



A Bible Study: Israel, Palestine and the U.S. Embassy Move to Jerusalem

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During the month of July, we were blessed with a two-session tutorial about the recent move of the United States Embassy in Israel from the city of Tel Aviv to the city of Jerusalem. This seemingly innocuous move in fact has great significance, given Israel's biblical claim to Jerusalem, dating back to the Old Testament.

The Bible Study was presented by Dr. Mark Meyer, Professor of Biblical Studies at Lancaster Bible College. Dr. Meyer is both a student and a teacher of the history of the Hebrew people. He skillfully ushered us on a chronological journey, injecting insight into the migration and evolution of the peoples who are the progeny of the Abrahamic covenant. The journey covered over 4,000 years, culminating with the decision to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Our window into Abraham's interaction with God began with His promise to spawn nations from Abraham which he did through Ishmael, from whom many Muslim nations descend and through Isaac, who would father both Muslims and Jews. Dr. Meyer explained the early movements of Abraham and how Isaac ultimately fathered twin boys, Esau and Jacob, each of whom had 12 sons and many tribes of people. Esau's sons spawned much of the Muslim world while Jacob, the deceiver who twice stole his older brother's birth right, generated the 12 tribes of Israel.

He then explained the migration of the Israelites from Canaan (the Promised Land) to Egypt and back to Canaan. After the reign of Solomon, Israel was split into the Northern Kingdom known as Israel and the Southern Kingdom known as Judah. Israel was conquered and dispersed by the Assyrians, and later Judah was conquered by the Babylonians, who destroyed the Temple that Solomon built. After approximately 70 years, Judah was repatriated and this was the world into which Jesus was born. By then they were under the control of the Roman Empire. Jesus introduced a New Covenant that made it possible for both Jews and Gentiles to access God by believing that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Dr. Meyer used wonderful visual illustrations to show how Gentiles were grafted into this New Covenant, which was initially offered to the Jews.

Dr. Meyer described contemporary Israel and Jerusalem as being very similar to the places Jesus visited. The walled city of Jerusalem is still cohabited by Palestinians and Jews, with Palestinians controlling the Dome of the Rock, which is said to be the place from which Mohammed ascended into heaven and where He will someday return. Two city blocks away from that golden dome is a silver dome which is called the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, where Jesus was crucified and buried. Palestinians also control the areas known as the Gaza Strip and Golan Heights, both within the boundaries of Israel. He then pointed out that the Philistines, ancestors of the Palestinians, and the Hebrews, who were the ancestors of the Jews, have been in constant conflict for millennia.

Dr. Meyer then explained that the tiny sliver of land that is Israel (approximately 7,800 square miles), about the size of New Jersey, has been alternately populated by Hebrews, Israelites, Jews and Israelis,

which are all names of the same genetic people. He further expounded that Jews are the only genetic people who are considered both a race and a religion, though some are devout, while others practice no religion at all.

The three great Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, all coexist in this region, with Jerusalem considered the holiest city according to each. Dr. Meyer explained that this is the reason that no U.S. president until now had been willing to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, out of concern that it would increase the ubiquitous volatility of that region. Every previous U.S. president has chosen diplomacy, and some have attempted to negotiate treaties and land resolutions to appease all sides. On May 14, 2018, the Trump Administration took the first definitive step toward restoring Jerusalem to Israel by moving the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem. This date marks seventy years since the establishment of the present-day State of Israel.

Dr. Meyer concluded that the U.S. is committed to defend and maintain alliances with the State of Israel at all costs. This is a necessary relationship, due to the scriptural nexus between Christianity and Israel's religious parent, Judaism.

If you were present for this study, you know how impactful it was and how the biblical events were so skillfully linked together to tell the story of how God's chosen people have both evolved and devolved over the course of their history. Having visited and toured Israel and being an avid Bible student made this presentation by Dr. Meyer uniquely informative for me. I am glad I took the time to attend, and pray my synopsis of the tutorial will prove helpful to you.