

What does Holy mean? Whose Land? Who are Hebrew, Israel and Jews?

The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation

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Topics to explore in our study tour:

- 1) Holy Land: why is a land called “holy”? What does “holy” mean?
- 2) Are they the same: Hebrew, Israel, Jew, and (state of) Israel today?
- 3) Does the word “Arab” and “Palestine-Palestinian” appear in the Bible? Who are they?
- 4) Names of God: Jewish or gentile (the nations) names for God: El Elyon, Elohim, YHWH, “I AM”, Joshua/Jesus?
- 5) God-fearers (gentiles): Melchizedek, Job, Aranuah? Do you know them?
- 6) Who are the oppressed, who the oppressors? And why the oppressed become the oppressors? [Curse of Cain?]

Ethics of Bible Interpretation

Genesis 12:1-3: “If you bless Israel, God will bless you. If you go against Israel, God will curse you.” “God gave the land to the Jewish people as an eternal possession. The Jews have the divine right to the land.” “The Jews returning to their Holy Land means the end time is near.” Really?

1. Accountability: Assume responsibility for our readings
2. Self-awareness: reflecting our assumptions and contexts
3. Questioning for the “salvation” value of the Bible: “Their independence, our nakba”? “They are the problem”?

The Context of Old Testament Canon: Jewish (Tanakh) Perspective

‘An Encyclopedia of Remembrance’ during the Babylonian Exile (587 BC)

1. The weakening of Egyptian and Hittite empires, and the rise of Davidic kingdom
2. Canon formation during Babylonian captivity: the Deuteronomic [reread the Torah] community began to collect holy books and construct a Zionist theology of rebirth.

Malachi 3:16-18: “Then those who revered the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD took note and listened, and a **book of remembrance** was written before him of those who revered the LORD and thought on his name.” After the exile/return, Ezra held a public reading of “the book of the Torah of Moses” (Ezra 7-10; Nehemiah 7)

3. Evidence: Psalm 137; Lamentation ends with 5:20-22
4. Theology of life from death: Hosea 6:1-3, Isaiah 26:19, Ezekiel 37:1-15

5. The Hebrew Scripture, TaNaKh

A. Structurally from Genesis to Malachi (in comparison with LXX, then our English Bible)

Torah [Pentateuch]

A

Neviim [Former Prophets = Jos, Jud, Sam, King; Latter Prophets = Isa, Jer, Ezk, Minor Prophet]

A

Khetubim [Writings:

- i. Poetry = Ps, Prov, Job - - 3
- ii. Five Scrolls = Song of Sol [pesach/passover], Ruth [pentecost/shabuoth], Lam [woe/ekah], Ecc [tabernacles/sukkoth], Esther [lots/purim] - - 5
- iii. Historical books = Dan, Ezra-Neh, Chron. - - 3

Focused studies:

A. Holy (Qados; hagasmos) means:

1.a. Like none other: Holy God; thus names of God: “I am who I AM” (MT Exodus 3:14; not LXX “I am the Being” *egō eimi ho ōn*), Yahweh.

1.b. Unique claim of God (in the priestly tradition, i.e., Pentateuch):

God sets the people apart (consecrate) as they are his and for his purpose; therefore people, sabbath (Exodus 16:23), assembly (Exodus 12:16), heaven (Psalm 20:6), Mount Zion (Psalm 2:6) are said to be holy [note: ‘holy prostitute’ in Deuteronomy 23:17: “None of the daughters of Israel shall be a ‘temple/holy’ (qedeshah—holy woman) prostitute; none of the sons of Israel shall be a ‘temple/holy’ (qadash) prostitute.”]

2. participating in the moral-spiritual holiness of God (in the prophetic tradition; Major and Minor prophets: Exodus 29:43; 1 Samuel 2:2; Leviticus 19:2; Psalm 18:30; 101:2, 6; 1 Peter 1:15), therefore righteous and justice are inseparable in Hebraic semantic of “holiness”, i.e., the understanding of ‘wholeness’. See Amos 5:15, 24

B. Whose Land is this? What are the borders of land of Israel?

3) Genesis 15:18 “from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates”

1) Deuteronomy 11:24: “Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon and from the Euphrates River to the western sea”

2) Book of Joshua on different lands allotted to different tribes

4) Number 34:3-12



Land promised to people of God in OT without conditions?

Leviticus 20:22

Deuteronomy 7:8-12, 16:19, 28:58-63, 30:17-18

Ezekiel 33:23-26

Isaiah 1:27, 5:16

C. Who are the Hebrews, Jews, and Israel in the OT?

1) Hebrew: Eber? (Genesis 10:24), Abram (Genesis 14:13)—neither an Israelite nor Jew; midwives (Exodus 1:15), man or woman (Deuteronomy 15:12), slaves (Jeremiah 34:9); language (John 5:2 Beth-zatha; 19:13 Gabbatha; 19:17 Golgatha; 19:20 in Hebrew, Latin and Greek; 20:16 Rabbouni), Acts 21:40, 22:2 (Paul spoke in Hebrew), 26:14 a voice speaking in Hebrew, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”, Philippians 3:5, Revelation 16:16 Harmagedon)

2) Israel:

a) Jacob (Genesis 32:28)

b) Jacob’s children (Genesis 34:7)

c) Jacob’s tribes (Genesis 47:27)

During United Kingdom before fall of Samaria, the term Israel may exclude residents of Judah (1 Samuel 17:52, 18:16).

After the fall of Northern Kingdom, “Israel” refers to followers of Yahweh.

3) Jews/ yehudi/ Judea/ Judah/ Judas [Iscariot]/ Jude: 2 Kings 16:6 (“Judeans”; Esther 2:5, 3:4. At first, refers to inhabitants of Judah, later followers of Yahweh from Southern Kingdom to Jerusalem to worship (2 Chronicles 30).

D. Who are the Arabs in the Old Testament? [April 7: “Ethnicity and God’s Family in the New Testament”]

Kairos Document

• We declare that any use of the Bible to legitimize or support political options and positions that are based upon injustice, imposed by one person on another, or by one people on another, transform religion into human ideology and strip the Word of God of its holiness, its universality and truth.

• Our land is God’s land, as is the case with all countries in the world. It is holy inasmuch as God is present in it, for God alone is holy and sanctifier. It is the duty of those of us who live here, to respect the will of God for this land. It is our duty to liberate it from the evil of injustice and war. It is God’s land and therefore it must be a land of reconciliation, peace and love. This is indeed possible. God has put us here as two peoples, and God gives us the capacity, if we have the will, to live together and establish in it justice and peace, making it in reality God’s land: “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it” (Psalm 24:1).