south to north) and everything from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River (west to east). In

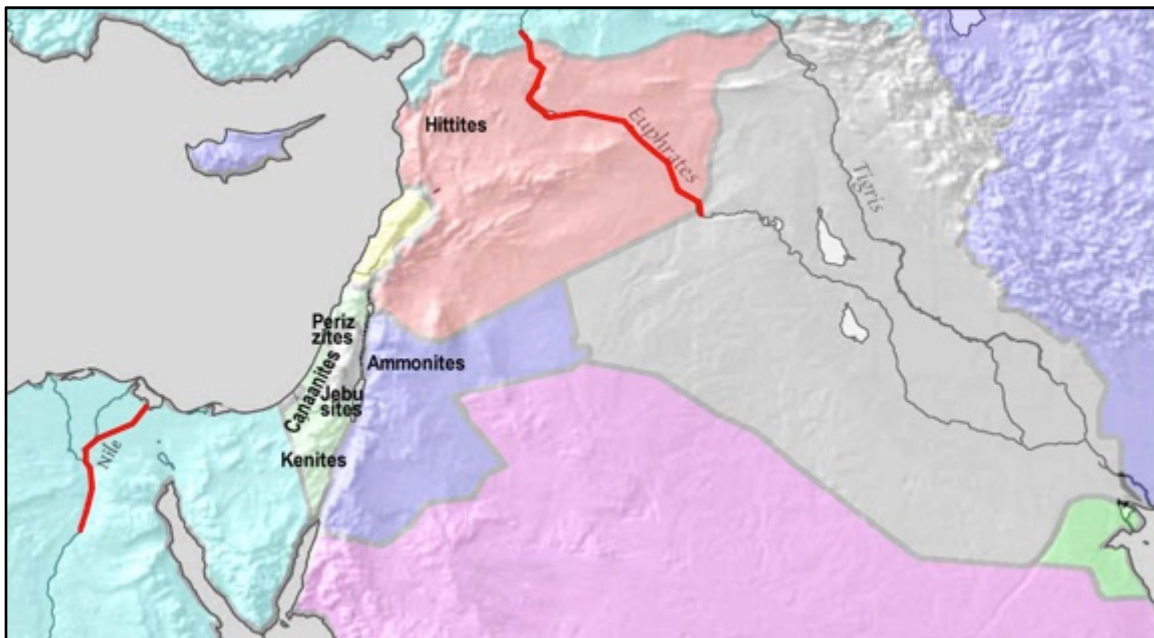


Figure 6. The Promised Land As Defined In Genesis And Joshua

summary, what land has God promised that belongs to Israel? All of the land modern Israel currently possesses, plus all of the land of the Palestinians (the West Bank and Gaza), plus some of Egypt and Syria, plus all of Jordan, plus some of Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Currently, Israel possesses only a fraction of the land God has promised.¹²

What portion of the Promised Land does not currently belong to Israel?

The West Bank, the Gaza Strip, some of Egypt and Syria, all of Jordan, some of Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

Has Israel ever totally encompassed the land promised in Joshua 1:4?

The entire land that has been promised to Israel in Joshua 1:4 (and other Scriptural passages) has yet to be fulfilled. During the reigns of David and Solomon, Israel achieved the greatest control of the Promised Land, although not totally. After David and Solomon, Israel suffered through kingdom divisions and exiles. However, in 1948 the modern state of Israel was established and Israel has since become a thriving democratic sovereign state.

As a complete answer to the question of Israel encompassing all of the Promised Land, Revelation 20:1-6 indicates that God will fulfill the promise to give Israel total control of the Promised Land that will be ruled by Christ during the 1,000 year Millennium.

Did God give Israel the Promised Land for all time?

To answer this question, let's look at Deuteronomy that says:

"Keep His decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you for all time"

Deuteronomy 4:40

Interestingly, this passage indicates this promise is conditional and also unconditional. The Israelite's had to obey God's statutes to *remain* in the land. However, the end of verse 40 says that God is giving Israel the land *"for all time."* So, the clear answer is that God conditionally offered blessings within the Promised Land, and God made an unconditional promise that Israel would have the Promised Land for all time.

