

FATHER OF MANY NATIONS

Passage for study and prayer: **Genesis 17:1-22**

“No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations.” (Genesis 17:5)

The Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, where Abraham and Sarah are buried along with Isaac and Jacob, is one of the flash points of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This is not surprising - part of it is a synagogue where Jews worship the God of Israel, and part is a mosque for Arab worshippers of Allah the Muslim deity. Abraham is considered the father of both the Jewish and Arab nations, through his sons Isaac and Ishmael. Both peoples carry the sign of the covenant, circumcision, in their flesh, and claim the covenant as theirs - but the Bible makes it very clear that as far as God is concerned, Isaac is the only legal heir. Isaac's descendants alone – through his own younger son Jacob, (not Esau, who is also an ancestor of the Arab people) – would belong to God in a special way and in turn the land of Canaan would belong to them.

Abraham liked this idea as little as some of his descendants have since! His first response to the news that Sarah would miraculously bear him a son in their old age, was simple unbelief. He tried to persuade God that his beloved son Ishmael, born of his slave girl Hagar in an attempt to provide himself an heir, would do just as well - but God said “No”. Whilst He would also bless Ishmael, give him an inheritance of land in the Middle East and make him a great nation, the covenant would be established with Isaac. God was not being unfair. One of the nations born of Abraham's seed had to be set apart in a special way to be God's instrument. Through Isaac's family He would reveal His character and eventually fulfil His plan, to bring **all** nations into covenant relationship with Himself. The sons of Ishmael would then be able to share in the covenant through faith in Messiah Jesus, and be reconciled to their brethren. Right now the Arabs, in bondage to a counterfeit religion, and the Jews, still unredeemed as a people, are each God's instrument of judgement for the other – but the day will come when they will be a witness together of His grace.

Praise God for His **everlasting** covenant with the Jewish people, and pray that all His perfect purposes for the land and nation of Israel will be fulfilled, for the blessing of the nations. ***“Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” (v 8)***

Pray earnestly and with love for all Arab people to be set free from the bondage of Islam and come into the fulfilment of God's blessing and promise for them. ***“And Abraham said to God, “Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!” (v 18)***

Stand in prayer for Hebron, where God spoke these words to Abraham and gave the promise of the land to Isaac's seed. It is a place of great spiritual as well as physical conflict and challenge to the truth of God's Word. ***“But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.”(v 21)***

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