



# *Last Days Beacon*

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## THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT:

### *WHY THERE WILL NOT BE PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST UNTIL JESUS CHRIST RETURNS - PART 1*

*By Carol Rushton*



The modern world has been embroiled in seeking peace in the Middle East between Jews and Arabs for almost 100 years. Conferences, summits, meetings, agreements, treaties have all fallen by the wayside. No amount of time, blood (literally), sweat, tears, begging, pleading, bullying, and threatening have achieved this elusive goal.

According to Dictionary.com, peace is “the normal, nonwarring condition of a nation, group of nations, or the world . . .” But peace is more than the absence of war; peace between countries also comprises diplomatic relations, economic trade, and a willingness to work out differences at a table than on a battlefield. No one can say this describes the situation between Israel and her neighbors.

As Israel celebrates 70 years of being re-established into their ancient, biblical lands as a nation, it is important to examine why peace has not been achieved in the Middle East after all these years. The hostility between Jews and Arabs goes back thousands of years before the nation of Israel even existed. We must return to the very beginning of the Hebrews as presented in the biblical account in order to understand the multiple issues involved in trying to achieve peace in the Middle East.

## BIBLICAL ROOTS OF THE CONFLICT

### Isaac and Ishmael



Most Westerners, including world leaders and their governments, only view the Arab-Israeli conflict through the historical events of the last 100 years or less. They never delve into the history of the Hebrew and Arab peoples before that time and refuse to include history as presented in the Bible as a legitimate source for consideration.

According to the biblical account, the Lord decided to work through the descendants of one man, Abraham, to present His plan of salvation to the world so that all people could have a relationship with Him. One of the most quoted passages of Scripture by both Jews and Christians that reveal God’s plan for the Middle East is found in Genesis 12:1-3:

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

The Lord promised Abraham the land again in Genesis 17:7, 8: "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession . . ."

Over and over again, God affirmed His promise to Abraham. When Abraham asked the Lord who would inherit these promises, since legally his heir at that time would be his steward Eliezer, God said in Genesis 15:4, 5: "And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be."

Increasingly alarmed by the passing of years with still no natural-born heir, Sarah and Abraham decided that God needed some help. While we might be horrified by their solution in giving Sarah's handmaid Hagar to Abraham, this was a commonly-held practice at that time for barren couples. In his notes on this passage of Scripture, Dr. Henry Morris writes:

In the culture of the time, it was considered so essential for a wife to give her husband an heir that if necessary, she could have a child by proxy, as it were, through her personal maid. Note the similar arrangement for Jacob by his wives, Leah and Rachel (30:3, 9). The famous Nuzi tablets, found in northern Syria, confirm that it was customary and legal in the nations of that time and place for a wife unable to produce children to provide her handmaid to be a surrogate wife to her husband, with any resulting child considered her own . . . The Nuzi tablets mentioned above also allowed the wife, if she so chose, to order both the mistress and the child to leave.

The child produced from the union of Abraham and Hagar was Ishmael. At no time did the Lord ever consider Ishmael the heir to the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. The Lord made it crystal clear in Genesis 17:19-21 that His promises to Abraham would be through Isaac, not Ishmael.

And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year.

It is clear from the biblical account that Ishmael knew of God's promise that the line of the Messiah would go through Isaac and not him. Genesis 21:9 reveals that Sarah caught Ishmael "mocking" Isaac. Bible scholars have various interpretations about what this "mocking" entailed, but whatever it was, it was serious enough for Sarah to demand Ishmael be banished from the family because of it.

In Genesis 16:12, the Lord described Ishmael's character to Hagar. "And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." I agree with Dr. Henry Morris' comments on this verse: "Literally, 'a wild ass of a man,' seemingly referring prophetically to a characteristic of the Arab peoples who are descendants of Ishmael, a character apparent even today in the modern Israeli-Arab conflict."

The Lord kept His promise to Abraham to multiply Ishmael's descendants and make them a great nation as well. Most modern-day Arabs are descendants of Ishmael. While Isaac and Ishmael may have eventually reconciled enough that they could bury their father together (Genesis 25:9), Ishmael's descendants shortly afterward until today have maintained a virulent hatred of the Jews. Sarah's seemingly innocent act of giving her handmaid to Abraham to provide a proxy heir for her husband has resulted in hundreds of years of tragic consequences for the descendants in the line of the Messiah.

## Lot and His Daughters



Sarah was not alone in making a bad choice that would affect Hebrews in the future. Abraham's nephew, Lot, made a series of terrible decisions that would negatively affect his uncle's family.

