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History of Palestine Before Islam

(2013-03-04)

Palestine was predestined by Allah Almighty to be the land from which prophets and messengers took upon their shoulders the banner of monotheism and called upon their people to abide by it.

In its ancient history, Palestine witnessed models of leadership by many prophets and their subsequent command over their people. These prophets waged violent struggles for the sake of establishing the banner of truth on this holy land.

The City of Jerusalem

Before plunging into details, it is important to keep in mind the fact that Muslims do believe in all prophets, that Muslims consider the heritage of all prophets as their own, that Muslims consider their Islamic creed as an extension of the creed of the prophets prior to the coming of Islam and that the creed for which all prophets previous to Muhammad had called for is the same creed for which prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him) had called.

Consequently, the stockpile of experience by all of the prophets in their call for truth and God worshipping is not separate or different from the Muslims' call and their stockpile of experience.

Consider the following verse taken from the Holy Qur'an: (And verily We have raised in every nation a messenger, (proclaiming): Serve Allah and shun false gods.) (An-Nahl 16:36) It is the creed of oneness to which every messenger had called. When a certain people reject their messenger, they reject all messengers. Consider what Almighty Allah says in the Holy Qur'an: (The people of Noah rejected the apostles) (Ash-Shu'araa' 26:105); (The `Ad (people) rejected the apostles) (Ash-Shu'araa' 26:123); (The Thamud (people) rejected the apostles) (Ash-Shu'araa' 26:141); (The people of Lut rejected the apostles) (Ash-Shu'araa' 26:160); and (The Companions of the Wood rejected the apostles) (Ash-Shu'araa' 26:176).

When they encounter the contemporary Jewish allegation of their right to Palestine, many historians engage themselves with archaeology and with the people who had settled, ruled or passed through Palestine and how long the rule of each one lasted. They eventually come up with the conclusion that the Jewish dominion over Palestine throughout history was very short in time and limited in place compared with the Arab and Muslim dominion. Although this aspect is very useful in refuting the historical and ideological aspects of the Jewish allegation, many writers and historians, it seems, have committed the following two major mistakes:

1. To consider the heritage of prophets, which were sent by Allah to the Jews to rule over them, as a heritage solely for the Jews (this is exactly what the Jews want), and

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2. To abuse the biographies of a number of prophets sent to the Children of Israel by using evidence based on the changed text of The Torah or the Jews themselves. When they use this reasoning, they intend to show the "shameful behavior" of the Children of Israel and their leaders once they settled in Palestine in order to degrade the value of their State and to show the decline of their level of civilization. Followers of this method of evidence talk about accusing prophets of cheating, of lying, of adultery and of raping the rights and killing the innocent to prove the cruelty, deceit and meanness of the Jews and to distort their image of rule and dominion at that time.

The Qur'an has provided us with sufficient ways to identify Jewish manners and has warned us regarding their debauchery and immorality. But their prophets and their virtuous followers are something else. Prophets are the best examples of all human beings. They should not be abused and most certainly Allah Almighty should not be abused. We should not follow the deviated stories of the Children of Israel, which abuse both prophets and God.

The deviated Torah and the Talmud, for instance, say that Allah (the Most High, Exalted and Great) plays with whales and fish for three hours every day. They also say that He cried over the demolition of the temple till His size was diminished from seven heavens to four heavens, and that earthquakes and hurricanes occur as a result of God's tears, which supposedly fall into the sea in response to the demolished temple. The Noble Qur'an mentions their allegations in the following verses: (The Jews say: "God's hand is tied up") (Al-Ma'idah 5:64); (God hath heard the taunt of those who say: "Truly, God is indigent and we are rich!") (Aal-'Imran 3:181)".

The Jews accuse Prophet Jacob with the theft from his father of an idol made of gold and with his having wrestled with God(!) near the city of Nablus, thus he was named Israel. In addition, he has been attributed with offering bribes to his brother, cheating his father and keeping silent regarding the alleged adultery and polytheism of his two daughters. Such things are understandable considering what the Jews say about other prophets.

