

***The affinity between the people of Israel and the Holy Land according to the Qur'an and its classic Islamic commentators\****

***Abstract***

*The central issue constituting the essence of the dispute between the Jewish world and the Islamic world is related to the status of the land that the Jews call "The Land of Israel", and the Muslims currently term "Palestine". Much has been written in Jewish sources about the land, as it is referred to in brief or the Holy Land, and the Jewish world's affinity to it. Days of special mourning have even been set aside to mark the destruction of their religious, spiritual and national centers in the land and to express a belief in the rapid return to it and in its rebuilding. The longing for the Land of Israel is manifested in many prayers in a variety of ceremonies related to the cycle of life, both that of the public and that of the individual, as well as to other important occasions.*

*The Muslims, in contrast, argue for their right to the land, because it was their property for 1,400 years; That is, almost since the beginnings of Islam. With time, other religious motives were added to feed the relationship between the Islamic world and the Land of Israel, such as the Muslims' belief that their prophet Muhammad rose to heaven from here and the direction of prayer was toward Jerusalem right from the start of Islam. The land is, also, the burial ground of personalities from the Muslim world and of eminent Biblical figures "adopted" and accepted as prophets by Islam as well, such as the Patriarchs, the tribal heads of Israel, Samuel the Prophet, Elijah the Prophet, and Job, among others.*

*The objective of this discussion is to clarify these arguments between Islam and Judaism strictly on the basis of the Qur'an and classic Islamic sources, such as Tabari and Qurtubi, among others. The discussion here will concentrate only on the land; it will not deal with disputes over Jerusalem and the Temple Mount.*

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**Keyword:** *Palestine; Holy Land; Temple Mount; Islam; Judaism; Israel; Muhammad; Qur'an; Tabari; Qurtubi; Allah; Egypt; Shi'ah; Sinai; al-Sham; Jericho; Abraham.*

\* A short list of the sources for this study is presented at the end of the article. A complete list of the sources appears at the end of the book (in Hebrew), 'Le-mi shayyekhet ha-Arets ha-zot?' (*To Whom Does This Land Belong?*), which published in 2013. The present list is based on one of the book's chapters.

There are about ten places in the Qur'an referring to the Holy Land, and in most cases stating explicitly that it is intended for the people of Israel as is inumerated below.<sup>1</sup> There is no verse, whether explicit or implicit, nor even alluding to the saying of the land being intended for Muslims, for Palestinians, or for anyone else who does not belong to the people of Israel.

One of the more striking places in which it is explicitly determined that Allah willed the land to the children of Israel is found in Chapter 7 of the Qur'an:<sup>2</sup>

***Qur'an: Allah Wills to the Children of Israel the East of the land and Its West***

We caused the people who were considered weak to inherit the land, its eastern parts and its western parts, which We blessed. And the good word of your Lord was fulfilled for the children of Israel because they exercised restraint. (Qur'an 7[39]: 137).

وَأَوْرَثْنَا الْقَوْمَ الَّذِينَ كَانُوا يُسْتَضْعَفُونَ مَشْرِقَ  
الْأَرْضِ وَمَغْرِبِهَا الَّتِي بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا وَتَمَّتْ كَلِمَتُ رَبِّكَ  
الْحُسْنَىٰ عَلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ بِمَا صَبَرُوا

The Qur'anic exegete Mohammad *Qurtubi* explains:

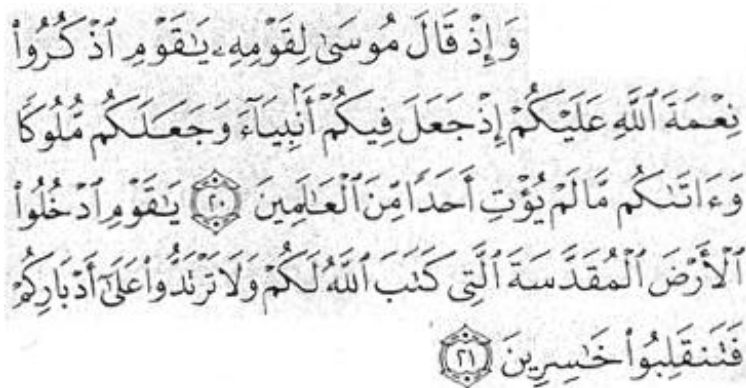
The children of Israel inherited al-Sham... Possibly the whole world may be the property of the Israelites, for David and Solomon were of the children of Israel, and they ruled the land... Allah granted the Land of Israel as an inheritance for the children of Israel, killing the Amalekites, who were there...

