

One of many
beautiful
landscapes of
Switzerland

Credit: Getty/by-studio

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WHAT IS A **PROMISED LAND**

By **Shani Sorko-Ram Ferguson**

Several years ago our family traveled for the first time to Switzerland. The mountains were magnificent and the view, a testimony to the grandeur of its Creator. In less than a thirty-minute ride straight up on a cable car, we went from bright grass and sunshine to the top of Titlis Mountain, where we walked through a permanent ice cave and the wind and snow nearly blew our daughter off the edge.

Between that and a later trip to Brazil, that boasts shades of green we didn't know existed in nature

and more beach islands than we could ever visit, we were in awe of the world outside our homeland of Israel.

On the plane ride back our kids looked excitedly out the window as we crossed our coastline and descended towards the Tel Aviv airport. At one point as we flew over some towns and the Judean desert, the smiles turned to questioning frowns and one of our kids looked back at us and asked, "Why is everything here so brown? Our country just has all these different shades of brown..."

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The Ferguson family at the top of Titlis Mountain in Switzerland on a typical late spring day



For most of my life, everyone I knew had equated the meaning of “Promised Land” with “Best Land.” After all, we were God’s chosen and therefore, surely God would pick the most amazing place on earth for us to dwell.

It was a funny question. My kids had officially been spoiled by the wonders of the world and I was having a revelation. For most of my life, everyone I knew had equated the meaning of “Promised Land” with “Best Land.” After all, we were God’s chosen

and therefore, surely God would pick the most amazing place on earth for us to dwell. On our end, we had always prided ourselves in having such a small swatch of land that included deserts, forests, coastlands, mountains and even a ski resort. But now it seemed we were just choosing to be content with our lot in life.

Setting aside that in Switzerland what we call mountains in Israel, wouldn’t even qualify as proper speedbumps, nothing natural in Israel comes easy. Grass and other greeneries are not an accident in Israel; they exist only for those willing to work hard for it. When it is hot and dry, it is very hot and dry. And when the rains finally come to soothe the cracked land, they come in perilous flash floods.

Apparently, when God promised the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob a land for them and their future generations, that’s all He meant—that He promised them that land.

Had anyone involved me while the heavens planned out the location of this predestined homeland for the chosen people, I would’ve picked a tropical island. A land of plenty where everyone would leave us alone to live in peace and the closest potential enemy would be oceans away.

In just a matter of hours you can drive from one tip of Israel to the other. The amazing thing is how many different landscapes you will cover during that short time.

But what would be the fun in that? That would've made the Bible an incredibly dull (and potentially shorter) book as we wouldn't have needed to be rescued so many times. We also, however, wouldn't have been able to fulfill our calling. The reality is, if God chooses a people to represent Him to the world, He would need them to be in the middle of everything and everyone's business.

Israel's location is in fact just that—at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa. The Promised Land was always a section of land that could not be easily ignored, but it also could not be surrounded entirely by enemies because of the Mediterranean Sea it sits on. Even in the olden days, in terms of trade, the region would be in high demand. It's a different kind of ideal—but for a people called to be ever present in the story of God and humankind, it's perfect.

That perfect part of God's plan—is, of course, one of the main reasons the enemy would like the children of Israel *not* to live there. That is why we grow up as Jews always understanding that a life in the Land of Promise will always be full of battles and challenges. But, those very battles and rescues of our God are precisely what the Lord wants everyone to be watching.





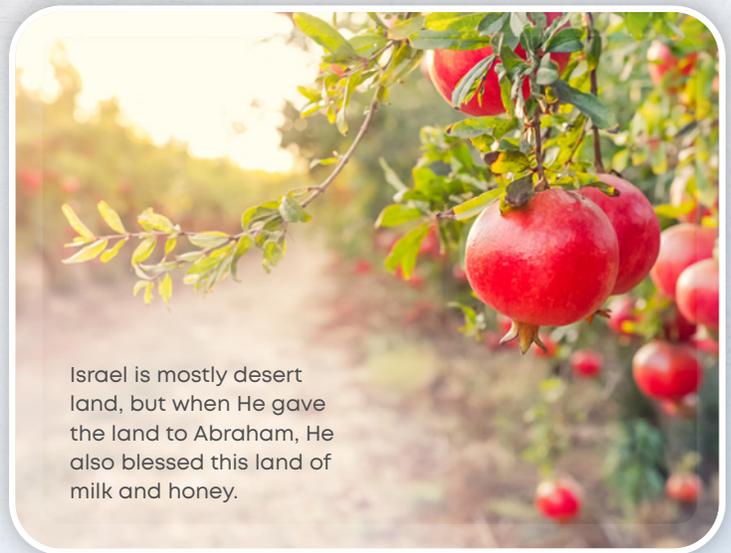
(PHOTO)

Israel in the Bible was made up of 12 different tribes with unique sets of skills and characters. While tribes are no longer traceable, Israel today is a fascinating blend of cultures and nuances brought here by Jews returning from all over the world.

When it comes to the word “chosen,” people also misunderstand and think, like “promised,” that “chosen” means “best” or at the very least “ideal.” However, the term “chosen” is just a word identifying a specific people we should watch throughout history—for better or worse. As for those “chosen,” the term is a notification that they carry a responsibility to play a role. That role will affect others.

The Bible even explains that the children of Israel weren’t chosen because they were incredible to begin with, but rather because they weren’t. It is God’s ability to make tiny, rowdy Israel into something beautiful, that is the point of His story.

