
Middle East and Prophecy

Part 1 by: Ronald L. Dart

Who owns Palestine?

Who actually has the deed to the property? As the old saying goes "possession is nine points of the law", but that doesn't keep us from asking the important question of the moral right to the land. Whose land is it anyway by, right? The Palestinians have a grievance because they claim the land has been taken from them. The Israelis have a grievance because they claim to have had it long before the Palestinians squatted on it, but someone had the land before the Israelis' ancestors, the Israelites, before they had it. Now how would you go about establishing an ancient land title?

Here in Texas, when you start looking at titles, your title history may go all the way back to a Spanish land grant before there even was a United States of America. Those original grants were given by a king.

Land Title

As it happens, the original titles to Palestine, and then some, were also granted by a king. You will find the story of the grant to the title of Palestine, beginning along about the 12th chapter of the book of Genesis in your Bible.

"The LORD had said to Abraham: "Get out of your country, leave your home, leave your family, leave your father's house, I want you to go to a land that I am going to show you. I am going to make you a great nation; I will bless you. I will make your name great; and you in turn shall be a blessing. I will bless them who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."" (Genesis 2:1-3).

Now I take that to mean that Abraham and his descendants were expected to be a blessing to the families of the earth.

Abraham did something unusual. He did what God told him to do and he left, and Lot his nephew, went with him. Abraham was seventy-five years old when he departed out of Haran and went down into Palestine. Abraham took Sarah his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. Now Abraham passed

through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh and the Canaanite was then in the land" (Genesis 12:4-6).

Okay, so here we have the possession factor established. If possession is nine points of the law, then the Canaanites, whoever they were, possessed the land when Abraham came there, but apparently since God owns everything, God did not consider that they held that land by right.

Build an Altar and Move On

Genesis 12:7 "The LORD appeared to Abraham, and said, Unto your seed will I give this land: and so, he built an altar to the LORD, who appeared unto him. Then he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent there and there he built another altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the LORD, and he journeyed on, going on toward the South."

He would journey for a while, stop, camp, built an altar, and go forward. In a way, these altars, served as benchmarks as Abraham surveyed the land that he was promised. In one sense of the word, it's like the man stepping out of the vehicle on the moon, walking over and planting the United States flag on the moon and claiming this territory for the United States of America.

Or perhaps more like Christopher Columbus planting the flag of Spain in the New World and claiming it for the King of Spain.

Everywhere that Abraham went, he put up one of these altars and then moved on.

God's Promise to Abraham

Later, God would expand on His promise that He made to Abraham in Genesis 13:14 "The LORD appeared again to Abraham and said, this was after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes and look from the place where you are; look north, south, east, and west; for all the land which you see, everything in sight, I am going to give it to you and your children forever."

Now this is pretty comprehensive. Not only in how big the area was, He promised that land to Abraham's children forever. This is a perpetual deed, this claim to the land, is perpetual and it is not going away.

The Palestinians have to deal with the Israelis who are staking a claim to that very ancient right.

God said "I will make your seed like the dust of the earth, so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then he can count your seed too. Get up, Abraham, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I will give it to you." So, Abraham removed his tent and he came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre which is Hebron, where he built an altar" (Genesis 13:16-18).

Like planting a flag everywhere, Abraham went throughout this country, planting altars that claimed the land for himself and his children.

Deed of Covenant

Now the 15th chapter of Genesis describes the establishment of the title to the land. This is the recording of the deed. We move beyond mere promises here to an outright deed of covenant.

Genesis 15:1 "After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Don't be afraid, Abraham. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward. But Abraham said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing that I have no children, and the steward of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" This was a man who was not a relative of his. So, Abraham said "I don't not know how You are going to do this because I don't have any seed."

"Abraham said, "Look, You have given me no children; a man who was born in my house as a servant is going to end up being my heir of everything that I have! And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "No, no, This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own bowels shall be your heir" (Genesis 15:3-4). In other words, his own children.

"Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars. That is the number of your children." And Abraham, as we are told, believed the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness. Then He said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."

Then Abraham asked an important question "Lord GOD, whereby, by what will I know that it is mine?" (Genesis 15:8). I think that that is an interesting question, initially the way it's worded you sort of think, well God said He is going to give it to you, what do you mean, How are you going to know it? You have God's promise on it. But what Abraham was looking for is some sort of evidence, a deed of covenant for the land. You can make your claim, a claim to possession, but what do you have to show for it. How can you prove it?