Another very striking section of the Qur'an relating to the affinity of Israel to the land is found in Chapter 5. In a discussion of the issue in debate here, the people of Israel are described as God's chosen people.

1. Qur'an 7[39]: 104-110, 128-137; 20[45]: 47; 26[47]: 17; 17[50]: 104; 11[52]: 57; 2[87]: 58; 4[92]: 154; 24[102]: 55; 5[112]: 21-26. The discussion in those chapters is scattered in the appropriate places in the present work.
2. Qur'an 7[39]: 137. In addition to what is written above, it should be noted that there are many ordinary geographical citations in the Qur'an, such as "Qaryah" (city or district), bab (gate), and balad (city). Many commentators ascribe them to various sites in the Holy Land.

***Qur'an: Allah Praises the Status of the People of Israel and Directs It to Enter the Land Which He Wrote for Them***

...Moses said to his people, 'O my people, recall the good that Allah granted you when He appointed prophets among you and made you kings, and gave you what He gave to no other inhabitants of the world. 'My people, enter the Holy Land which Allah wrote for you and do not turn back, for then you will be lost.' (5[112]: 20-21)



Many exegetes of the Qur'an relate to the two verses, and it may be seen from what they say that they have difficulty in explaining the plain meaning of these words; It is impossible that, in their opinion, that the words "Kings" and "Prophets" denote actual Kings and prophets, for it is now the children of Israel who exited Egypt. *Tabari* explicates that the intention of the word "prophets" are the seventy elders chosen by Moses to go up with him to Mt. Sinai in order to ask forgiveness from God after the sin of the Golden Calf.<sup>3</sup> *Tabari* further elucidates that the word "Kings" is intended to refer to all of the children of Israel, since like Kings they merited to have water from the rock, quail, mannah, and clouds of glory while in the desert (*Tabarsi*).

Fadl (d. 1153, Shi'it) explains that "Kings" is a term for the children of Israel, whom Allah granted Pharaoh's property and that of the Amalekites, and gave you what he gave to no others inhabitants of the world.

*Tabari* explains that the intention is the parting of the sea, the removal of the clouds (of glory) from over them and to other large events. *Qurtubi*, too, adopts *Tabari*'s interpretation of the words "prophets" and "angels".

The Holy Land, about which Allah wrote for you.

The verb "wrote" here is linked to the divine promise to the children of Israel to grant them the Holy Land. This constituted a reason for commentators to explain this verb in various and interesting ways as will now be detailed.

3. See Numbers 11: 16, 24-25; also, Qur'an 7[39]: 155.

שנתון "שאנ" – תשע"ה – כרך כ

**Tabari's Interpretation of the Expression "which Allah wrote for you" (5[112]: 212)**

Tabari, for one, presents three different interpretations of the verb "wrote":

[Athbata] stated that there is reference to the hidden calendar (*lawh mahfuz*) – The divine calendar preserved with Allah, in which are written the chronicles of humanity for time immemorial and according to which the land is yours [the children of Israel], for [the purpose of] a Tabernacle and dwellings in place of the Giants found there: If somebody inquires: Why did it [the verse] say "God wrote for you", you know that they did not enter it, according to what is said [in verse 26], the answer is: It was written for (all of) the children of Israel, for a Tabernacle and for dwellings, and they lived there and stayed there and it became theirs, as Allah said to Moses: Enter the Holy Land about which God wrote you; in other words, Allah wrote it for the children of Israel....The intention is not only for those whom he commanded to enter by themselves...

The second explanation for the verb "wrote" determines this meaning: he granted (*wahaba*). The third interpretation – commanded it for you: Allah commanded you about it.

