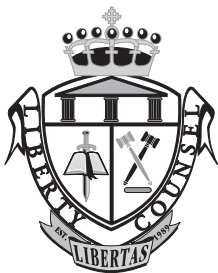


PATRIOT'S HANDBOOK OF ESSENTIAL REASONS TO STAND WITH ISRAEL



- ★ *Scriptural reasons to support Israel*
- ★ *Christian leaders' views on Israel*
- ★ *Geo-political issues in the Middle East impacting U.S.-Israel relations*
- ★ *Essay by Mathew D. Staver, Esq.*

PATRIOT'S HANDBOOK OF ESSENTIAL REASONS TO STAND WITH ISRAEL



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PO Box 540774
Orlando, Florida 32854
(800) 671-1776
Email: liberty@LC.org
<http://www.LC.org>

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Called forth by the Spirit that inspired America's historic Great Awakenings and participating in today's worldwide Awakening Movement, New Revolution Publishers (NRP) aims to facilitate a renewal of the great discussions of liberty through which the United States of America forged her identity. To that end, NRP encourages and facilitates the publication of books, essays, pamphlets, and other materials on the theme of True Liberty in the classical Christian sense.

*“In days to come Jacob shall take root,
Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots
and fill the whole world with fruit.”*

Isaiah 27:6

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Why America Should Stand with Israel

*By Mathew D. Staver, Liberty Counsel
Founder and Chairman*

King David captured God's timeless admonition to "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May they prosper who love you" in Psalm 122. Israel has a special place in the Bible and has played a central role in Middle Eastern and world affairs throughout history.

Yet today, with increasing pressure coming from anti-Semitic and Jihadist forces on all sides, Israel has never been in greater need of friends!

It is now evident that the once-touted so-called "Arab Spring" has turned into the "Arab Winter." Established pro-American governments have been overthrown and replaced by the Muslim Brotherhood or other anti-Israel and anti-American Islamic groups.

The Palestinian Authority (PA), controlled as it is by the radical terrorist group Hamas, has persistently lobbied the United Nations to be recognized as an independent nation. While seeking such recognition, the PA's constitution still calls for the elimination

of Israel and the PA authorities refuse to recognize Israel's right to exist. The PA wants to wipe Israel off the map and assume full control of Jerusalem as its uncontested capital.

To insist, as they do, that Israel and her ancient capital of Jerusalem actually belong to a previously non-existent people group called "Palestinians" is to exhibit complete biblical and historical illiteracy.

Because of Israel's unique place in the Scriptures and world history, the manner in which we individually and as a nation relate to the nation of Israel is eternally significant!

Many once-great nations that trampled on Israel and shook their fists at the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have disappeared. And from a contemporary geo-political standpoint, not only is Israel strategically significant, but today Israel is the United States' greatest ally in the Middle East.

In 2011, Anita and I were privileged to have a private meeting with the Prime Minister of Israel in his Cabinet office not long after he delivered an address to a Joint Session of the United States Congress. In that meeting, Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated themes he had developed in his speech to our Congress, but he added

a subject that brings an ongoing challenge for us and for all American Christians.

We are humbled that the Lord opened the door for us to have personal time with this great world leader. When the Prime Minister asked for our help to build relationships between Israel and believers in America, we knew that the Lord was giving Liberty Counsel a very special opportunity! We have been building on this foundation ever since that historic meeting through our Liberty Ambassador Counsel outreach. See AmbassadorCounsel.org.

I will always treasure the sincere note of thanks I received from Prime Minister Netanyahu when Liberty Counsel delivered 50,000 statements of support for the nation of Israel during a time of great crisis in Israel in 2012.

Every person in leadership from the Prime Minister on down and every Israeli citizen we've met sincerely appreciate the friendship and support from America in general and from Christians in particular. Don't ever underestimate what your friendship and support means to the people of Israel!

The American people are pro-Israel, and Americans will remain pro-Israel, no matter what the current administration says. To Israel and the Jewish people, I

say: “We are your friend. We will always be your friend. We stand with you and we have your back covered!”

The foundation of Western civilization was birthed in Israel, and it is the survival of Western civilization that is at stake today. Anita and I were delighted by Prime Minister Netanyahu’s articulate and passionate discussion on this crucial point during our meeting with him.

Make no mistake, the controversy surrounding Israel is not about a plot of land: It is about the right of the Jewish people and Israel to exist and about the future of Western values.

Abandoning Israel would have consequences we can scarcely imagine. That’s why American Christians must take every opportunity to express our support of Israel and why we are so committed to Liberty Ambassador Counsel’s ongoing success. Liberty Counsel has already made great progress in building bridges to Israel and the Jewish people, and tremendous blessings are yet to come through expanding these important relationships.