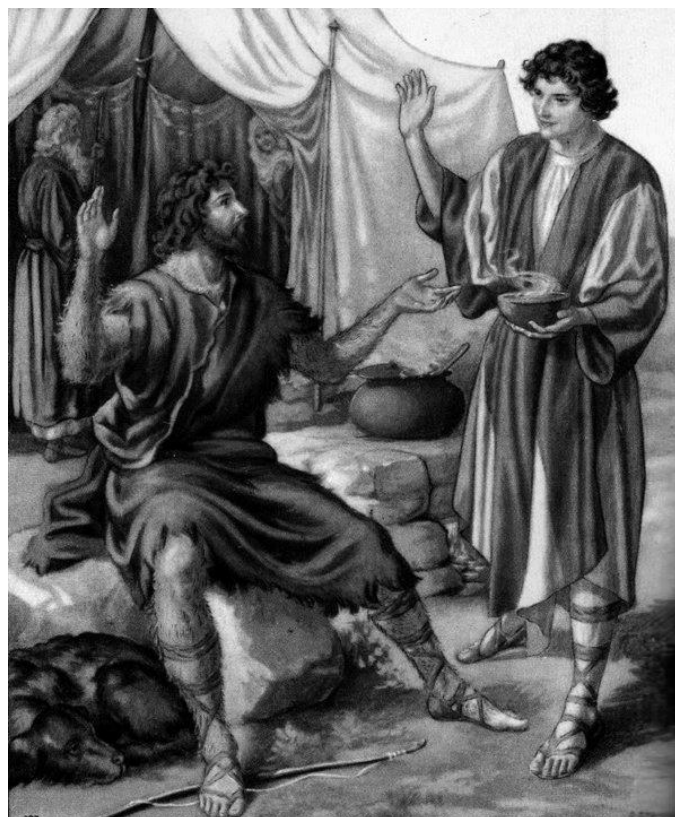
Genesis 13:12, 13 says that after he separated from Abraham, Lot "pitched his tent toward Sodom. But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly." Even though II Peter 2:7 describes Lot as "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked," Lot would not have been "vexed" if he had not lived in Sodom. Lot may have thought he could have a positive impact on his neighbors but the Genesis 19 account makes clear it was the other way around.

When the two angels came to warn Lot and his family of God's judgment the next day upon Sodom, Lot threw his own virgin daughters under the bus by offering them to the homosexual men of the city so they would not rape the angels staying in his house. Scripture does not record what Lot's daughters thought about this idea but they could not have been crazy about it. The only reason that the angels escaped was because they had the power to strike the homosexuals with blindness so they could not enter Lot's house!

What follows the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is one of the most shocking passages in the Bible. Lot's daughters somehow had the impression that it was acceptable for them to get their father drunk and have sex with him so they could have children. Lot's fascination with one of the most wicked cities in world history, so immoral that God had to destroy it, caused the destruction of most of his family, including his wife, and corrupted his two remaining daughters to the extent that they thought that incest was acceptable.

The sons of Lot's daughters, Moab and Benammi, were the predecessors of the Moabites and Ammonites, enemies of the Hebrews. While Moab no longer exists, Ammon is the modern-day capital of Jordan, an Arab country that borders Israel. Jordan has sided with Israel's enemies, has fought against the Jewish state in conflicts and wars, and has harbored terrorists responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Israeli Jews.

## Jacob and Esau



As if the Hebrews didn't have enough future enemies, they gained more through the descendants of Esau, the child of Isaac and Rebekah and twin brother of Jacob. Rebekah was having a difficult pregnancy so when she asked the Lord why, He told her point blank, "Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23).

As a woman, I can assure you that Rebekah did not keep this news to herself. She made sure that Isaac knew right away, and the boys heard about this at some point. The fact that the parents had favorites only fueled the rivalry between Jacob and Esau as they grew up.



Genesis 25:27 describes Esau as “a cunning hunter, a man of the field.” Dr. Morris writes, “The only hunters mentioned in the Bible are Nimrod (10:9) and Esau, and both were rebels against the will and revelation of God. Although God permits the eating of meat, the hunting of animals for sport is questionable at best. God cares even when a sparrow dies (Matt. 10:29). The family did not need game for meat, since Isaac had great flocks and herds; neither did they need protections from wild animals, as Esau had to be a ‘cunning’ hunter to find any to slay. He was simply a carnal, profane, licentious playboy (Heb. 12:16).” It is interesting that Hebrews 12:16 calls Esau a “fornicator” and “profane person.”