ويعنى بقوله : ﴿ أَلَيْسَ كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ ﴾ : التى أثبت فى اللوح المحفوظ أنها لكم مساكن ومنازل ، دون الجبابرة التى فيها .  
 فإن قال قائل : فكيف قال : ﴿ أَلَيْسَ كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ ﴾ . وقد علمت أنهم لم يدخلوها بقوله : ﴿ فَإِنَّهَا مُحَرَّمَةٌ عَلَيْهِمْ ﴾ . فكيف يكون مثبتاً فى اللوح المحفوظ أنها مساكن لهم ، ومحرومة عليهم سكنها ؟  
 قيل : إنها كُتبت لبني إسرائيل داراً ومساكن ، وقد سكنوها ونزلوها ، وصارت لهم كما قال الله جلّ وعزّ ، وإنما قال لهم موسى : ﴿ ادْخُلُوا الْأَرْضَ الْمُقَدَّسَةَ الَّتِي كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ ﴾ . يعنى بها : كتبها الله لبني إسرائيل ، وكان الذين أمرهم موسى بدخولها من بني إسرائيل ، ولم يعنِ ﷺ أن الله تعالى ذكره كتبها للذين أمرهم بدخولها بأعيانهم .  
 حدثنا ابن حميد ، قال : ثنا سلمة ، عن محمد بن إسحاق : ﴿ أَلَيْسَ كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ ﴾ : التى وهب الله لكم ...  
 وكان الشدى يقول : معنى ﴿ كَتَبَ ﴾ فى هذا الموضع بمعنى « أتمر » .

Tabari similarly interprets the expression "and do not go back lest you lose [your life]"

(5[112]: 21):

## God Commands the Children of Israel to Kill the Previous Residents of the Land of Israel

Do not retreat, those who are deterred are behind you... but go according to the command of Allah, who commands you to kill them and to fight them on their land... It is said that Allah may be ascendant commands them to fight the heretics in it [the Land] and commands them to enter it. Their avoidance, then, of what Allah commanded them causes a double violation: First, refraining from fulfilling the commandment of conquest (fard al-jihad), which God commanded them; Second, their embittering God's commandment in neglecting to enter the land.

القول في تأويل قوله : ﴿ وَلَا تَزِدُّوا عَلَى آذَانِكُمْ فَتَنْقَلِبُوا خَاسِرِينَ ﴾ .

وهذا خير من الله عز ذكره عن قيل موسى عليه السلام لقومه من بني إسرائيل ،  
إذ أمرهم عن أمر الله عز ذكره بإثاء بدخول الأرض المقدسة ، أنه قال لهم : انفضوا أيها  
القوم لأمر الله الذي أمركم به من دخول الأرض المقدسة ، ﴿ وَلَا تَزِدُّوا ﴾ . يقول :  
لا ترجعوا القهقري مرتدين ﴿ عَلَى آذَانِكُمْ ﴾ . يعنى : إلى ورائكم ، ولكن انفضوا  
قُدماً لأمر الله الذي أمركم به من الدخول على القوم الذين أمركم الله بقتالهم ،  
والهجوم عليهم فى أرضهم ، وأن الله عز ذكره قد كتبها لكم مسكناً وقراراً .  
قيل : إن الله عز ذكره كان أمرهم <sup>١٧</sup> بقتال من فيها من أهل الكفر به ، وفرض  
عليهم دخولها ، فاشتوجب القوم الخسارة بتركهم إذن فرض الله عليهم من وجهين ؛  
أحدهما ، تضييع فرض الجهاد الذى كان الله عز ذكره فرضه عليهم . والثانى ،  
خلافهم أمر الله فى تركهم دخول الأرض ، وقولهم لنبيهم موسى عليه السلام - إذ قال  
لهم : ﴿ ادْخُلُوا الْأَرْضَ الْمُقَدَّسَةَ ﴾ - : ﴿ وَإِنَّا لَنَنَدِّخُهَا حَتَّى يَخْرُجُوا مِنْهَا فَإِن  
يَخْرُجُوا مِنْهَا فَإِنَّا دَاخِلُونَ ﴾ .

## Egypt (too) Is an Inheritance for the People of Israel

A close look at the Islamic sources, the Qur'an and its exegeses, shows the opinion to be well founded that Allah bequeathed to the children of Israel not only the Land of Israel but also Egypt. One verse states:

We [Allah] seek to grant favor unto those who had been persecuted on the land [i.e., the children of Israel], and to make them leaders and inheritors, to settle them on the land, and to show Pharaoh and Haman and their hosts all that they feared of him.<sup>4</sup>

4. Qur'an 28[49]: 5.

שנתון "שא" - תשע"ה - כרך כ

“... and to make them inheritors” – Tabari explains: to make them inheritors of the house of Pharaoh, that they will inherit the land from those who destroy them.

*Qurtubi* explains the following verses similarly:

“And We seek to grant them favor” – we will grant them our favor, and our good will be upon them.

“... and to make them leaders” – such as...a source of blessing...rulers and kings.

