

Sabeel Kairos UK: Advent Bible Study 1

Zionism and Apartheid: Repudiating Supremacism and Segregation

Introduction

Historically, the Bible has often been exploited to justify colonisation, slavery, white supremacism, segregation and apartheid, and in particular, to defend Zionism and Israeli apartheid. This study is intended to help you to challenge the misuse of the scriptures and bring an end to apartheid in the furtherance of justice, peace and reconciliation. In this Bible study we want to explore what the Bible has to say about the 'Promised Land', who may live there and what its ultimate purpose was.

Bible Study

1. From the following verses, to whom does the "Promised Land" belong?

"The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers." (Leviticus 25:23)

"I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable." (Jeremiah 2:7)

"I will repay them double for their wickedness and their sin, because they have defiled my land with the lifeless forms of their vile images and have filled my inheritance with their detestable idols." (Jeremiah 16:18)

2. Was the promise of land unconditional or conditional and why?

"This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!" If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever and ever." (Jeremiah 7:3-7).

3. What were some of the conditions attached to residence in God's land?
4. Was the land given exclusively to the Jewish people as their personal possession? If not why?
5. After the Exile who was entitled to return and receive an inheritance of land?

"You are to allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the foreigners residing among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe foreigners reside, there you are to give them their inheritance," declares the Sovereign LORD." (Ezekiel 47:22-23)

Notice the Lord has to say the same thing three times in two consecutive sentences. Why? Presumably because the retuning exiles did not want to share their inheritance. God makes it crystal clear, that Gentiles who acknowledge him have the same rights as 'native born Israelites'.

6. How did Jesus respond to the territorial aspirations of his disciples in Acts 1?

"So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:6-8)

7. How does Jesus explain the timing, nature and extent of his kingdom? In John Stott's commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, he writes,

"Their question must have filled Jesus with dismay. Were they still so lacking in perception? As Calvin commented, 'there are as many errors in the question as words'. The verb, the noun and the adverb of their sentence all betray doctrinal confusion about the kingdom. For the verb restore shows that they were expecting a political and territorial kingdom; the noun Israel that they were expecting a national kingdom; and the adverbial clause at this time that they were expecting its immediate establishment. In his reply (7-8) Jesus corrected their mistaken notions of the kingdom's nature, extent and arrival."

The kingdom is indeed, spiritual in its character, international in its membership, and gradual in its expansion.

8. What should they have already understood from Jesus' previous teaching concerning his kingdom?

"Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place." (John 18:36)

9. Read Galatians 2:11-15, 21 and observe how the Apostle Paul confronts the issue of segregation among God's people.

"When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles.

But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? "We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ" (Galatians 2:11-15, 21)

What are the implications for today?

10. To whom was the Abrahamic inheritance ultimately promised?

"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:28-29)

11. How does the New Testament understand the promise of land made to Abraham's descendants as being fulfilled?

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God... These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them... These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect." (Hebrews 11:8-10; 14-16; 39-40)

12. What role then does the 'Promised Land' fulfill within the purposes of God?

Conclusion

The use of the Bible to normalise segregation was never undertaken in isolation, but was invariably attempted, retrospectively, by European colonialists to justify their subjugation of dependent people and the sequestration of foreign lands. In this regard,

apartheid was and remains not about maintaining racial purity as about maintaining racial supremacy.

It is sobering to realise that the segregationist policies designed to preserve European 'racial purity' in the USA, also inspired fascism in Germany and apartheid in South Africa to do the same.

Largely with the complicity of the institutional churches, supremacism has led to the blasphemous justification of slavery, to segregation, fascism, apartheid and genocide. If we really care about justice, peace and reconciliation, it is time to challenge apartheid in Palestine as well, peacefully and non-violently.

Twenty years ago Archbishop Desmond Tutu said,

*"The end of apartheid stands as one of the crowning accomplishments of the last century, but we would not have succeeded without the help of international pressure... If apartheid ended, so can the occupation, but the moral force and international pressure will have to be just as determined. The current divestment effort is the first, though certainly not the only, necessary move in that direction."*¹

In the Book of Revelation, there is a glorious heavenly vision of a restored humanity ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse yet standing together not segregated, one in heart, soul and mind.

"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

*"Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9-10)*

Notice that tiny little word "from" in verse 9? The multitude which no one can count is *from* every nation, *from* every tribe, *from* every people and *from* every language. They are not segregated; they are not separated. They are not distinguished by these things. They are all standing together, all wearing the same white clothes, all singing the same song, united in joyful adoration. If that is what heaven will be like, surely the people of God should be aligning itself with where we are headed, offering to outsiders a foretaste of heaven.

¹ Desmond Tutu, "An international campaign : Build moral pressure to end the occupation" *International Herald Tribune* (June 14, 2002) <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/14/opinion/IHT-an-international-campaign-build-moral-pressure-to-end-the.html>