In contrast, Scripture says Jacob “was a plain man, dwelling in tents.” In the Hebrew, the word translated “plain” actually means “perfect” or “mature.” Jacob worked at home, taking care of the family’s flocks and herds and household responsibilities while Esau played in the fields. Jacob took God’s promises reverently and seriously. Esau “despised his birthright” (Gen. 25:34).

According to Dr. Morris, the birthright included the right to be “the spiritual leader of the family. His task was to transmit the divine promises to future generations.” Although Isaac and Esau knew the Lord’s plan for their family, they both “rejected this revelation and determined to convey these privileges to Esau.” Esau’s choice of pagan, Hittite wives, causing his parents “grief of mind” (Gen. 26:34, 35), is further proof of why Esau was unfit to inherit the birthright, the blessings, and the right to be included in the line of the Messiah, and the Lord’s wisdom in choosing Jacob instead.

It is Dr. Morris’ opinion that Isaac favored Esau because he was probably living vicariously through his son’s exploits. “In spite of God’s commandment (25:23) and Jacob’s merits (25:27), Isaac showed strong partiality to Esau, and for the most carnal of reasons [‘because he did eat of his venison’ Genesis 25:28]. . . But God said: ‘Jacob have I loved’ (Mal. 1:1-3; Rom. 9:10-13).”

Jacob did not cheat Esau out of his birthright. It was always rightfully Jacob’s. The Lord would have ensured the birthright and the blessing would have gone to Jacob, no matter the machinations and maneuverings of any of the parties involved. It is noteworthy that the Lord never rebuked Jacob or Rebekah for anything they did, including her plan to

have Jacob impersonate Esau to obtain the blessing.

Isaac seems to have finally accepted the Lord’s calling on Jacob and his life when he blessed his son before he left to spend some time with Rebekah’s family. Jacob was supposedly going to find a wife when he was actually fleeing from Esau, who had vowed to kill him. Dr. Morris notes, “At this point, Isaac repeated and expanded his blessing to Jacob, indicating his full realization that God’s will had been accomplished.”

After Jacob returned to the land of promise after many years with his two wives, Leah and Rachel, his children, and his wealth, Esau appeared to welcome his brother without animosity or hatred. However, this meeting obviously did not bury the hatchet between the brothers. The hostility and bad feelings concerning past events were passed on to Esau’s descendants, who always opposed the Hebrews and joined their enemies to fight against them whenever possible.

According to Genesis 36:8, Esau settled in Mt. Seir. “Thus dwelt Esau in mount Seir: Esau is Edom.” In Hebrew, Edom means “red.” Mt. Seir encompassed the land from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba and included Petra, known as the “Red Rock City,” now a part of modern-day Jordan.

## The Amalekites



After the Lord delivered the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt, the first battle Abraham’s descendants fought was against the Amalekites. According to Genesis 36:12, the Amalekites came from Amalek, a son born to Eliphaz, one of Esau’s sons, by one of his concubines named Timna. Exodus 17:8 states, “Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel

in Rephidim.” Israel defeated the Amalekites only because Aaron and Hur held Moses hands up in the air when he grew tired. Deuteronomy 25 records that the Amalekites had been able to pick off the weaker stragglers, which may have prompted the Hebrews to decide to stand and fight to stop the Amalekites from killing more of them.

The second time the Hebrews battled the Amalekites was after they rejected the counsel of Joshua and Caleb to go into the land promised them by God (Num.14). The Hebrews knew they had made a big mistake and tried to take on a confederation of the Amalekites and Canaanites but the Amalekites defeated the Hebrews handily.

In Deuteronomy 25:17-19 the Lord commanded Joshua before entering Canaan to completely destroy the Amalekites but they were still around 300 years later when Saul became Israel’s first king. The Lord through the prophet Samuel ordered Saul to kill all the Amalekites in I Samuel 15:2, 3. Saul only half-obeyed the Lord. He killed most of the Amalekites but not their king and kept the best of their worldly goods and animals.

Because of Saul’s refusal to fully obey the Lord, another Amalekite descendant by the name of Haman was almost successful in a wholesale extermination of the Jews when they were in captivity in Persia. If not for the faithfulness of Mordecai and his niece, Esther, the Jews would have been virtually wiped out as a people. To this day, Jews celebrate the holiday of Purim to mark the Lord’s provision over them.

Balaam prophesied the end of the Amalekites in Numbers 24:20. “And when [Balaam] looked on Amalek, he took up his parable, and said, Amalek was the first of the nations; but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever.” There are no known Amalekites today. They were either wiped out as a people or absorbed into other Arab tribes.