Most Jews have deviated from the Torah or the Old Testament, and they follow the path of the deviated Torah as seen in their manners, debauchery and immorality, under the pretence of what they had attributed falsely and untruly to their prophets. Historians, especially Muslim historians, should not embark rashly in their search into Palestine's history accusing Allah's prophets and messengers, as the Jews did in their fabrications, in order to prove other prophets' rights in Palestine.

If the creed-and-faith tie is the ground upon which Muslims of all kinds and colors are united, then Muslims have the priority to hold the heritage of the prophets, including the heritage of the prophets of the Children of Israel. Muslims are still holding the banner which was held up by the prophets and are still following their path. All of those prophets were Muslims and believers in the unity of God according to the Qur'anic understanding. Consider the following verse revealed by Allah Almighty in the Qur'an: (Abraham was not a Jew, nor yet a Christian; but he was an upright man who had surrendered (to Allah), and he was not of the idolaters. Lo! those of mankind who have the best claim to Abraham are those who followed him, and this Prophet and those who believe (with him); and Allah is the Protecting Guardian of the believers.) (Aal-'Imran 3:67-68), Allah Almighty also says: (And when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the House, (Abraham prayed): Our Lord! Accept from us (this duty). Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Hearer, the Knower. Our Lord! And make us submissive unto Thee and of our seed a nation submissive unto Thee, and show us our ways of worship, and relent toward us. Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Relenting, the Merciful.) (Al-Baqarah 2:127-128), and Allah Almighty also says: (And who forsaketh the religion of Abraham save him who befooleth himself? Verily We chose him in the world, and lo! in the Hereafter he is among the righteous. When his Lord said unto him: Surrender! he said: I have surrendered to the Lord of the Worlds. The same did Abraham enjoin upon his sons, and also Jacob, (saying): O my sons! Lo! Allah hath chosen for you the (true) religion; therefore die not save as men who have surrendered (unto Him). Or were ye present when death came to Jacob, when he said unto his sons: What will ye worship after me? They said: We shall worship thy god, the god of thy fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac, One Allah, and unto Him we have surrendered.) (Al-Baqarah 2:130-133).

In general, the nation of monotheism is considered as one nation that came from Adam (peace be upon him) till Allah inherits the earth and all above it. Allah's prophets and messengers and their followers are part of the nation of monotheism, and the call for Islam is an extension of their call. Muslims have the priority to hold Allah's prophets and messengers and their heritage.

The prophets' traditions are our traditions; their experiences are our experiences; their history is our history and the legality given by Allah to them and their followers to dominate over this blessed holy land is an indication of our legality and right to hold this land and to rule it.

Allah Almighty had given this land to the Children of Israel when they were following the right path of God and when they were representing the nation of monotheism in ancient times. We are not ashamed and we do not hesitate to mention this fact, otherwise, we would explicitly contradict the Qur'an. For instance, when Moses (peace be upon him) said to his people: (O my people! enter the holy land which God hath assigned unto you, and turn not back ignominiously, for then will ye be overthrown, to your own ruin) (Al-Ma'idah 5:21). This legality was linked with the commitment by the Jews for monotheism and conformity with Allah's Law. But, when they rejected to believe in Allah, disobeyed His messengers, slew His prophets, broke their covenants and oaths, rejected to follow the Islamic creed preached by Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him) of whom the prophets of the Jews had given glad tidings to their people, as mentioned in the following verses: (Those who follow the messenger, the Prophet who can neither read nor write, whom they will find described in the Torah and the Gospel (which are) with them.) (A-'raf 7:157); (and giving Glad Tidings of an Apostle to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmed) (As-Saff 61:6); (And because of their breaking their covenant, We have cursed them and made hard their hearts.) (Al-Ma'idah 5:13); (Say: shall I point out to you something much worse than this (as judged) by the treatment it received from God? Those who incurred the curse of God and His wrath, those of whom some He transformed into apes and swine, those who worshipped Evil, these are (many times) worse in

rank, and far more astray from the even path!.) (Al-Ma'idah 5:60)

Therefore, the legality of dominating over the Holy Land was changed to the nation that follows the prophets' way and carries their banner - the nation of Islam. The question as to who has the legal right to dominate the Holy Land, according to our understanding, is not related to race, kind, or people, it is rather related to who is following the correct way.