I can prove that I own my house and the land that sits on, by going down to the courthouse because there is a deed of covenant filed down there, that says that particular plot of property belongs to me until the government takes it away from me with taxes, etc. but that's another question entirely. We know what we mean by a deed of covenant.

Okay, Abraham asked for it, and God says, "Get Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon" (Genesis 15:8).

Now I am sure that all these things, including the age of them was more significant to Abraham, in ways that have long since been lost to us.

He took all these, and He divided them in the midst and laid each piece opposite the other. He didn't just split the birds in two. Now when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away." He sat there and protected them. "Now as the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abraham; and a horror of great darkness fell upon him." He went into a trance. "Then God said, "Abraham, Know of a surety that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them. They will be down there for a very long time. They shall afflict them for four hundred years. And also, that nation whom they will serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now you go to your fathers in peace; you

shall be buried at a good old age. {16} "But in the fourth generation they shall come again, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Genesis 15:10-16).

Now what God seems to be saying by this, is that the land that you're sitting on here, the people who actually possess it, the iniquity of these people has not come to full fruition. What I take this to mean is that there needs to be a level of justification on God's part for judging these people, and for expelling them from the land. You know, you don't just come in and evict people for no reason at all. God saw the direction of the Ammonites, and the Hivites and all people who lived in that land were going. But He said, "They're not going to be ready, their iniquity is not going to be full until another 400 years have passed."

"And it came to pass, when the sun went down, and it was dark, there was a smoking furnace and a burning lamp that passed between the pieces" (Genesis 15:17).

Now this is important. The blood sacrifice was a part of sealing a covenant and a deed for property. The parties of the covenant had to meet, in other words, you had to shake hands and be face-to-face, when you render a covenant. You don't do it by a third-party. This burning lamp represented God meeting Abraham to convey this property.

"On the same day the LORD made a deal with Abraham, saying: "To your seed I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18).

Here is basically what God has told Abraham, today's the day, I have sealed the deed, you have the deed, you can record it at the courthouse, because this is going to happen, but you're not going to actually possess it in full until the iniquity of the Amorites comes to such a level that we can be justified in driving them out of the land. That basically is where this came.

What the Real Estate Will Include

Now this is some piece of real estate. I want to tell you what this piece of real estate includes. It starts at the river of Egypt, that's the Nile River and so consequently all the God deeded to him was everything. All of Egypt that was east of Nile River, one side of Egypt altogether. He also gave him all of the Sinai Peninsula. All of present-day Israel and Palestine. All of Jordan. All of Syria, all of Lebanon and most of Iraq, all the way to the Euphrates River and all of the Arabian Peninsula. Some deed! Some property!

So, all the land from the Euphrates River, all the way to the Nile River in Egypt was made sure to Abraham and all of his descendants forever. And since forever is still going on, I have to conclude that Abraham and his descendants have title deed to the land, but it wasn't all given to Israel, as such.

What Land Did Abraham's Descendants Get?

People forget that Abraham had a lot of descendants, a lot of kids. Who were they and what land did they get? It's sort of like the barker at the baseball game selling programs, you can't tell who the players are, without a program.

I guess that brings me to why I'm telling you all this because this article begins a series on the Middle East and prophecy. It's axiomatic. You can't understand biblical prophecy unless you know who the players are, and you can't know that without a little bit of history. Prophecy in the Bible is all rooted in history and if you know nothing of the history, you will never understand prophecy and what will happen in the future.

Abraham would leave different parts of his property to different ones of his sons, and it would be in a fashion, willed to them.

Who got the first distribution of property from Abraham?

How Can We Get Some Children?

God had promised Abraham that his own children would inherit this property and Sarah became concerned about the fact, naturally, that they didn't have any children. So, what in the world are we going to do about it? God says that we're going to have property to give to our children, but we don't have any children. How can we get some children?

She says Abraham, "Look, the Lord has restrained me from bearing. I pray, go into my maid, it may be that I may attain children by her, and Abraham listened to the voice of Sarah, which was probably not the wisest thing he ever did. They decided to give surrogate motherhood a try, since Abraham needed a child, they would do what they could to get one. It did not work very well.

In verse 4 of Genesis 16 "So Abraham went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress Sarah was despised in her eyes."

You know, the woman in the household that has the kids tends to take the higher position and she began to look down at Sarah, who couldn't have children. It was the way that it was.

