

No, Mr. Obama: You Can't Steal What You Paid For

THE LIE

On October 13, 2026, former President Barack Obama claimed that Jews seeking refuge in the Land of Israel stole land from Arabs. He said Jews “took land off people and they were excessive,” and that those people understandably want their land back.

THE TRUTH

Jews did not come to the Land of Israel as thieves. They purchased land legally, often at inflated prices, from Arab landowners who were eager to sell. The claim that Jews simply stole the land ignores the historical record.

BACKGROUND

→ On October 13, 2026, former U.S. President Barack Obama spoke with journalist Susan McKay at the O2 arena in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Earlier that day, Queen's University Belfast awarded him an honorary doctorate.

→ He said Jews “for millennia, were oppressed, discriminated against, killed” and “understandably sought a refuge.” He then said they “took land off people and they were excessive. And those people understandably said, ‘This is injustice and I want my land back.’” [JFeed](#)

→ He also said the strengthening of right-wing forces in Israel and the “settler” movement had made peace harder. [ITV](#)

TRUTH EXPLAINED

→ **Jews bought the land, and paid dearly for it.** Between the 1880s and 1948, Jews purchased about two million dunams in the Land of Israel, roughly 500,000 acres. Most of it came from wealthy Arab landowners along the coastal plain and in the northern valleys up to the Galilee. The Sursock family of Beirut alone sold more than 176,000 dunams in the Jezreel Valley. Arab middlemen often bought land from peasants and resold it to Jews at around thirty times the price. [Emory University](#)

→ **Arab landowners were eager to sell**, even those who publicly opposed Jewish settlement. There were always more Arab offers to sell land than Jews had money to buy it. Some of the sellers were Arab political leaders who publicly campaigned against selling land to Jews. Between 1920 and 1928, at least a quarter of the members of the Arab Executive, the main Arab political body in the Land of Israel, sold land to Jews, either personally or through their families. [UNC Press](#)

→ **The British looked for Arabs displaced by Jewish land purchases, and found few.** In 1931, Britain invited Arabs who said they had lost land to Jewish buyers to file claims, and offered new farmland to those who could prove it. Arabs filed thousands of claims. Britain found only 664 valid. <https://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/21st-july-1939/21/the-arab-claims>)

→ **In Hebron, Arabs drove Jews off their land.** Jews had lived in Hebron for centuries. In August 1929, Arab rioters murdered 67 Jews and destroyed their homes and synagogues. The British then evacuated the 484 survivors, including 153 children, to Jerusalem. Jews did not return to live in Hebron until after 1967. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-hebron-massacre-of-1929>)

→ **In 1948, Jordan drove every Jew out of Jerusalem's Old City.** In May 1948, Jordan's army captured the Jewish Quarter and forced out its residents. Over the next 19 years, Jordan destroyed all but one of the Old City's 35 synagogues and used Jewish tombstones from the Mount of Olives to build roads and latrines. Jordan barred Jews from the Western Wall until Israel reunited Jerusalem in 1967. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jordan-s-desecration-of-jerusalem-1948-1967>)

→ **Jews have paid for this land since Abraham.** Abraham insisted on paying full price for the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron, even when its owner offered it as a gift: “And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant” (Genesis 23:16). Jacob bought a field in Shechem (Genesis 33:19), and King David bought the site of the Temple (1 Chronicles 21:25). Today the world accuses Jews of stealing these very places: Hebron, Shechem, and the Temple Mount. (Steinsaltz Center: https://steinsaltz-center.org/portal/library/Concise_Guide/Sages/Genesis/title/127/582)

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QUOTES

"The lands which became the critical core for Israel were provided by Arab sellers." - Kenneth Stein, Historian, Emory University

TAKEAWAY

Obama got one thing right. Jews came to the Land of Israel fleeing persecution. But they did not come as thieves. They came home, and they paid for every acre. They bought land from Arab owners who were eager to sell, often at inflated prices. When the British went looking for Arabs who had lost their land to Jews, they found almost none. And when Jews were driven from their homes, in Hebron in 1929 and in Jerusalem's Old City in 1948, no one demanded they get their land back. From the day Abraham counted out four hundred shekels for a cave in Hebron, the Jewish people have paid for this land. They are not excessive. They are home.