To continue discussing the Jewish allegation of their right in Palestine according to the Old Testament, we would refer to what they mentioned in the changed Old Testament of giving this land to Abraham (peace be upon him) and his progeny. It includes the following: "...The Lord said to Abraham: Leave your land, your tribe, the house of your father and go to the land I am leading you to ... So, Abraham went as the Lord told him ... Then, they came to the land of Canaan ... and the Lord appeared before Abraham and said: 'To your progeny I give this land'...." In the altered Torah, there is also the following: "...And (Abraham) lived in the land of Canaan. Then the Lord said to him: 'Raise up your eyes and from the place where you were, look around you to the north, south, east and west, because all the land that your eyes can see I give to you and to your progeny for ever'...." It also includes: "... The Lord made a covenant with Abraham saying to your progeny I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river; the Euphrates...".

To refute these issues, in addition to our understanding of them in their fundamental religious context, we can say the following:

1. If there was a covenant, it was given to Abraham (peace be upon him) and his progeny, and the Children of Israel are not the only progeny from Abraham. The naturalized Arabs were also from the progeny of Abraham (the Children of Isma'il, peace be upon him) and Muhammad (peace be upon him) is one of them.

2. If these issues are linked with progeny and reproduction, all evidences show that the great majority of the Jews in our time are not from Abraham's progeny, because most of the Jews nowadays are from the Caspian Jews who embraced this religion in the ninth and tenth centuries CE (Common Era).

3. The Qur'an clarified the chieftom (Imamah) issues of Abraham and his progeny without any confusion. Consider what Allah Almighty says: (And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain Commands, which he fulfilled: He said: "I will make thee an Imam to the Nations." He pleaded: "And also (Imams) from my offspring!" He answered: "But My Promise is not within the reach of evil doers) (Al-Baqarah 2:124).

When Abraham asked God for the chieftom to be held by his offspring, God pointed out to him that his offspring are not entitled to have the chieftom and oppressors should not be allowed to obtain it. What more injustice, disbelief and hindering from the path of Allah and corruption in the earth has there been and is still being committed by the Children of Israel!!

Regarding the historical allegations of the Jews, historians have sufficiently refuted them. The period of the dominion of Islam is the longest one throughout history. Peoples who had settled in Palestine more than 1,000 years before the coming of the Jews remained settled there until now. They were mixed with the Arab immigrations before and after the Muslim Conquest. These now comprise the people of Palestine with its Muslim religion, Arabic language and Arab traits.

Palestine in Ancient Ages

Man lived in Palestine since the early ancient ages. There are ruins which trace back to the ancient Stone Age (500,000-14,000 BC) and the middle Stone Age (14,000-8000 BC). This age in Palestine is called Al-Natoofieh civilization, attributed to Al-Natoof caves, north of Jerusalem. Al-Natoof origin is not yet known. Their civilization was concentrated on the coast. They lived in caves such as those found on Al-Karmel Mountain.

In the Modern Stone Age (8000-4500 BC) the cave life of man in Palestine was changed to settlements. He changed from food collector to food producer. The first evidence supporting settlement life appeared in Jericho, which is the most ancient city in the world. It was established in 8000 BC.

The Brass Stone Age ran from 4500 BC to 3300 BC. A lot of archaeological civilization locations that trace back to that era were discovered in the Beer Sheba region, between the Hebron mountains and the Dead Sea and along the sea coast of Al-Khudiera.

The beginning of the third millennium BC was characterized with the emergence of the old empires in the east accompanied by the discovery of writing and the start of writing history. From here, historical ages started in Palestine.

The era that extended from 3200 BC to 2000 BC is called the Ancient Bronze Age. It was characterized by the emergence of the fortified defending towns built on high hills.

They were spread out in large numbers, and most of them were built in the middle and north of Palestine. The most important locations were in Bashan, Majideo, Al-Afoula, Ras Al-Nakoura and Tal Al-Farei'a north of Nablus. In the third millennium BC, the population of Palestine increased, and the cities grew and became political and economic powers. This period can be called the period of "small-States of towns."