Then Sarah went to Abraham and said "My wrong is upon you. It's my fault. I gave my maid into your bosom and when she saw that she conceived, she began to look down on me, the Lord judge between you and me. It was my fault" (Genesis 16:5).

Abraham said "No, your maid is in your hand, you do what pleases you." And when Sarah began to deal firmly with Hagar, Hagar just got out of there and she took her baby and ran away. The angel of the Lord found her by an oasis in the wilderness by the fountain on the way to Shur, and he said to Hagar, "Where have you come from, where are you going, what are you doing here?" and she said "I'm fleeing from the face of my mistress. Sarai." And the angel of the Lord said, "Return to your mistress and submit yourself under her hand" (Genesis 16:6-9). Basically, what he's telling her is to go back there and don't be so uppity.

And the angel of the Lord said, "I'm going to multiply your seed exceedingly. The child that you're going to have is going to have a lot of children, so many that cannot be numbered because of the multitude." The angel Lord said to her, "Behold, you are with child, you will bear a son and you shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has heard your affliction. He shall be a

wild ass of the man with his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him and he shall live at odds with his kin" (Genesis 16:10-12).

Ishmael and the Arabs

Later on, God would say of Ishmael, in another context, speaking to Abraham, "As for Ishmael, I have heard you. I have blessed him. I am going to make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly, twelve princes he will beget and I'll make him a great nation, but I'm going to establish my covenant, not with him, but with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this set time in the next year and God left off talking with him and He went up from Abraham (Genesis 17:20-22).

It is interesting, He names this child before he was born, Isaac means to laugh, and He actually says before him, we're going to name this boy 'Laugh' because Sarah laughed when I told her that she was going to have a son.

The sons of Ishmael inherited the Arabian Peninsula.

And by ancient and divine design, they ended up sitting upon most of the world's oil and the prophecy that the angel gave to Ishmael's mother is surely true of the Arabs. He shall be a wild ass of a man with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him and he will live at odds with all of his kin.

It is the Arabs, the sons of Ishmael, who formed the bulk of the gang that flew four of our airliners to destruction on September 11, 2001. It was Arabs who fought to the death in Afghanistan, while the non-Arab Taliban fighters surrendered or defected. It was the Arabs who were shooting fellow Muslims who wanted to surrender in that losing cause.

You know, it's not surprising that the Islamic peoples have never been united very long without force of arms. And never forget that Islam is at heart an Arab religion. It was born in the deserts of Arabia and was well enough suited for that hard land. It was the Arabs who took Islam, by force of arms, throughout the world and conquered half the world and made converts by the simple charge "Accept Islam or die." It was surely the most effective means of evangelism in the history of man.

So now you can write a couple of names in your program guide for studying the middle east. Ishmael, the Arabs, sons of Abraham, legitimate heirs of the Arabian Peninsula and nothing else. But they have taken and controlled and directed much beyond that, for the Arab Empire went all the way to Asia and stretched all the way down to Indonesia. In the ancient days it went all the way across north Africa and up into Spain and controlled the sea lanes of the world, for generation after generation after generation.

The Arabic empire was powerful, and they have left Islam everywhere they went. There are now over one billion people in this world who are followers of the Prophet Mohamed.

There's a fascinating reflection from Israel to Ishmael in that Israel had 12 tribes, and so did Ishmael. He actually had 12 sons who would inherit his land, that is the Arabian Peninsula, and they are found in the 25th chapter of Genesis.

If you have a good Bible computer search program, you could probably track these sons of Ishmael through the Old Testament and find if they are mentioned again.

Lot, Moab and Ammon

But there's an odd story that we are going to sidetrack into here and there are two other families that are going to hold doubtful claim to some of the land in Abraham's inheritance and who actually probably are significant players in the events going on right now in the Middle East.

When the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, God sent two angels into the city and they went to the home of a man named Lot. They warned Lot to get himself out of there and to get his family and his children, his wife and daughters and get them up in the hills away from there before the fire would come down from God and destroy those cities.

Genesis 19 and verses 29 and 30 has the story. "It came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that He remembered Abraham, and He sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt. He went up out of Zoar and dwelt in the mountains with his two daughters with him; because he was afraid to stay in that city." Now it is really tragic what happens here because as Lot said to his sons and his daughters "Get out town." They didn't pay any attention to him.