What is the Muslim perspective of the rights to the Promised Land (Holy Land)?

Muslim Imams and preachers continue to insist that Jewish rights to the land of Israel ceased with the Muslim occupation of the Holy Land in 638 AD and that the Jews who live there are usurpers to the property of others.¹³

Does the Muslim Qur'an mention the Promised Land

The Qur'an specifically states that Allah gave the Holy Land to the children of Israel as follows:¹⁴

"Remember Moses said to his people: O my people! Call in remembrance the favour of Allah unto you, when He produced prophets among you, made you kings, and gave you what He had not given to any other among the peoples. O my people! Enter the holy land which Allah hath assigned unto you, and turn not back ignominiously, for then will ye be overthrown, to your own ruin"

(Qur'an 5:20-21)

GOLAN HEIGHTS, WEST BANK, GAZA STRIP AND JERUSALEM

GOLAN HEIGHTS¹⁵

In the closing stages of the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel seized the Golan Heights from Syria with most of the Syrian Arab inhabitants fleeing the area during the conflict. Syria tried to retake the area during the 1973 Middle East war but failed and that led to Israel and Syria signing an armistice in 1974. As a result, a United Nations observer force has been in place since 1974. In 1981, Israel unilaterally annexed the Golan Heights but the international community did not recognize the move. However, in March 2019, the U.S. Trump Administration signed a proclamation that formally recognized Israeli sovereign control over the Golan Heights. Because this proclamation made international news that was both positive and negative, let's look at what makes the Golan Heights so important to Israel and to Syria

Although The Golan Heights area is comprised of fertile volcanic soil that is used to cultivate vineyards and raise cattle along with being a key source of water for an arid region (provides a third of Israel's water supply), its primary benefit is its high elevation that is strategically beneficial for military applications. The high elevation allows Israel an excellent vantage point for monitoring Syrian troop movements and also provides a clear view of south Syria all the way to the capital, Damascus, 40 miles away. The topography also provides a natural buffer against any military attack from Syria.

WEST BANK¹⁶

This 2,180 square mile portion of land is currently located within Israel and is bordered by the Jordan River to the east. The West Bank was the name given to differentiate the territory west of the Jordan River when it was captured by Jordan in the aftermath of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, and was then subsequently annexed by Jordan in 1950 until the 1967 Six-Day War when it was captured by Israel. Of particular note, The West Bank includes East Jerusalem (the site of the old city).

After Israel captured the West Bank in 1967, it was not immediately annexed by Israel and did not come under Israeli military control until 1982 (Jordan did not relinquish its claim to the West Bank until 1988 and eventually stripped the West Bank Palestinians of Jordanian citizenship). Since the 1993 Oslo Accords, the Palestinian Authority controls 11% of the West Bank (Area A), Area B (about 28%) is subject to joint Israeli-Palestinian military and Palestinian civil control, and Area C (about 60%) is under full Israeli control. Although 164 nations refer to the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) as "*Occupied Palestinian Territory*," the Israeli view is that only territories captured in war from "*an*

established and recognized sovereign” are considered occupied territories. After a 2007 split between Fatah and Hamas, the West Bank areas under Palestinian control are an exclusive segment of the Palestinian Authority, while the Gaza Strip is ruled by Hamas. (If this brief overview of the West Bank seems somewhat complicated, it is, but that is the way the West Bank is currently administered).

GAZA STRIP^{17,18,19,20}

The Gaza Strip is a 140-mile long stretch of land that is located between Egypt and Israel and along the Mediterranean coast (Figure 7). Following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Egypt administered the newly formed Gaza Strip until its



Figure 7. The Gaza Strip

capture by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War. Between 1994 and 1999, Israel through a series of agreements known as the Oslo accords, transferred much of the security and civilian responsibility for many Palestinian-populated areas to the

newly created Palestinian Authority. By late 2005, Israel withdrew its presence (civilian and military) but continues to control the Gaza Strip's land and maritime borders and airspace. In 2006, the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) won a majority in the Palestinian Legislative Council election, resulting in Hamas's violent seizure of all military and governmental institutions in the Gaza Strip in June 2007. Since the Hamas takeover, Israel and Egypt have enforced tight restrictions on movement and access of goods and people in and out of the strip.