During the third millennium BC, the Ammonites, the Canaanites and also the Yabousians and the Phoenicians, which are considered sub-branches of the Canaanites, had migrated to settle in Palestine. Their emigration to Palestine was around 2500 BC. The Canaanites settled on the plains of Palestine and the Ammonites settled in the mountains. The Yabousians settled in and around Jerusalem; they built the city of Jerusalem and named it "Yabous" then "Hierosolyma". The Phoenicians settled on the north coast of Palestine and in Lebanon.

Reliable historians believe that the Ammonites, the Canaanites, the Yabousians and the Phoenicians had come from the Arabian Peninsula and that the majority of the current population of Palestine, especially the villagers, are the offspring of those old tribes and peoples or the Arabs and Muslims who settled there after the Muslim Conquest.

During that period, the emigration of the Canaanites took place on a large scale. They became the original population of the country. The name of "Land of Canaan" was the oldest name to which the land of Palestine had been known. The Canaanites built most of the towns in Palestine. Their number - within the borders of the current Palestine - was more than 200 towns during the second millennium BC, hundred of years before the coming of the Hebraic Jews. In addition to Jericho and Jerusalem, there were other old towns, namely Shechem (Balatah, Nablus), Bashan, Ashkelon, Akka, Haifa, Hebron, Ashdod, A'aqur, Beer Sheba and Bethlehem.

After that time, the Middle Bronze Age followed from 2000 BC to 1550 BC. The first half of the second millennium BC witnessed the dominion of the Hyksos, who ruled Palestine during the eighteenth to sixteenth centuries BC. It seems that during this age (around 1900 BC), Abraham (peace be upon him) came to Palestine accompanied by his nephew "Lut" (peace be upon him) and there, Isaac and Jacob (peace be upon them) were born.

The Late Bronze Age (1550 BC-1200 BC) started with the withdrawal of the Hyksos dominion from Palestine and the subsequent control by the Egyptian regime. As to the Iron Age (1200 BC-330 BC), it seems that in its early period (approximately 1200 BC), Palestine had received groups of emigrants who came from various regions, the most important ones were "the peoples of the sea" migrations. It seems that they came from western Asia and from islands of the Aegean Sea (Crete and others). At the beginning, those peoples launched their attacks against the coasts of Syria and Egypt, but Ramses the Third, Pharaoh of Egypt, drove them away from his country in the Blouzioun battle (near Port Said) and gave them permission to settle in the southern part of Palestine. In the archeological inscriptions, the name of "PLST" was mentioned and, accordingly, those peoples were called "Palestians" and then the letter "n" was inserted in their name (maybe because of the plural). So they became the "Palestinians". The Palestinians built five kingdoms, including the cities of Gaza, Ashdod, Jet, Aqroun and Ashkelon. These cities were possibly ancient Canaanites, and they expanded and organized them and built two new cities, namely Lod and Saklash. They occupied the rest of the coast up to the Al-Karmel Mountains. Then they captured Marj Ibn Amir. The Palestinians soon mixed with the Canaanites, used their language and worshipped their gods (Dajoun, Ba`l and Ashtar). Although the Palestinians had been mixed with the people, they gave this land their name, so, it was called Palestine.

It is apparent from the comparative historical indications that Moses (peace be upon him) led the Children of Israel towards the Holy Land in the second half of the thirteenth century BC, i.e. in the Late Bronze Age. This Age and the Early Iron Age witnessed the beginning of the Jews entering Palestine and the emergence of the Kingdom of David and Solomon (peace be upon them) between 1004 BC and 923 BC. This period was divided into two kingdoms: the Israel Kingdom (923 BC-722 BC) and the Judah Kingdom (923 BC-586 BC). Each one ruled over a limited part of the land of Palestine. From 730 BC, Palestine, in general, was under the Assyrian dominion, which came from Iraq, till 645 BC. Thereafter, the Babylonians were the successors in dominion till 539 BC. The Assyrians and the Babylonians exchanged the domination over Palestine with Egypt. Then, the Persians invaded Palestine and ruled it from 539 BC to 332 BC. After that, Palestine entered the Greek Hellenistic Age. It was ruled by the Ptolemaics till 198 BC and was followed by Seleucias till 64 BC, at which time the Romans arrived and dominated over Palestine. After the division of the Roman Empire, Palestine was still influenced by the Eastern Roman Empire "Roman State", with Constantinople as its capital. Thereafter, the Muslim Conquest took place and gave it its Arab-Islamic character.