“and to make them inheritors” – of King Pharaoh; they will inherit his property and will reside in the homes of the ancient [*qubt*] Egyptians.

“And to settle them on the land” – we will make them leaders of the land, of its inhabitants, until they reign over it; that is, over the land of al-Sham and Egypt.

Another verse dealing with the people of Israel’s inheriting Egypt states the following:

### Allah Drowns the Egyptians, Bequeaths Their Property to the Children of Israel, and Selects Them for His Servants

Take out my servant this very night, because they are chasing after you: leave the sea split, because they are drowning hosts: they have left behind gardens and springs in seeded fields, luxuriant residences, and the most pleasurable satisfactions: so it was, and we bequeathed all this to another people: the sky and the earth did not cry for them, and no deferment was given them; thus we saved the children of Israel from shameful punishment at the hands of Pharaoh, he who is arrogant and unrestrained in behavior: we chose them knowingly to be above all inhabitants of the world.<sup>5</sup>

فَأَسْرِ بِعَبْدِي لَيْلًا إِنَّكُمْ  
 مُتَّبِعُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾ وَأَتْرِكُ الْبَحْرَ رَهْوًا إِنَّهُمْ جُنْدٌ مُّغْرَقُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾ كَمْ  
 تَرَكُوا مِنْ جَنَّتٍ وَعَيْونِ ﴿٢٥﴾ وَزُرُوعٍ وَمَقَامٍ كَرِيمٍ ﴿٢٦﴾ وَنَعْمَةٍ  
 كَانُوا فِيهَا فَيَكْبِهِينَ ﴿٢٧﴾ كَذَلِكَ وَأَوْرَثْنَاهَا قَوْمًا آخَرِينَ ﴿٢٨﴾  
 فَمَا بَكَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّمَاءُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَا كَانُوا مُنظَرِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾ وَلَقَدْ  
 بَحَيْنَانِي إِسْرَاءَ يَلٍ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ الْمُهِينِ ﴿٣٠﴾ مِنْ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ  
 كَانَ عَلِيًّا مِنَ الْمُسْرِفِينَ ﴿٣١﴾ وَلَقَدْ اخْتَرْنَاهُمْ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ عَلَى  
 الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

5. Qur'an 44[64]: 23-32.

*Tabari* explains these phrases:

*"Take out my servant this very night"* – and these are the people of Israel, walking at night, before the morning.

*"...because they are chasing after you"* – Pharaoh and his people are chasing after you while you abandon their place and their land.

*"they have left behind"* – Pharaoh and the ancient Egyptians left...gardens and trees, springs, which were in abundance in their gardens and agricultural plants that were growing in their fields.

*"We [Allah] bequeathed"* – the gardens and the springs and the plants and the residences and the pleasures of another people after their loss. There are those who say that "another people," the intention is to the people of Israel. We selected the children of Israel because of knowing them over the wise men of their time, and this was the time of Moses of blessed memory. We chose them knowingly to be above all the inhabitants of the world; that is, they were selected over the people of their time....

*Qurtubi* follows in *Tabari*'s path, explaining:

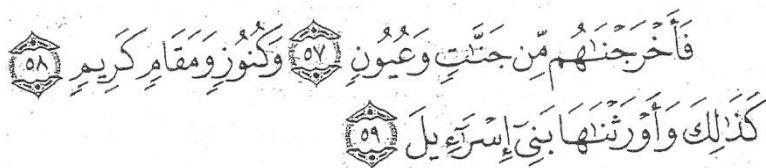
*"and the most pleasurable satisfactions"* – the Nile ... there are those who say, the land of Egypt because of its numerous blessings.

*"We bequeathed all this to another people"* – in other words, the people of Israel, whom Allah, may he be elevated, granted the ground of Egypt after they had been subjugated by them, and they were its inheritors, just as one receives an inheritance.

Another verse dealing with endowing Egypt to the people of Israel is the following:

### **Qur'an: God Bequeaths the Property of the Egyptians to the Children of Israel**

So we drove them out of gardens and springs and treasures and pleasant abodes; and We bequeathed all this to the children of Israel. (26[47]: 57-59)



The general lines of this quotation are similar to the one previously cited (44[64]: 23-32) both in style and in content.