The unique thing about being Jewish and being part of a story whose highlights have already been written —is that we know we will be here the day after. We go into every war knowing that while we may lose precious members among our people, we as a nation will always win. That is a confidence no other people group carries into



Israel is mostly desert land, but when He gave the land to Abraham, He also blessed this land of milk and honey.

battle. It is not arrogance or the belief that we are somehow better or stronger. In fact, we are often outgunned and outnumbered. It is just a confidence in our identity as people chosen by the God of the universe. The best part about this mentality is that when Christians—who understand the importance of watching Israel—see our confidence in our God’s ability to keep His promise, they will be able to hold firmly the same confidence in God’s promises for their lives. ■

THE SCARIEST PARABLE

Matthew 25:31-46

IN THE BIBLE

By **Shani Sorko-Ram Ferguson**

Of all the parables Yeshua told while on earth, I find the parable of the sheep and goats most unsettling and here's why. Yeshua describes the day where we all stand before the Lord and final rulings are made about where we spend eternity.

First, while Yeshua shares many allegorical parables, this one appears to be entirely literal. The only figurative part of the parable is the concept of separating people into two groups described as sheep and goats.

In the parable, Yeshua explains that the way the nations treated Him when He was in need is a deciding factor in whether He considers them His own, or groups them with “the devil and his angels.” At first it seems straight forward. We know if we walk in the ways of God in

relationship with Him we are promised eternal life with Him and if we live wickedly, we will be separated from Him.

The scariest part of this parable is **the response of both the sheep and the goats** when they are told where they are going and why. When Yeshua explains what actions in their life mattered to Him, **both groups are equally confused** about when they did or didn't do what Yeshua is talking about. Yeshua then replies—*“When you did/didn't do it to **these, the least of my brothers and sisters**, you did/didn't do it to Me.”*

The parable seems so plain it is difficult to accept. Which is probably why for centuries Christianity that had turned against the Jewish people interpreted it to simply mean helping “anyone in need.” With the loss of the Church's connection to the historical roots of their Savior, the interpretation prevails even today. After all, surely, something as simple as how one treats Jews can't

have a bearing on whether they make it into heaven or not. But Yeshua did not say, “the least of humanity.” Rather, speaking to the nations of the world in the parable, Yeshua specified, “the least of my brethren”—the least of His people.

So the million dollar question is then, “Is Yeshua saying that—how the nations treat Israel—will be an important aspect on where they spend eternity?” **Do we really want to risk being wrong about this?** After all, there are numerous sections in scripture that express this same message. Verses like Genesis 12:3 and Zechariah 2:8 echo how important the treatment of Israel is to God and the severe punishment that will come to those who do evil to Israel.

How protective God is of His people Israel should actually give everyone joy that He will stand up for **all those** who are His own. Whatever the case, the conclusion is undeniable. There is something nonnegotiable in this parable for God, and He was clear that ignorance is no defense. ■



Shalom from Jerusalem!

Remember last month we asked for prayer for our recently printed Hebrew Bibles?

We had been notified the Bibles were on their way to Israel and were concerned of the Houthi pirates from Yemen who were hijacking ships on their way to Israel. Well, **our collective prayers have been answered and the Bibles are in our hands!**

Our Maoz partners who gave towards and prayed for those Bibles are the force behind our ability to provide Israelis with a Bible they can understand as modern Hebrew speakers.

So thank you!

Since the war began, Maoz—as well as other ministry organizations in Israel—have had incredible opportunities participating in serving our nation as Jewish believers in Yeshua.

In Israel, being a Jewish believer has long been perceived as some sort of threat to the health and existence of the Jewish people. This has been accentuated due to the history of the church persecuting Jews and general ignorance in Israeli culture as what a Jewish believer even is.

So it's been **especially satisfying to know that where Hamas meant to destroy us, they have actually caused many Israelis to stop and look at other Israelis with fresh eyes—including us.** This means Jewish believers now have a chance to shine their light in the darkness of this situation and in the lives of our people who are suffering.

Unloading shipping containers at Israel's port where our Bibles arrived!

Nonetheless, we are still deep in our battle for survival. As Hamas planned, one of the most difficult areas to restore Israel in the years ahead will not be a home or a field, but rather the minds of Israelis. The traumas witnessed by children and adults alike in the early days of this war cannot easily be erased. And the months' long displacement of families and even complete towns has brought on its own psychological and emotional problems.



The affect this trauma will have on the culture of our nation for decades to come is daunting. Therefore, the sooner we address this issue, the higher our chances in bringing healing and restoration to the people of our land—both Jewish and Arab.

In all this, one cannot overstate the importance of addressing spiritual needs alongside psychological needs. And that is something we as believers can address.

Access to trained believing counselors is currently limited in Israel, but we do have a number of such trained professionals and Maoz would like to get behind their efforts to reach and care for as many Israelis as possible.

If you or a loved one have ever gone through any sort of mental health treatment, you understand the length of time needed, enormous costs involved and the value of that investment in your life. **Right now we have everything from soldiers returning from the battlefields, to displaced families, to trauma victims from October 7th on a waiting list wanting to be treated and unable to because of the cost involved.**

It won't be cheap, but **Maoz is committing to sponsor these victims and heroes who have fought to defend us and now need us to defend them.** If you'd like to join us in this endeavor, **\$300 a month will sponsor an individual or family receiving treatment.** For each individual treated, Maoz will commit to one year of treatment and reassess at the end of the year if there is need to continue. **We will cover the cost of as many people as you, our Maoz partners, will help us care for.**

Thank You for partnering with us and Israel,

Kobi and Shani Ferguson

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