

## Biblical Reflection on the Land

**Introduction:** Sharing Jerusalem's land is a key element in resolving the Palestinian/Israeli conflict in a just way. Who controls it; who lives here; who does or does not have access will have a significant effect on whether there will be a lasting and just peace or whether the conflict will continue.

**What are we going to be discussing:** We are going to look at some of what the Hebrew Bible says about land and promise, who owns it, how should one divide the land, use it and share it.

**Abraham:** Who was Abram/Abraham? People will be asked to answer this question.

- patriarch
- his sons and grandsons became the ancestors of both the Jews and Muslims, and by extension the patriarch of Christians
- God called him and made promises to him

**Call and Promises:** We will look at several of them.

The first call and promise comes right after the passage where we learned that Terah had taken Abram, Sarah and Lot and moved from Ur in Mesopotamia to go to Canaan and on the way stops in Ur of the Chaldeans and dies there.

12:1-3 "The Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you a great nation and I will bless you...and you will be a blessing. I will bless (curse) those who bless (curse) you; and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

**Discussion questions:**

- Does this sound like a conditional or an unconditional call?
- Does this sound like an exclusive or nonexclusive claim to land?
- What does it say about land ownership?

**Look at another call/promise to Abraham:**

17:7-9 "I will establish my covenant between me and you...an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring..I will give to you, and to your offspring...the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding...As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring throughout the generations."

**Discussion questions and background:**

- Is this conditional or an unconditional promise?
- What is a covenant? (agreement where each side has responsibilities)
- Example of an ancient near eastern covenant where a covenant is imposed on a lesser power (Abraham) by a greater power (God). The greater demands loyalty, and obligations.

In light of the Sinai Covenant, " I am your God, and you will be my people, and you shall .... Being God's people is conditional on keeping the stipulations of this agreement (aka Torah), what is said about land ownership and use in the Torah?

"You will keep all my statutes...so that the land to which I bring you to settle in may not vomit you out...I have said to you: You shall inherit the land, & I will give it to you to possess... I have separated you from the peoples...you shall be holy to me,...and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine." Lev. 20:22-26

"Keep the statutes and commandments, which I am commanding you today for your own well-being and that of your descendents, so that you may long remain in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for all time." Deut. 4:25-27

**What did we learn?**

- The land has a life of its own and suffers and can be defiled and unrighteousness defiles the land & like sinners ejected camp, Israel will be ejected from the land.
- To break the law is to lose the land.

“Alas for those who devise wickedness...they covet fields, and seize them; houses, and take them away; they oppress householder and house, people and their inheritance...Now, I am devising against this family an evil from which you cannot remove your necks.” Micah 2:1-3

So what about this seemingly unconditional gift of land by God to Abraham and his offspring? What are some of the conditions? And who really owns this land?

Finally, I would like to share with you a prophetic word of hope related to the land.

“This is the word of the Lord which came to Jeremiah when...the army of the Babylonian king was besieging Jerusalem...Hanamel, son of your uncle is going to come and say, “Buy my field at Anathoth...then just as the Lord said, my cousin came to me and said, buy my land..I knew that this was the Lord’s word, so I bought the field at Anathoth...I weighed out 17 shekels of silver...I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch...and in their presence said...houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.” Jeremiah 32

I would like to suggest that with Sharing Jerusalem, you are being offered a similar opportunity, where in the face of overwhelming odds that there is no way politically Israel with US backing is going to share Jerusalem with Palestinian Muslims and Christians, that you will risk not money but the possibility of rocking the boat by openly declaring your allegiance to a political reality that is different from the one which is being highly praised by many.