*Qurtubi* devotes an extensive discussion to the above verses, and sums it up like this:

*"...gardens, and springs, and treasures, and an abode of honor, Allah bequeathed [all that] to the people of Israel....* The Israelites returned to Egypt after the loss of Pharaoh

and his people. It is said that by 'inheritance' here, what is meant are the jewels of Pharaoh's family, *which they borrowed at the command of Allah may he be elevated.*"

*Tabari* repeats what he said in connection with the two previous verses, but in the present context relates a story the origin of which is presumably found in the Talmud and according to which the following event occurred as the Israelites were about to exit Egypt:

Moses went out at night, but there was an eclipse of the moon, and the land grew dark. He said to his friends: Joseph made me promise that we would be rescued from Pharaoh's hand and made me swear to take his bones. Moses went out that night to pray at the tomb [of Joseph] and found an old woman, whose house [was on his grave]...She said [to Moses]: Carry me and take me out with you. And he put Joseph's bones in his clothes, and then lifted up the old woman...

The Jewish sources, as was mentioned, offer a story along similar lines to *Tabari's* Joseph story:

And how did Moses our father know where Joseph was buried? They said: Serah the daughter of Asher survived from that generation. Moses went to her and said: Do you know where Joseph is buried? She said to him: they made him a coffin of metal in Egypt and set it in the Nile, in the river, in order that its waters should be blessed. Moses went and stood by the bank of the Nile. He said to it: Joseph, the time has come that the Holy One Blessed Be He has sworn, that I redeem you all, and the oath that you made Israel swear has now to be fulfilled. If you show yourself, all will be well; if not, we are absolved of your oath. Immediately Joseph's coffin floated to the surface....<sup>6</sup>

### **The Qur'an and Its Exegetes on the Boundaries of the Land of Israel**

The Qur'an does not specify the boundaries of the land that Allah intended for the people of Israel, but gives only general descriptions as mentioned earlier:

"Enter the Holy Land which God has written for you (5[112]: 26). We bequeathed to the people who thought itself weak this land, to its east and to its west, to which we gave our blessing (7[39]: 137).

Many commentators have dealt with the issue of borders. Following are interesting points made by *Tabari*, who offers a variety of opinions on this issue:

### **Islamic Definitions of the Boundaries of the "Holy Land" (Qur'an 5[112]: 21), according to Mohammad Tabari**

- \* "The Holy Land": Some said the meaning is *Mt. Sinai and its environs (al-tur wama hawlahu)*. Among those who said this: Muhammad ibn 'Amr told me: Abu 'Azim told us, in the name of Mujahid: "The Holy Land": Mt. Sinai and whatever is around it...
- \* Others said: The meaning is *al-Sham*. Among those who said this: Hasan ibn Yahya, said in the name of Qatadah, who said: "The Holy

6. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sotah 3a.

Land: the intention is al-Sham."

- \* Others said: The meaning is the *land of Jericho (ard ariha)*. Among those who said this: Yunus told us, he said: Wahab told us, saying..."Enter the Holy Land that Allah wrote for you, he said: Jericho."
- \* And there are those who say that the "Holy Land" is Damascus and Palestine and part of Jordan (Dimashq wafalastin wa-ba'd al-urdunn).
- \* And the most proper statement on this matter, insofar as exactness is concerned: "It is not impossible that it is the territory between the Euphrates and 'Arish Masr (a term for the east bank of the Nile), since all the commentators and historians and religious elders are full of information about it" (*lan takhruj min an takun min al-ard allati ma bayna al-furat w'arish masr li'ijma' jami' ahl al-t'awil wa-lsiyar wal'ulama' bil-akhbar 'ala zalika*).

... ثم اختلف أهل التأويل في الأرض التي عناها بالأرض المقدسة؛ فقال بعضهم:

عنى بذلك الطور وما حوله...

ذكر من قال ذلك

حدثني محمد بن عمرو، قال: ثنا أبو عاصم، قال: ثنا عيسى، عن ابن أبي

نحیح، عن مجاهد: ﴿الْأَرْضُ الْمُقَدَّسَةَ﴾: الطور وما حوله...

وقال آخرون: هو الشام.

ذكر من قال ذلك

حدثنا الحسن بن يحيى، قال: أخبرنا عبد الرزاق، قال: أخبرنا معمر، عن

قتادة في قوله: ﴿الْأَرْضُ الْمُقَدَّسَةَ﴾. قال: هي الشام.

وقال آخرون: هي أرض أريحا.

