

The State of Israel

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The Land Grant

To the little land of Palestine, about 150 miles long and 60 miles wide, almost a billion souls—Jews, Christians, and Moslem—look as the sacred center of their faith. Though many are not aware of the fact, one of the integral features of the Abrahamic Covenant is the grant of the land of Palestine to Abraham and his seed in perpetuity (See Gen 12:7). This promise is reiterated in Genesis 13:14–18, 15:18–21, and 17:6–8 to Abraham; in Genesis 26:1–5 it is confirmed to Isaac; and in Genesis 28:1–4 and 35:11–12 the grant is reconfirmed to Jacob. Similarly, the Davidic Covenant contained as an inseparable element the same promise of the land to the seed of Abraham (Note 2 Sam 7:10). It is with ample justification, then, that the Mosaic writings spend so much time in relating how Israel came back to the land from Egypt, that the Book of Joshua occupies itself so largely with the matter of the distribution of the land among the tribes of Israel, and that the Book of Ezekiel closes with a detailed presentation of the allotment of the land in the time of the earthly reign of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Land in the Prophets

Every repetition of the Davidic Covenant among the prophets is explicit in stating that Israel will be settled in the

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land under the reigning Messiah. Compare Isaiah 9:6–7; 11:11–16 ; 49:8–21 ; Jeremiah 23:1–8; Ezekiel 11:17–21; 34:11–15 ; 36:24–28 ; Daniel 7:23–27 (especially verse 27) ; Hosea 3:5 and 13:10 ; Joel 3:17–21; Amos 9:11–15; Obadiah 21; Micah 4:1–8; Zephaniah 3:14–20; Zechariah 8:1–8; 14:16–21 ; and Malachi 3:12. It is imperative that the reader study these passages carefully in order to catch the full import of the place of the land in the program of the future of Israel. These promises form the basis for the strong and unquenchable desire that resides in the heart of the Jewish people to return to the land of their fathers. Their national anthem (“The Hope”) dwells on the one theme: the restoration of the nation Israel to the land of promise.

The Land Forsaken

It is well known that in the Egyptian bondage the descendants of Abraham were separated from the land of Palestine. We have indication that the people did groan under the galling servitude of the Egyptians, but nothing is stated of a longing to return to their homeland. As a matter of fact, the desire was expressed more than once during the wilderness wandering to the land, that the people preferred in their distress to return to Egypt. Because of idolatry in the northern and southern kingdoms, Israel was exiled to

Assyria and Babylon in the eighth and sixth centuries B.C. The sentiment is recorded in the Psalms that the godly yearned for the land of their birth (See Ps 137). After seventy years the Lord restored His people to the land where they were when Messiah came in fulfillment of Old Testament prediction. In 70 A.D. under the Roman Titus came the third wholesale separation of the people of Israel from their homeland. This exile is in its second millennium.

The Land in National Aspiration

For centuries the longing of the Jewish heart has been

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expressed in the words of Psalm 137:5–6. Again and again in the liturgy of the orthodox Jew we meet the words “Next year in Jerusalem!” Modern Zionism may be said to stem from the disillusionment of the nineteenth century which followed the period of enlightenment, when liberty, fraternity, and equality were heralded on every side. Anti-Jewish laws and the persecutions of the Jews in Europe fed the fires of hope for a homeland for downtrodden Israel. During the first part of the nineteenth century there had been several proposals for the acquisition of Palestine as a homeland for the Jews, but no one was able to bring any program to fruition. When Rabbi Z. H. Kalischer (1795–1870) began to write and speak for the return of the land, most religious Jews considered his attempts blasphemous, for the restoration to Zion is considered as a part of the work of the Messiah alone. However, he was successful in arousing interest which resulted in the establishment in 1870 of an agricultural school for young colonists near Jaffa.

Rabbi Samuel Mohilever (1824–1898), deeply burdened because of the pogroms against the Jews of Russia and Poland in 1881, founded in Warsaw that year the association called “Lovers of Zion.” Historically, this is the first group to be formed to carry out Zionist aspirations. Mohilever is considered the founder of the religious wing of Zionism, called *Mizrachi*. The earliest agricultural settlements of East European Jews were founded by the “Lovers of Zion” in the period from 1882 to 1903. The new settlers found conditions extremely difficult: hostility from the Turks and Arabs, disease, adverse climatic conditions, and an impoverished soil.

The actual founder of modern Zionism was Theodor Herzl. At the celebrated trial of Captain Alfred Dreyfus in Paris, Herzl served as a correspondent of the Viennese *Neue Freie Presse*, and saw the degradation of Dreyfus on January 5, 1895. Up to this time Herzl had been an assimilationist, advocating the assimilation of Jews into the country of their residence, but now in his profound emotional shock over the demonstration of the anti-Semitic mob, he saw only one solution for the problem of the Jew: a Jewish State. He wrote his

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now famous essay, *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State), which is the plan of political Zionism.