The Mission of Truth and the Tour of Prophets in the Holy Land

Abraham (peace be upon him), was the first of the Prophets whom we know who lived and died in Palestine. He is the father of all Prophets, as many prophets descended from his offspring, including Prophets Isaac, Jacob, Yusuf, Isma`il and Muhammad (peace be upon them).

According to traditions, Abraham (peace be upon him), was born in Ur in Iraq and lived there for a period of time. He destroyed idols, called for monotheism and faced Al-Namroud with evidence. They tried to burn him at the stake as a punishment for destroying the idols, but Allah Almighty made it cool and a means of safety for him. Abraham migrated with his nephew Lut for the sake of Allah: He said: (I will go to my Lord. He will surely guide me) (As-Saffat 37:99).

It seems that Abraham in the beginning migrated with his companions to Harran (Al-Raha), which is presently located to the south of Turkey and north of Syria. From there, he migrated to the land of Canaan (Palestine). Allah Almighty says: (But we delivered him and Lut (and directed them) to the land which we have blessed for the nations.) (Al-Anbiyaa` 21:71) Historians estimate that his arrival in Palestine was around 1900 BC. This date for the ancient history of Iraq represented the end of the "Third Ur" reign, which was ruled by the Samaritans and the beginning of the old Babylon era in which the Semitic elements that came from the Arabian Peninsula (Ammonites) prevailed.

Abraham (peace be upon him), dwelled in "Shechem" near Nablus. From there, he moved towards Ramallah and Jerusalem, passing through Hebron and then Beer Sheba, where he settled for some time. He then departed for Egypt. He returned from Egypt accompanied by Hajar. She was presented to him as a gift by the Egyptian leader. It was also mentioned that she was the daughter of Pharaoh or an Egyptian princess. Then he returned to Palestine and passed through Gaza, where he met Abu Malek, the Emir of Gaza. Then he moved between Beer Sheba and Hebron. Thereafter, he ascended to Jerusalem. Lut (peace be upon him) moved to the south of the Dead Sea as he was sent by Allah as an apostle to the people of that region, while Abraham remained in the mountains of Jerusalem and Hebron. Isma`il (peace

be upon him) was born to Abraham from his wife Hajar. Thirteen years later, Isaac was born to Abraham from his wife Sarah. It seems that Abraham's sons were born while he was in his old age. This we know from the following verse of the Qur'an, in the words of Sarah: (She said: "Alas for me! Shall I bear a child, seeing I am an old woman, and my husband here is an old man?") (Hud 11:72)

It seems that Abraham (peace be upon him) visited the Hejaz many times. He brought Isma'il and his mother Hajar to Makkah. The story of Hajar running back and forth between the Safa and the Marwa hills and the gushing out of the Zamzam water is well known. Then Abraham returned and built the Ka'bah with Isma'il: (And remember, Abraham and Isma'il raised the foundations of the House (with this prayer): "Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us: for thou art the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing") (Al-Baqarah 2:127). However, the place of settlement of Abraham remained Palestine, where he died and was buried in Al-Makfeelah cave near Hebron, which is the city named after his name (peace be upon him). It is said that his age was 175 years.

Abraham (peace be upon him) lived at the time of Jerusalem's ruler "Malaki Sadeq", who seemed to be a monotheist and a friend of his. At that time, the believers in Allah were very few. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) related that Abraham said to his wife Sarah after he had visited one of the powerful people at that time: "There are no believers on earth except for you and myself." This apparently happened when they went to Egypt. This can be concluded from the verse of Allah Almighty: (Abraham was indeed a model (Ummat: Nation), devoutly obedient to God) (An-Nahl 16:120)

However, Abraham, the Father of the Prophets, was one of the firm-willed prophets. He had a missionary role in calling for the message of monotheism in Palestine. He used to establish mosques and prayer niches for the worship of God everywhere he used to visit. It seems that he did not have trouble or distress with the people of Palestine, and he was not forced to leave it because of his religion and message. He remained settled in Palestine with full freedom of movement until his death.