ذكر من قال ذلك

حدثني يونس، قال: أخبرنا ابن وهب، قال: قال ابن زيد في قوله: ﴿ادْخُلُوا

الْأَرْضَ الْمُقَدَّسَةَ الَّتِي كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ﴾. قال: أريحا...

وقيل: إن الأرض المقدسة دمشق وفلسطين وبعض الأردن.

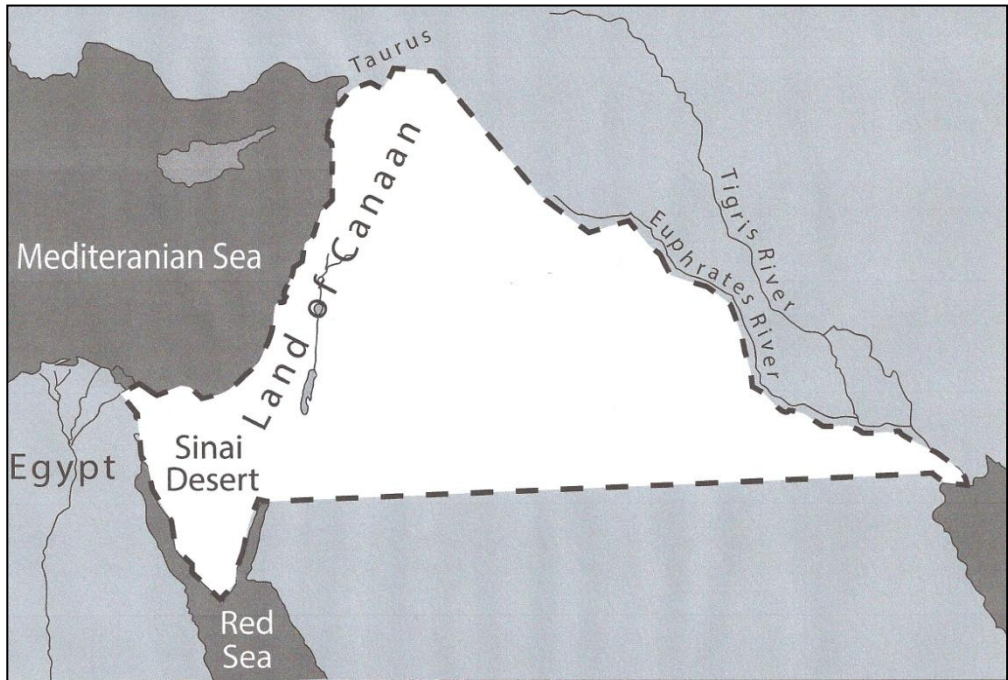
وعنى بقوله: ﴿الْمُقَدَّسَةَ﴾. المطهرة المباركة.

كما حدثني محمد بن عمرو، قال: ثنا أبو عاصم، قال: ثنا عيسى، عن ابن أبي نجيح، عن مجاهد: ﴿الْأَرْضُ الْمُقَدَّسَةُ﴾. قال: المباركة.

حدثني المثنى، قال: ثنا أبو حذيفة، قال: ثنا شبل، عن ابن أبي نجيح، عن مجاهد مثله.

وأولى الأقوال في ذلك بالصواب أن يقال: هي الأرض المقدسة. كما قال نبي الله موسى ﷺ؛ لأن القول في ذلك بأنها أرض دون أرض، لا تُدرك [٦٦٣/١ ط] حقيقة صحته إلا بالخبر، ولا خير بذلك يجوز قطع الشهادة به، غير أنها لن تخرج من أن تكون من الأرض التي ما بين الفرات وعريش مصر؛ لإجماع جميع أهل التأويل والسير والعلماء بالأخبار على ذلك.

# **Islamic Definitions of the Boundaries of the "Holy Land" according to Mohammad Tabari (Qur'an 5[112]:21)**



It should be noted that the fifth opinion of those that Tabari cites as the boundaries of the Land of Israel is identical to the boundaries of the promise that God made to Abraham at the Covenant of the Pieces. *Tabari* contends that the religious sages and many historians rely on this definition of the borders of the Land of Israel.

*Qurtubi* presents the four options paralleling the first four possibilities mentioned above by *Tabari*. On this occasion, he heaps words of praise on the Land of Israel, describing it as a blessed (sanctified) land, in the sense that it has no droughts, no hunger, and so forth. *Tabarsi*, too, lists a number of options as to the boundaries of the Land paralleling *Tabari's* options 2-4.

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