He called the First Zionist Congress which was held August 29–31, 1897, in Basle, Switzerland. The “Basle Program,” which was projected at that time, stated: “The aim of Zionism is to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law.” Herzl wrote in his diary on that occasion: “In Basle I established a Jewish State. If I were

to say that aloud today, universal laughter would be the response. Maybe in five years, certainly in fifty, everybody will recognize it.” Actually, the Jewish State was founded some fifty years later.

Along with the growth of political Zionism came the revival of Hebrew as a living language. A distinguished body of literature appeared before long covering the different phases of Jewish life. A new wave of immigration came during the years 1904 and 1914, consisting of young students and intellectuals who were for the most part members of the Labor Zionist Movement. Their aim was to settle on the land, cultivate the soil, and make this type of life a national pattern.

The outbreak of World War I set East European Zionists in trenches against Central European Zionists. To make matters worse, the Turkish Government embarked on a vigorous and ruthless program of extirpating Zionism from Palestine. Some of the leaders of Zionism today (even the present President of the State of Israel, Yitzhak Ben Zvi) were deported at that time, and found refuge in the United States.

The Land under Mandate

For aid given the Allied cause in World War I (especially in the realm of explosives by Dr. Chaim Weizmann, Professor in the University of Manchester, England), Lord Arthur James Balfour, British Foreign Secretary, issued on November 2, 1917, what is now known as the Balfour Declaration. It provides as follows: “His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for

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the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.” In the years following the war both Arabs and Jews claimed promises from Great Britain assured them of possession of the land. Ambiguity in the agreements was exploited to the full.

In the meantime a new wave of immigration into Palestine began from Europe. During 1918–25 there were some 60,000 settlers; 84,000 immigrated during 1925–35. New life was manifesting itself and building was carried on from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the Negev wilderness. No less than one hundred new settlements were founded in the eighteen years following the issuance of the Balfour Declaration. The mandate for Palestine had been assigned to Great Britain on April 25, 1929 by the League of Nations.

From 1920 to the latter part of the next decade there were many incidents of violence between the Arabs and Jews in the land, a result of a number of unfortunate factors. The answer of the British Government to these accumulated facts of violence was to restrict drastically Jewish immigration, a policy stated in the well known “White Paper” of May, 1939. Apart from a short respite during World War II the violence between Jews, Arabs, and the English continued unabated. By 1946 the river of strife had reached flood-tide. The British finally announced to the United Nations (considered the successor of the now defunct League of Nations) that the mandate was no longer workable.

The Land and the United Nations

The General Assembly of the United Nations responded with a partition plan for separate Jewish and Arab States in Palestine and for the internationalization of the city of Jerusalem. This was on November 29, 1947. Thus was the ancient prophecy of Joel 3:2 (last clause) brought to remarkable fulfillment. On the matter of the status of the city of

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Jerusalem, we note that “The question of Jerusalem has been before the United Nations since November 29, 1947, when the original resolution dealing with an over-all peaceful solution of the Palestine question was passed by a substantial majority. At that time concern was expressed by a great number of delegates regarding the ultimate fate of the Holy Places in Jerusalem. In order to assure the protection of these Holy Places, as a major objective of the United Nations, internationalization of Jerusalem was proposed.” The Jews, happy that at last they were assured of a Jewish State in Palestine authorized by the nations of the world, accepted the partition plan. The Arabs have loudly and consistently rejected it *in toto* from that hour to this.

The Land and the State of Israel

When the British High Commissioner left Haifa on May 14, 1948 after most of the British Army had retired from Palestine, the British Mandate came to a sudden end. On the same day the National Council, representing all segments of the Jewish population, met at Tel-Aviv and heard David Ben-Gurion read the Proclamation of Independence, forming the Jewish State with the name *Medinath Israel*, the State of Israel. The Government of the United States was the first power to give practically immediate recognition to the new nation. The Council elected Dr. Chaim Weizmann as President and David Ben-Gurion as Prime Minister.

While the United Nations was seeking unsuccessfully to implement its partition plan, it became abundantly clear that a war between the Jews and Arabs was in the offing. On March 9, 1948 a call for mobilization was issued by the Jewish leaders. The creation of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948 was the occasion for the invasion of Israel by the seven Arab states of Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Trans-Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen. The invaders overestimated their strength and underestimated the force of their enemies. The Arab armies took the old city of Jerusalem on May 18, 1948, and

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tried to take the new city which was inhabited by Jews. The siege was broken on June 11, 1948. By July 20, 1949 Israel had negotiated separate truce terms with the Arab powers. With the war's end Israel found itself in possession of more territory than the original partition plan of the United Nations had allotted. The Arabs have found the State of Israel entirely distasteful to them, and claim to be prepared to sacrifice millions of lives to blot it out of existence. The chief concern of the United Nations seems to be with the disposition of Jerusalem and especially the Holy Places. The latest suggestion of the State of Israel, and many have been the proposals, regarding the Holy Places is to allow the Arabs and Jews to hold their respective positions already attained in the political realm, but to set up an international trusteeship of the Holy Places under the authority of the United Nations. Since virtually all the Holy Places are in Arab hands, no plan yet suggested has been implemented.

