

DO JEWS HAVE A DIVINE RIGHT IN THE PROMISED LAND? BY JOHN PIPER

How should Bible-believing Christians align themselves in the Jewish-Palestinian conflict? There are Biblical reasons for treating both sides with compassionate public justice in the same way that disputes should be settled between nations generally. In other words, the Bible does not teach us to be partial to Israel or to the Palestinians because either has a special divine status.

I do not deny that Israel was chosen by God from all the peoples of the world to be the focus of special blessing in the history of redemption which climaxed in Jesus Christ, the Messiah. "The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deuteronomy 7:6).

Nor do I deny that God promised to Israel the presently disputed land from the time of Abraham onward. God said to Moses, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, 'I will give it to your offspring'" (Deuteronomy 34:4).

But neither of these Biblical facts leads necessarily to the endorsement of present-day Israel as the rightful possessor of all the disputed land. Israel may have such a right. And she may not. But that decision is not based on divine privilege. Why?

First, a non-covenant-keeping people does not have a divine right to hold the land of promise. Both the blessed status of the people and the privileged right to the land are conditional on Israel's keeping the covenant God made with her. Thus God said to Israel, "If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples" (Exodus 19:5). Israel has no warrant to a present experience of divine privilege when she is not keeping covenant with God.

More than once Israel was denied the experience of her divine right to the land when she broke covenant with God. For example, when Israel languished in captivity in Babylon, Daniel prayed, "O Lord . . . we have sinned and done wrong . . . To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us

open shame . . . to all Israel . . . in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you" (Daniel 9:4-7; see Psalm 78:54-61). Israel has no divine right to be in the land of promise when she is breaking the covenant of promise.

This does not mean that other nations have the right to molest her. She still has human rights among nations when she has no divine right. Nations that gloated over her divine discipline were punished by God (Isaiah 10:5-13).

Secondly, Israel as a whole today rejects her Messiah, Jesus Christ, God's Son. This is the ultimate act of covenant-breaking with God. God promised that to Israel "a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6-7). But with tears this Prince of Peace looked out over Jerusalem and said, "Would that you . . . had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. . . . You did not know the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:42-44).

When the builders rejected the beautiful Cornerstone, Jesus said, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits" (Matthew 21:43). He explained, "Many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness" (Matthew 8:11-12)

God has saving purposes for ethnic Israel (Romans 11:25-26). But for now the people are at enmity with God in rejecting the gospel of Jesus Christ, their Messiah (Romans 11:28). God has expanded his saving work to embrace all peoples (including Palestinians) who will trust his Son and depend on his death and resurrection for salvation. "Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one. He will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith" (Romans 3:29-30).

The Christian plea in the Middle East to Palestinians and Jews is: "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). And until that great day when both Jewish and Gentile followers of King Jesus inherit the earth (not just the land), without lifting sword or gun, the rights of nations should be decided by the principles of compassionate and public justice, not claims to national divine right or status.

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