As a result of the 2007 takeover by Hamas, the Gaza Strip has become a primary launching pad for attacks on Israel, as there have been thousands of rocket attacks on Israel from Gaza (and some from Lebanon) in combination with noteworthy conflicts from Hamas and other Gaza-based militant groups such as Islamic Jihad against Israel. Several examples are:

- 2008-2009 – air campaign and ground invasion
- 2012 – major bombing campaign
- 2014 – Hamas engaged in a 51-day conflict with Israel
- 2018 – tensions erupted when the U.S. Embassy relocated to Jerusalem
- More recently, during May 4&5, 2019, 690 rockets were launched from the Gaza Strip into Israel, receiving minimal media attention (remember Figure 1?)

The Gaza Strip is important not just because it frequently seems to be in the news, but because it exemplifies an important example of the truth about the Arab war against the Jewish nation of Israel. Lets look at some examples of this perspective:

- As Israel expelled 11,000 of its own people from their homes in Gaza for the purpose of ceding land to the Arabs, Israel proved that its desire for peace is more than just words
- Gaza proves that land for a peace formula does not work. In return for ceding Gaza, Israel has been subjected to thousands of rockets from Gaza
- Gaza is a place where civilians are used as human shields for the sake of making Israel look immoral. Additionally, Hamas takes its financial aid and uses it to purchase weapons to use against Israel
- Gaza is proof that the two-state solution does not work. When Israel ceded the Gaza Strip, the result was an increase in terror and a demand for more land and concessions. These are some of the reasons why the current Gaza Strip is a lesson in reality

As a point of importance, the land of Israel has been subjected to rocket fire and/or a realistic threat of rocket fire, primarily from Gaza/Hamas and other

terrorist organizations for at least the past eighteen years. Since 2001, over 15,000 *rockets and mortars* have been launched into Israel with the greatest number coming after 2005 after Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip in that same year. When incoming rocket fire is detected, Israeli citizens have between 15-45 seconds to find shelter. For informational purposes, the following is a yearly count of rockets launched into Israel:

○ 2001: 510	2008: 3,278	2015: 23
○ 2002: 661	2009: 774	2016: 15
○ 2003: 848	2010: 231	2017: 35
○ 2004: 1,528	2011: 627	2018: 1,000
○ 2005: 488	2012: 2,248	2019: Over 700 as of May
○ 2006: 1,123	2013: 41	
○ 2007: 2,427	2014: 450	

Since the Gaza Strip is located within the contiguous boundaries of Israel, the launching of rocket and mortar fire by Hamas (and some other terrorist organizations) has been simplified and is able to reach many areas of Israel in addition to Hamas incessantly increasing the capabilities and size of its terror arsenal. Some of the rockets that are launched into Israel are capable of reaching Israel's largest cities such as Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Although Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have currently been successful in severely damaging terrorist long-range rocket arsenals, shorter-range rockets and mortars still pose a constant threat.

Generally, most terrorist rockets that are launched into Israel are home made, about the height of a person, are easily transported and launched from common areas, and are called Qassam rockets by the Israeli media (Figure 8). These rockets cannot be precisely launched to a specific target so they are used indiscriminately against Israel. Although the Qassam rockets pictured in Figure 8 are the most accessible rockets in the arsenal of Hamas (manufactured within the Gaza Strip), Hamas also has limited access to some longer-range rockets. A primary advantage of these types of rockets is their low cost in combination with ease and speed of manufacture, transport and mobility. The Qassam propellant is a mixture of sugar and potassium nitrate (a widely available fertilizer), the warhead is comprised of TNT and urea nitrate (another common fertilizer), and a single person can carry one rocket. The cost of these types of rocket is about \$800.²¹



Figure 8. Qassam Rockets Are Easily Launched From Common Areas

Operational since 2011, the Iron Dome is a missile defense system that is designed to intercept in-coming rockets and missiles. The Iron Dome is currently comprised of ten “batteries” that use a radar unit and three launchers that are each capable of firing 20 Tamir interceptor missiles designed to intercept incoming short-range missiles (Figure 9) launched from 2.5 to 43 miles away. The system does not target missiles that are directed at uninhabited areas and has been effective in reducing the number of missiles reaching Israeli citizens and property.²²

JERUSALEM^{23,24,25}

Jerusalem is not only one of the oldest and most well known cities in the world, it is also considered a holy site to Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. During its long history, Jerusalem has been destroyed at least twice, besieged 23 times, captured and recaptured 44 times, and attacked 52 times. Since 1860, Jerusalem has expanded way beyond the Old City’s boundaries. As an example, in 2016, the population of Jerusalem was about 882,700 comprising about 61% Jews, 36% Muslims, 2% Christians, and 1% unclassified.



