

# The Land

by Pastor Paul F. Nolting

## That Land

What land? The Promised land, the land that flowed with milk and honey (Exodus 3:8), the Land of Canaan that extended **“from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates--the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites” (Genesis 15:18-21)**. Today the area from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates would include parts of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and all of Israel, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank.

## The Patriarchs

The LORD God called Abraham and directed him to go to a land that He would show him. He promised to make him a great nation. A nation needs a homeland. After Abraham had walked through the land, which was occupied by the Canaanites, the LORD appeared to him and promised, **“To your descendants I will give this land” (Genesis 12:7)**.

Nation and land go together. No nation, no need for land. But a nation needs land. After the initial promise of making Abraham a great nation and giving that nation a homeland, the Lord repeated that nation/land promise four times: Genesis 13:16-17; 15:18-21; 17:8; and 24:7.

After the death of Abraham, the nation/land promise was given to Isaac: **“And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 26:4)**. But take note of these words of the LORD by which He states why He is passing that nation/land promise on to Isaac, **“because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws” (Genesis 26:5)**. The LORD attached the condition of obedience to the land promise.

From Isaac to Jacob! When Jacob stopped at Bethel on his way to Haran, the LORD transferred the nation/land promise and the blessing of salvation to Jacob (Genesis 28:13-14). When Jacob returned to Bethel, the LORD repeated that promise (Genesis 35:11-12). Jacob died believing that promise (Genesis 48:4).

## Moses

Centuries passed. Israel had become a large nation in Egypt, but an enslaved nation. Moses was born, educated in the very palace of Pharaoh, and assumed the role of a self-appointed deliverer. That rashness resulted in a forty-year banishment. Then the LORD God appeared to Moses in the burning bush and announced to him, **“I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8)**.

The LORD did deliver His people from Egypt. He was leading them to the Promised Land, but that generation never entered the Land because they murmured against the LORD. They brought upon themselves the curse of the LORD: **“The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above” (Numbers 14:29)**. The LORD God does indeed keep His promises, but it is only believers who receive the blessings of those promises.

## Joshua

The Book of Joshua records the conquest and dividing of the Land. The inspired writer concludes the report with these remarks, **“So the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it... Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass” (Joshua 21:43,45)**. But in his farewell address, Joshua warned Israel that they would perish from the good land the LORD had given them if they transgressed the covenant of the LORD their God (Joshua 23:16).

## Solomon

It was the task of David to consolidate the kingdom with the result that Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the Euphrates to Egypt (1 Kings 4:20-21). The LORD had fulfilled His nation/land promise made to Abraham and his descendants. But that promise was conditional. If you do as I command you, the blessing will continue for you and your descendants. But if you turn from Me, **“I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them” (1 Kings 9:1-9)**. Faithfulness meant possession and enjoyment of the land; disobedience meant loss of the land.

## Pre-exilic Prophets

These were the prophets who brought the Word of the LORD to His people before the judgment of deportation and exile fell on them. The message of the LORD communicated to the people was a call to repentance, reinforced by the solemn threat of national destruction including the loss of the land. Those messages of judgment were followed by the LORD's assurance that He would restore His people to the land He had given them and that He would fulfill His covenant to send the Messiah.

Judgment fell on the northern tribes at the hands of the Assyrians in 722 B.C. There is an ominous threat recorded against these tribes by Hosea: ***“My God will cast them away, Because they did not obey Him; And they shall be wanderers among the nations” (Hosea 9:17).*** That threat presupposes loss of the land.

In a letter that the LORD instructed Jeremiah to write to the captives in Babylon, He instructed them to ***“seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive.”*** He then gave them the solemn assurance: ***“After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place” (Jeremiah 29:7-14).*** Despite this judgment of deportation from the land, Jeremiah declared that the LORD had kept His original promise of the land (Jeremiah 32:22-23).

## Post-exilic Prophets

In his prayer, Nehemiah also affirmed that the LORD had kept His land promise (Nehemiah 9:7-8). Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the people to rebuild the temple, but they make no mention of the land. Malachi brought the Old Testament canon to a conclusion, foretelling the coming of the messenger who would prepare the way for the Messenger of the Covenant. The issue of the land had faded in importance. The LORD had made the nation /land promise to Abraham. He had fulfilled it in the days of Joshua and most gloriously in the days of David and Solomon. He had taken the land away from His people because they had violated His covenant. He had restored the land to repentant Israel. As always, being “in” or “out” of the land was determined by obedience or disobedience.

## New Testament Era

Israel was in the land when, in the fullness of the time, God sent

the promised Messiah to His people. John the Baptist said nothing of the land. Jesus said not a word about the Nation of Israel possessing the land. He did call the meek blessed, for they would inherit the earth. Neither did any of the apostles have as much as a word to say about the land.

John preached a ***“baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4).*** Jesus proclaimed: ***“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).*** In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus read the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the coming Messiah, closed the book, and announced that He was the fulfillment of that prophecy. Luke records one of the final words of our Lord that ***“all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me” (Luke 24:44).*** On the Day of Pentecost, Peter quoted the prophecy of Joel concerning the last days - the days of the Messiah - and also the words of David in the sixteenth Psalm, proclaiming that all was fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah. Paul testified to the Corinthians that ***“all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us” (2 Corinthians 1:20).*** All blessings spiritual and material are inseparably connected with Jesus, the promised Messiah.

What did the Nation of Israel do to their long awaited Messiah? In the Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers (Matthew 21:33-44), Jesus reviewed the centuries long unbelief of His people that culminated in the murder of the Son. That brought down upon the Nation the judgment of the Messiah: ***“The kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it” (Matthew 21:43).*** The LORD's chosen people lost their status as the Covenant People of the LORD. Through the judgment upon the Nation of Israel by the Romans they also lost the land promised to Abraham.

But what of the restoration of Israel to Palestine in 1948 together with the reacquisition of Jerusalem in 1967? Was this a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy? Impossible, for all the promises of God are “Yes” and “Amen” in Christ Jesus. The Nation of Israel remains under judgment because it continues to reject Jesus as their promised Messiah. The blessing of becoming a nation as numerous as the sand and stars has been transferred to the Church. Jews remain wanderers among the nations. In His merciful governance of the nations (Acts 17:26), the LORD has provided a homeland for some of them in a restricted area of what was once the Promised Land. The policy of land for peace continues to diminish that “homeland.”