Israel--the Promised Land of the Jewish People--Thoughts for Matot-Masei

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Angel for Shabbat--Matot-Masei

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

It seems to have become "politically correct" to speak of narratives, rather than to focus on historical truth. This tendency is blatantly evident in some discussions about Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. We are told that each group has its own narrative, implying that each group clings to its own version of truth and should be respected for its views. This approach--seemingly objective and non-judgmental--actually leads to the distortion of facts and undermining of historic truth.

This week's Torah reading tells of the Israelites as they were on the verge of entering the Promised Land. The Torah provides specific boundaries of the land…the land that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob…and the entire People of Israel.

It isn't a "Jewish narrative" that Israel is the Jewish homeland; it is historically true. It has been true since biblical times; it was true during Temple days in antiquity; it was true through the nearly 1900 years of exile in which Jews prayed facing Jerusalem and yearned for the return to their holy land; it is true based on the ongoing presence of Jews in the land of Israel throughout the ages, based on archaeological evidence, based on archives, documents, photographs etc.

For there to be peace between Israel and its neighbors, it is essential to seek truth, not "narratives." Here are a few historical facts that must be understood.

The Muslim Ottoman Empire controlled the land of Israel for hundreds of years. Relatively few Jews lived in the holy land during those centuries. The Ottoman Empire could very easily have established a Muslim country in the land of Israel with Jerusalem as its capital city. The thought never occurred to them! Palestine was a poor backwater of little significance; Jerusalem was an old, decrepit city that no one (except Jews) cared very much about. There was no call for a Palestinian State, and no claim that Jerusalem should be a capitol of a Muslim country.

Between 1948 and 1967, Jordan controlled the West Bank and the Old City of Jerusalem. Egypt controlled Gaza. Neither Jordan nor Egypt ceded one inch of territory to Palestinian Arab rule. Neither suggested the need for a Palestinian country, nor took any steps in the direction of creating a Palestinian State. Jordan did not declare Jerusalem as a capital city of Palestinians.

In June 1967, Israel defeated its implacable Arab enemies in the remarkable Six Days War. In the process, Israel took control of the Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the Old City of Jerusalem. In making peace with Egypt, Israel ceded the Sinai to Egypt. In attempting to create conciliatory gestures to Palestinian Arabs, Israel ceded much of the West Bank and Gaza to the Palestinian Authority. Israel is the only country in the world to have given territory to the Palestinian Arabs. Israel has a legitimate claim to much of this territory, but for the sake of peace decided to forego pressing its claims.

Although no Muslim or Arab nation, when having control of Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, created (or even suggested creating) a Palestinian State with a capital of Jerusalem--the current propaganda in the "politically correct" world is: the Palestinian Arabs have a right to their own State with Jerusalem as capital.

This propaganda ignores the Bible, the thousands of years of Jewish history in the holy land; ignores the rights of the people of Israel; ignores truth.

Certainly, Israel is not a perfect country; and there is no doubt that it has made errors in its policies--as has every other country on the face of the earth. But Israel has a right to flourish and to enjoy the fruits of its labors and creativity and idealistic endeavors. Israel does not ask to be judged more kindly than any other nation--only that it should not be judged less kindly than any other nation.

Misguided individuals and countries who forget history, who ignore or deny Israel's rights, who look the other way when Israel is maligned and attacked--such people are part of the problem, not the solution.

If there is to be peace in the Middle East, the focus should not be on “narratives” but on historical fact. Once this recognition of Israel’s historical right is acknowledged, a real peace process can begin that will bring untold benefits to all parties.