A large bibliography is available to the interested reader who desires to acquaint himself with the accomplishments in the new State of Israel. For our purpose we choose certain milestones along the way. On January 25, 1949 the first election was held in Israel with 440,000 Jews, Arabs, and Christians voting for incumbents for 120 seats in the Knesset (Parliament), and for Dr. Chaim Weizmann as the first President of Israel. On May 11, 1949 the United Nations admitted Israel as the 59th member of that body. The population statistics of Israel are always interesting to the student of Scripture. The population of the State of Israel at the end of July, 1954 was 1,687,886. Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem enjoyed in 1948 sixty per cent of the population but only forty-three per cent in 1953. One of the subjects of the late King Abdullah contrasted in this way the Jewish development in Israel with the backwardness of his own country: "Israel is travelling at the rate of an express train, while we Arabs are plodding along at the speed of a camel." The great influx of population over such a short period of time has inevitably

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created numerous and grave social, cultural, and economic problems. The leaders of the State are looking hopefully toward the natural resources of the land. Their great expectation is to find oil in the Negev. The Dead Sea has an uncalculated amount of chemical deposits. In the Lake Huleh region there are said to be some twenty million tons of peat.

Space permits us to mention a few of the interesting pieces of legislation that have been enacted since the establishment of the newest democracy in the Near East. The Law of the Return (1952) gave all Jews throughout the world the right to settle in Israel. In that same year the Law of Citizenship provided that all who were residents in Israel at the time automatically became citizens of the State, unless they expressed a desire to the contrary. This citizenship (dual citizenship) was valid, though one might be a citizen of another country. In 1953 legislation was passed dealing with old age pensions, workmen's compensation, and social security. In February, 1954 capital punishment was abolished, except for those convicted of Nazi crimes. Politically the situation is very tense between Arabs and Jews. The United States has given and is giving economic aid to Israel, but the shipping of arms to the Arabs has been strongly protested throughout the State of Israel. Religiously the picture is quite varied: the State can boast of the extreme of the extreme orthodox in Judaism as well as those without any religious preference. Though the religious segment is quite vocal in the councils of the State, the majority is inclined to the opposite position. Educationally and scientifically the State is keeping pace with the rest of the world. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem is the most important institution of higher education in Israel. It was the dream of Dr. Weizmann and was opened with Dr. Judah Magnes, an American, as Chancellor on April 1, 1925. By 1951 it had 1,862 students with a faculty of 290, many of them internationally famed scholars and scientists. Its library has the largest collection of Hebraica and Judaica in the world. In 1933 the Weizmann Institute for scientific research was opened in Rehoboth. It has already become one

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of the most significant research centers in the world.

The Land in Proper Perspective

Much of the literature in recent years on the State of Israel has lacked the proper perspective. Claims have been made, as though based on Scripture, which are not founded on the Word of God. Let us state some postulates clearly and unequivocally. First of all, the present return to the land is not the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. The present boundaries of the State of Israel are a far cry from those given in Genesis 15:12–21. Secondly, the present return to the land is a fulfillment of prophecy only to the extent that Scripture (Zeph 2:1–2; Matt 24:12; Rev 11; 16:21) reveals Israel will be back in the land in the latter days of Israel's age in unbelief. The current regathering to the land is not a regathering to the Lord. As a matter of sober fact, their present non-religious trend and the uneasy peace that prevails in the land can easily set the stage for their relations with the Roman beast and the false prophet (the Anti-Christ) of the Great Tribulation, after the Church is raptured to glory. Thirdly, we must reiterate with all the force at our command that the material prosperity of Israel is not tantamount, and never has been, with spiritual prosperity. They are not being prospered because they are now in the will of God, but in spite of their being out of His will through personal and individual rejection of Christ as Messiah and Savior. Fourthly, Israel is doomed to sad and dismal disappointment as they place their trust in the United Nations. This will prove to be just such a bruised reed as dependence upon the now interred League of Nations. Fifthly, God Himself will regather Israel to the land in the last days (Isa 27:13; Matt 24:31) to accomplish His consummating purposes with the nation there. Lastly, the Lord Himself, when Israel is in the place of obedience and national spiritual restoration, will give them all the land granted originally and solemnly to Abraham their forefather. Let us not misjudge the existence of the State of Israel in the world today, and let us realize as never before that earth's time is running out rapidly.