Figure 9. Iron Dome Intercepting Incoming Hamas Rockets

As a focal point of contention, both the Israeli and Palestinian people publicly claim Jerusalem as their capital. During the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, *West Jerusalem* was captured by Israel while East Jerusalem (the old city) was captured from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War and subsequently annexed into Jerusalem with other surrounding territory. Today, Israel's Basic Law (the 1980 Jerusalem Law) considers Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel. All branches of Israeli government are located in Jerusalem, including the Knesset, the residences of the Prime Minister and President, and the Supreme Court. The international community has rejected the annexation of Jerusalem from Jordan as illegal and views East Jerusalem as Palestinian territory occupied by Israel.

East Jerusalem is comprised of the eastern segment of Jerusalem and was captured by Israel from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War and rapidly came under Israeli administration. Although there were attempts by the Palestine Liberation Organization to control East Jerusalem, Israel unilaterally declared all of Jerusalem to be its undivided capital although the international community has not recognized this declaration. Israel annexed East Jerusalem in 1980 and still considers all of Jerusalem to be its capital. Interestingly, the international

community considers East Jerusalem to be a part of the West Bank and Palestinian territories.

In a bold and sweeping move that made global headline news, President Trump announced the United States recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Jerusalem on December 6, 2017, and ordered the relocation of the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (officially opened on May 14, 2018).²⁶ Not surprisingly, this decision was rejected by a majority of world leaders including the United Nations. Yet, some countries have supported the move as follows:

- Guatemala, Australia and Paraguay to also relocate their embassy
- Czech Republic, Romania and Honduras now recognize Jerusalem as Israel's Capital

Interestingly, former President's George W. Bush, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama all supported the U.S. Embassy to be located in Jerusalem and promised to move the U.S. embassy, yet never delivered. As an example, former President George W. Bush stated in 2000 – *"As soon as I take office, I will begin the process of moving the United States ambassador to the city Israel has chosen as its capital,"* and then added – *"I will start the process as soon as I am sworn in."* This promise was never realized.²⁷

CONCLUSION

A familiarity with the history of the age-old Israeli-Arabic conflict in combination with Israel being surrounded by larger Arab nations that openly voice a hatred for Israel combined with the current escalation of the Hamas terrorist war could easily result in a perception that Israel is destined for a potential Islamic destruction of Israel and its Jewish inhabitants. However, the Bible clearly states:

- God has promised the land (Promised Land) to Israel, and *for all time* as indicated in Joshua and Deuteronomy as follows:

"To your descendants (Abram) I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates," Genesis 15:18 – and to Isaac and Jacob – "Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates – all the Hittite country – to the great sea on the west"

Joshua 1:4

"Keep His decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you for all time"

Deuteronomy 4:40

- God has promised to deliver Israel from a future Islamic invasion as described in Ezekiel 38-39. In these explicit prophetic passages, God predicts a coming northern confederacy of Islamic nations (led by Russia) who will invade Israel (Ezekiel 38:1-6). However, God will miraculously defeat the invading forces in Ezekiel 38:18-39:8, and then restore the nation of Israel (Ezekiel 39:21-29)
- Of primary importance, the Bible clearly states that Jerusalem:
 - Is the location where Christ ascended back into heaven (Acts 1:11-12) after His resurrection
 - The location where one day Christ will return to earth (Mt. of Olives shall be split in two), in the same way He ascended to set up His Kingdom (Dan 7:13, Zech 14:4, Matt 24:30, 26:64, Rev 1:7, 14:14)
 - The New Jerusalem (Rev 21:2) to be the new capital city of heaven

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