Lut (peace be upon him) dwelled south of the Dead Sea. He was sent as an apostle to the village of "Sodom". The people of that village were committing sodomy. Their apostle Lut prohibited them from doing so, but they did not obey him. As a result, Allah punished them for that and turned their village upside down and rained down on them brimstones hard as baked clay. Allah Almighty says in the Qur'an: (We also sent Lut. He said to his people: "Do ye commit lewdness such as no people in creation (ever) committed before you? For ye practice your lusts on men in preference to women: ye are indeed a people transgressing beyond bounds. And his people gave no answer but this. They said, "Drive them out of your city: these are indeed men who want to be clean and pure!" But we saved him and his family, except his wife: she was of those who lagged behind. And we rained down on them a shower of (brimstone): Then see what was the end of those who indulged in sin and crime!) (Al-A'raf 7:80-84) and (When Our Decree issued, We turned (the cities) upside down, and rained down on them brimstones hard as baked clay, spread, layer on layer, marked as from thy Lord: nor are they ever far from those who do wrong!) (Hud 11:82-83).

The Qur'an indicates that Abraham (peace be upon him) was contemporary with Lut's mission and the destroying of his people. Angels came and gave him glad tidings of Isaac and told him that they were sent to destroy Lut's people. He, then, said to them: (... But there is Lut there. They said: 'Well do we know who is there: we will certainly save him and his following, except his wife' ...) (Al-Ankabut 29:32) Thus, Allah Almighty gave victory to his apostle Lut and purified his holy land from "...the town which practiced abominations..." The glad tidings came to Abraham that Isaac would carry the banner of monotheism after him in the Holy Land so that the spreading of God's light would continue.

Isaac lived in the land of Palestine. Allah Almighty blessed him with Jacob (peace be upon him), who is considered by the Jews as their father. Isaac and Jacob were the light of guidance after Abraham (peace be upon him). Consider the following marvelous Qur'anic text: (And We bestowed on him Isaac and, as an additional gift (a grandson), Jacob, and We made righteous men of every one (of them). And we made them leaders, guiding (men) by Our Command, and We sent them inspiration to do good deeds, to establish regular prayers, and to practice regular charity; and they constantly served Us (and Us only)) (Al-Anbiyaa' 21:72-73).

Jacob (peace be upon him) was born in the eighteenth century BC (around 1750 BC) in Palestine. But, it seems that he immigrated to Harran "Al-Raha", where he got married and produced eleven sons, among whom was Joseph (peace be upon him). His twelfth son, Benjamin, was born in the land of Canaan (Palestine). Jacob (peace be upon him) and his children returned to Palestine and lived in Sa'ar near Hebron. The history concerning his son, Joseph, is well known and detailed in Surah Yusuf (Joseph) in the Qur'an. The story unfolds as Joseph's brothers plot against him and throw him down to the bottom of a well. Then Joseph was found by a caravan of travelers who sold him as a slave in Egypt. He grew up there, prayed to Allah, rejected women's temptations and was imprisoned till he was honored by Allah and was put in charge of the storehouses of the land of Egypt. This was a result of his skillful interpretation of a dream by a king, and his absolution was proved. Joseph brought his father, Jacob, and his brothers to Egypt where Allah restored Jacob's sight after his eyes became white from the sorrow he experienced over his perceived loss of Joseph. Joseph had also forgiven his brothers. Some narrations mentioned that Jacob lived in Egypt for 17 years, but he was buried near his grandfather and father - Abraham and Isaac - in Hebron.

The period during which Jacob and his children lived in Egypt coincided with the domination by the Hyksos over Egypt from 1774 BC to 1567 BC; they were not originally from Egypt.

However, it seems that Joseph and his brothers, the children of Jacob (Israel), were all kept busy with the liberty of work and worship in Egypt. They played their role in the calling for monotheism. However, their condition changed in the successive generations. The Children of Israel fell under the oppression of the Pharaoh till Allah sent Moses to Pharaoh to take the Children of Israel out of Egypt to the Holy Land.

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