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## Israel: Whose Land Is It?

### Introduction

Over the last 60 years there have been eight major military engagements in the Middle East, including the current Lebanese incursions between Israel and Hezbollah strongholds in southern Lebanon. These include:

1. 1948 - Israel's War for Independence
2. 1956 - Suez Crisis (war - England, France, and Israel against Egypt)
3. 1967 - The Six Day War - Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Syria against Israel
4. 1970 - War of Attrition - Egypt tries to reclaim Sinai from Israel
5. 1973 - The Yom Kippur War - Egypt and Syria against Israel
6. 1982 - Lebanese War - PLO, Syria, and Lebanese Muslims against Israel, Israel occupies southern Lebanon
7. 1982-2000 - Guerrilla warfare of Hezbollah against Israel in southern Lebanon. In 2000, Israel withdrew; Hezbollah regarded it as victory
8. 2006 - Hezbollah strikes across Lebanese border into Israel
9. 2007-2008 - Rocket attacks from Gaza by Hamas continue

So whose land is it for which these battles have been and are being fought? There are two answers to this question. One is political, and the second is biblical.

First, the political: The name "Palestine" was coined by Hadrian early in the first century AD. During the period of Roman rule, the Jews clashed with the Romans several times beginning in AD 66. The Roman leader, Titus, besieged Jerusalem and entered it in AD 70. He burned the Temple that was built by Herod. During the reign of Trajan (AD 98-117), the Jews in five of the Roman kingdoms (Mesopotamia, Cyprus, Egypt, Cyrenica, and Palestine) revolted. Trajan set out to destroy them in the first four kingdoms. After Trajan died, he was succeeded by Hadrian (AD 117-138), who suppressed the Jews in Palestine, killing a large number of them.

Hadrian severely punished the Jews. Prisoners were sold into slavery in massive numbers, and Judaism as a religion was under attack. He forbade the people to teach Mosaic Law or to own scrolls of any sort. Pagan temples and symbols were erected all over the province and even directly over old Jewish religious sites. The province itself was renamed Palestine; and of course, Jerusalem was already called Aelia Capitolina to stamp out any reference even to the Jewish names. The people were even forbidden from entering the temple complex to pray at their own sacred grounds, and the outer wall of the complex eventually came to be known as the

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"wailing wall." He built a statue to Jupiter on the site of Herod's Temple and ended Jewish ties with the land. So the land belonged to the Jews when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and created a territory called Palestine to eradicate any reference to the Jews in connection with Jerusalem or Israel of the first century.

After the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 by the Romans, the Jews were dispersed and generally divided into two groups. By the Middle Ages, Jewish groupings included the Ashkenazi (Northern and Eastern European Jews) and Sephardic Jews (Spanish, Mediterranean, and Middle Eastern Jews). These groupings incorporate parallel histories sharing many waves of persecution and forced expulsions, which finally culminated in events in the 20th century that led to the State of Israel.

During this time the Arabs gained control of the Middle East by AD 637, but there were many Jews who still lived, then and now, throughout the countries in this area. In the early AD 600's, a new religion was born in this region out of the life and writings of Mohammed (AD 570-632). This young religion was dedicated to wed both religion and politics and create Muslim states where Islam would be the only legal state religion and would seek to conquer the world for Islam. In 1099, the Crusaders responded to this threat by taking control of the Middle East. Many atrocities were committed in the name of Christianity. In AD 1291, the Muslims overthrew the Crusaders and controlled the land until 1917.

In World War I, Turkey and the Arab world aligned with Germany, so in response the British took control of the Arab world and the Middle East in 1917. On November 2, 1917, the Balfour Declaration announced the British government favored the establishment of a Jewish state. It took thirty-one years for this to become a reality when the UN granted statehood to Israel in 1948. The Muslim Arab states immediately declared war on Israel.

Second, and most important - What is the biblical answer to this dilemma? Whose land is the state of Israel? Why is this an important issue?

1. God has the prerogative of divine ownership - It's His land; He can give it as He pleases.
  - Gen 1:1 - God is the creator, sole owner of the universe - *creatio ex nihilo*.
  - Ps 24:1 - "earth is the Lord's" as part of His creation; it is His to award.
  - Prov 8:15 - "by Me kings reign;" divine ownership includes sovereign authority.

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2. God gave the land of Israel to Abraham and his descendents - God chose Abraham.
  - Gen 12:7; 15:7-20 (16) - God made a covenant with Abraham (land, seed, blessing).
  - Gen 17:4, 7, 8, 19, 21 - But my covenant (land, seed, blessing) passed to Isaac (Hebrews).
  - Gen 17:20-21 - God promised Ishmael twelve nations but not the covenant or the land of Israel.
  - Gen 24:7; 26:2-5 - reaffirmed with Isaac
  - Gen 28:15; 35:12 - reaffirmed with Jacob
  - Gen 48:4 - reaffirmed to Jacob's sons
  - Exod 6:4, 8 - I will give the land to you as a heritage: I am the Lord, reaffirmed to the Hebrews about to become the nation of Israel.
  
3. God created a nation out of the twelve tribes after they came from Egypt.
  - Exod 19:1-8 - Israel established by divine decree and covenant of Sinai.
  - Numb 14:8 - Joshua and Caleb remind the people that God gave them the land.
  - Josh 1:4 - God reaffirmed the promise of land to Joshua and the Hebrews.
  
4. God allowed the Hebrews to be taken from the land as discipline, but not permanent.
  - Amos 9:11-15 - in 8th century BC said, "I will raise up tabernacle of David. . . ."
  - Jer 25:12; 29:10 - "after 70 years I will cause you to return"
  - Ezek 34:13; 36:24 - feed you on mountains of Israel; gather you out of all countries
  - Zech 12:10; 13:1-2; 14:8-11 - Israel receives Jesus; land healed; living water Ezek 47:1
  - Matt 24:1-51 - Israel is in the land in end time; 24:32-35, parable of fig tree
  
5. God's fulfillment of the messianic hope is with Israel and the land - not Islam
  - Isa 2:1-3 - God will set up His Kingdom in Israel in the days of Messiah.
  - Isa 4:2-3 - Branch of the Lord will set up His Holy Kingdom in Jerusalem.
  - Isa 9:6 - Messiah will re-establish kingdom of David ( Kingdom of God).
  - Isa 11:1-2 - Messiah shall gather all remnant to the land, vv 12-16.
  - Isa 61:1-7 - Messiah anointed to bring eternal restoration to Israel.
  - Zech 2:12 - God declares a future restoration of the land to the Jews.
  
6. God's eternal plan includes the land of Israel and all believers - not Islam or others

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- Acts 1:11; Zech 14:4, 11 - Jesus returns in the same way to same place He ascended.
  - Rev 21:2, 9-27 - John describes the eternal city will be the New Jerusalem.
7. God's plan also includes final judgment on all people, nations, and religions who reject Him and His eternal plan - Bad news/ Good news
- John 3:16, 18 - There is no alternate plan B for those who reject Jesus as Savior.
  - Rom 3:23 - Sin is universally present in the human family.
  - Jas 4:1-6 - War is one evidence we live in a sinful world.
  - Rom 6:23 - spiritual war rages; the end is death, destruction, and eternal judgment, BUT THE GIFT OF GOD IS EVERLASTING LIFE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

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