## Edomites, Ammonites, and Moabites



Edomite City of Petra

While the Hebrews were commanded to eliminate all the pagans living in Canaan, the Lord told Moses to leave the Edomites, Ammonites, and Moabites alone according to Deuteronomy 2. But the Edomites had so much hatred toward the Hebrews, they would not give Moses permission to pass through their land, even when Moses reminded the king of Edom that they were brothers and offered to pay even for any water they or their animals would drink!

The king of Edom rejected the offer and even threatened to fight them (Numbers 20). Since well over 400 years had passed since Jacob and Esau had lived and died, that’s a long time to hold a grudge!

Balak, the king of Moab, had heard about the Hebrews defeating the Amorites and was so concerned he hired a pagan seer, Balaam, to curse them! The Moabites and Ammonites do not appear in Scripture again until the period of the judges. The Lord used numerous pagan nations, including Moab and Ammon, time after time to chastise the Hebrews when they would follow pagan gods. Although the Lord raised up Ehud, who led the Hebrews to defeat the Moabites and Jephthah to defeat the Ammonites, peace in Israel never lasted.

Besides the descendants of Esau and Lot, Israel also had to contend with the Midianites, who were descendants of Abraham through his wife Keturah, who he married after Sarah died. They became the Philistines and Canaanites, who, at various times were thorns in Israel’s side until David took over as king of Israel and soundly defeated all of them. Subsequently, most of them became “servants” of David and Israel (II Samuel 8:2).

Solomon followed David as king but eventually became so involved with pursuing a hedonistic lifestyle that his kingdom deteriorated to the point where the nations subjected under David rebelled and were successful in throwing off Israel’s rule.

When years later the two southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin came under Babylonian subjection, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites joined King Nebuchadnezzar and his troops in the initial invasion. In his prophecy of the final eradication of the Edomites, Obadiah not only accuses them of supporting the Babylonians and rejoicing in the razing of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the death and slavery of the Jews, but also participating in killing those Jews trying to flee the Babylonians.

For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever . . . thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy brother in the day that he became a stranger; neither shouldest thou have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; neither shouldest thou have spoken proudly in the day of distress. Thou shouldest not have entered into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity; yea, thou shouldest not have looked on their affliction in the day of their calamity, nor have laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity; Neither shouldest thou have stood in the crossway, to cut off those of his that did escape; neither shouldest thou have delivered up those of his that did remain in the day of distress. . .there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the LORD hath spoken it (Obadiah 10, 12-14, 18).

The nations of Edom, Ammon, Moab, Midian, Philistia, Canaan, and Assyria no longer exist. The people groups who made up these countries either completely died out or were absorbed by Ishmael's descendants who make up the modern countries of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Oman, and other Arab states.

## From Cyrus to Mohammed

The period from the Babylonian Captivity until about 600 A.D., was mostly a relatively quiet period between Jews and Arabs. The Jews spent 70 years in captivity in Babylon until the Medo-Persian Emperor Cyrus conquered the Babylonian Empire in 539 B.C. and allowed them to return to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. The only major conflict between Jews and any of their Arab "brothers" during this time is found in the Book of Esther, when Haman, a descendant of Amalek, tried - and failed - to exterminate Abraham's seed from Persia.

When Jews returned to Israel to rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem, their adversaries did not try to fight them directly but tried to hinder them by complaining to whoever was the head of the ruling empire at that time. It took some years before the Jews successfully rebuilt the Temple and the city but they had their hands full, as did the Arabs and the rest of the known world, in fighting not their former foes but the Greeks and the Romans who were overrunning their country. The Maccabees were successful in eventually throwing off the pagan Greeks but no country could stand before the overwhelming might of the Roman Empire.

The destruction of the Temple and most of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and then the crushing of the Bar Kochba rebellion in 132-135 A.D. by the Roman Empire, led to the dispersion of Jews throughout the world. According to the *Jewish Virtual Library*, whether Jews suffered or thrived depended upon the whims of the different rulers they lived under, both pagan and Christian. This continued until the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. when another major change occurred that would drastically affect the Jewish people. "The Arab conquest in 632 saw the beginning of a new regime" (<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/egypt-virtual-jewish-history-tour>). Under the Prophet Mohammed, Islam would birth a new fanaticism, dedicated to the establishment of a worldwide caliphate and the eradication of the Jewish people once and for all.

In order to truly understand why man cannot bring peace to the Middle East and the issues involved, it is important to understand the underlying history between Jews and Arabs that is foundational to the conflict. In Part 1, we covered the beginnings of this conflict as found in the Bible. In Part 2, we will detail how Islam has escalated the hatred Arabs have for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and its effects on the modern Middle East.

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