And so, finally, all he could do was to take his wife and his two unmarried daughters and head for the hills. The Angel said "Get out of here and get up there and actually took him by the hand and led him out of the city because he was lingering hoping that his sons-in-law would go with him. They got him out of the city and sent them on their way and said, "Don't look back, whatever you do." Halfway up the mountain, Lot's wife looked back and the Bible says, "She turned into a pillar of salt." And all that was left was Lot and his two daughters.

Lot begged the Angels for permission to go aside to a little city, named Zoar, he said it was a small city, and it would not be so bad. The implication is that they spared the city of Zoar, so Lot could go there. Otherwise it would've been gone too, but Lot was so afraid he couldn't stay there after Sodom and Gomorrah was destroyed, so he and his daughters went up in the mountain and dwelt alone there.

Then follows a rather tragic story (Genesis 19:31-36). Lot's two daughters, considering what was going on, they said, "Look, our father is old. There's no husband for us. There's not a man on the earth to come into us, after all the matter of the earth." They assumed that everything was destroyed. They said, "Let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, so that we can preserve seed of our father." Their goal was that they wanted their father to have some sons to carry on his name and his inheritance. So, they made their father drink wine that night and the firstborn went in and lay with her father and he didn't perceive when she lay down, or when she got up.

I take that to mean that Lot had a blackout. The girls probably had reason to know that he would drink that much. I doubt that it was the first time it ever happened. It came to pass the next day the firstborn said to the younger "I did last night. Let's do it again. You go and lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father and they made their father drink wine that night also. The younger one arose and lay with him and he didn't perceive when she lay down, or when she rose. Thus, the two daughters of Lot were with child by their father. A truly tragic case of incest that didn't have to happen, shouldn't have happened, but it did happen.

The firstborn bares a son, and she called his name Moab; the same as the father of the Moabites unto this day. The younger daughter, she also bares a son, and called his name Benammi, the same is a father of the children of Ammon to this day (Genesis 19:37-38).

Two tribes of people that will figure again and again in the history of Israel and in the prophetic Scriptures of the Bible: Moab and Ammon.

So, we can add two more names to your program: Moab and Ammon. They were not heirs of Abraham, they were sons of Abraham's nephew Lot, and they settled in the land across Jordan today. You can look at your biblical maps and look at the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. The land across Jordan from Israel is where the Moabites and the Ammonites settled, and the chances are you have a map in the back of your Bible that will actually show you roughly where those two tribes of people had settled.

Those people were still there when Israel returned from Egypt some 400 years later. They were still over there, still carrying on in their generations. If you just flip to the back of your Bible, the chances are very good, you'll find a map there having to do with Israel's departure out of Egypt, with the exodus and their conquest of the new land.

You should see that Ammon is directly east of Jerusalem on the other side of Jordan. Moab will be just south of Ammon on the other side of the Dead Sea.

You'll also see another group of people called Edom, just south of Moab, and we will have to talk about Edom another day.

All these people, as far as that identity, seemed to disappear down through the ages, but when you read the Bible, they end up playing a significant role in the events of the last days, so from a prophetic point of view, one would think that the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is the land of the sons of Moab and Ammon, and they're going to play a very significant role in the history of the people of Israel and they are probably playing a role right now, which is described in some of the prophecies of the Bible, but that will have to wait till later.

Program Guide

My purpose in this series of articles is not to tell you what's going to happen and when it's going to happen and to give you a scenario of prophecy. That is not what biblical prophecy is all about. What I want to do is to paint in the background so that when you read the Bible, you will know who the players are, and you'll know what role they're going to play so that when events unfold

you will understand what's going on so that as you read your Bible and you see these characters come into play, you will know who it is talking about.

Hence a series of articles on the Middle East and prophecy of which this is number one.

What we hope to do is to provide you with a program, so you can know who the players are and what the events happening in the Middle East really mean. Try not to miss an article in the series, the Middle East and prophecy.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you answer the question: "Who owns Palestine?"
2. Which descendants of Abraham were to get what lands?
3. Do you think God intended originally for the lands to be divided in the ways that they were?
4. Isn't it interesting to see how God's prophecy of Ishmael is still holding true today?
5. Why do you think God made it to where Israel and Ishmael each had the same amount of sons?
6. Have you ever done a Bible study to trace all the descendants of Abraham?
7. Have you ever mapped out Israel, Ishmael, Ammon, and Moab?
8. What about Keturah's children?
9. What kind of role in the future do you think this area is going to play?
10. Was there anything new that you learned Mr. Dart brought out in this study?