At Liberty Counsel, we stand with Israel, and pray that you join us in that vitally important mission.

Anita and I also hope you join us on a tour of Israel as part of the Liberty Ambassador Counsel program. This Liberty Counsel program provides tours of the

Biblical and historic sites in Israel. But, in addition to a life-change experience touring the Holy Land, the Liberty Ambassador Counsel program provides unique opportunities to meet with and hear from high-level Israeli government, military, academic, business, and religious leaders. This amazing experience will strengthen your faith and equip you to be a Goodwill Ambassador for Israel.

Visit AmbassadorCounsel.org or LC.org for information on the next Liberty Ambassador Counsel VIP Tour of Israel. You can also call 800-671-1776.

Essential Reasons to Stand with Israel

The Miracle of the Israeli Democracy

Israel today is a modern miracle, a flourishing economic powerhouse, the most astonishing fulfillment of biblical prophecy in the last 2000 years, and a harbinger of awesome things ahead for the Jews and the world. To its enemies, Israel is a catastrophe, an evil to be eliminated, and a nation that “must be wiped off the map,” as former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said in October 2005.¹

No larger than the state of New Jersey with a population of about 7-8 million, tiny Israel has grabbed global headlines since its founding on May 14, 1948. After wandering the nations for two millennia, suffering at the hands of Christians and Muslims alike, enduring pogroms, persecution, and, finally, the death of six million Jews in the Holocaust, the Jewish people finally had their own independent state.²

At that point, five Arab nations—Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq—immediately attacked the nascent state in a failed attempt to kill it at birth. And that was just the start. In its short 65-year existence, modern Israel has been forced to defend itself six times in all-out wars waged

by enemies pledged to “to uproot it just like a cancer,” as Saudi Arabia’s King Saud said in 1954.

Israel lives in a very tough neighborhood. Her next-door neighbor in the Gaza Strip is ruled by Hamas, which is pledged to Israel’s destruction. Unwilling to make peace with Israel, Palestinian leaders have used suicide bombs and rocket attacks, along with two *intifadabs* (uprisings), to wage war against Israel.

In Lebanon, the ruling party, Hezbollah, has a stockpile of 40,000 to 50,000 missiles according to a 2010 estimate³ and is ready to use them to achieve its bloodthirsty objective of Israel’s destruction. “If they [Jews] all gather in Israel, it will save us the trouble of going after them worldwide,” Hezbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah said in 2002.⁴

On its southern border, Israel now faces an Egypt strongly influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood, which seeks Israel’s destruction. Egypt’s former president until a recent coup, Mohammad Morsi, referred to Jews in 2010 as “blood-suckers,” “warmongers,” and “the descendants of apes and pigs.” Morsi said military, political, and economic “resistance is the only way to liberate the land of Palestine.”⁵

To the northeast, Israel faces what may be its supreme existential threat as Iranian scientists work furiously to build a nuclear arsenal for the radical Islamic state. If not checked, Iran’s mullahs will reach their radioactive

ambitions within a year and be poised, as Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has said, to "to erase Israel from the map."⁶

Despite living in the world's roughest precinct, one where well-armed bullies regularly issue threats of extinction, Israel is the fourteenth happiest nation on the planet, according to the "World Happiness Report" released in 2012 from Columbia University.⁷ A 2012 poll found that 75.6 percent of Israelis are optimistic about the future. Some 85.4 percent of Israeli Jews said they were confident about the Israeli Defense Force's ability to defend the nation.⁸

Another poll released in May 2013 revealed that 54 percent of Israelis think military conflicts, while painful, will nonetheless lead to economic growth. Neria Gutel, President of the Orot Israel College, which conducted the survey, said "The poll reflects not only national strength but also national optimism. Pessimism is probably more a thing of the press than actually reflecting public opinion. Most Israelis believe that even difficulties and crises will, at least at the end of the day, lead to growth."⁹

With regular elections and an independent judiciary, Israel is the sole functioning democracy in the Middle East. Three quarters of Israel's citizens are Jews, but all citizens—Jewish, Christian, and Arab—enjoy religious liberty, freedom of expression, and due process of law. Critics of Israel call it an apartheid state, alleging a Jew/Arab racial divide in the nation, but the 1.65 million Arabs

living in Israel enjoy the same rights and immunities as Jewish citizens. Arabs serve in the Knesset, Israel's parliament, and are content to live as citizens of the Jewish state. Some 90 percent of Arabs in Israel want to live there long-term, according to a 2012 poll.¹⁰

Surrounded by enemies, Israel devotes about seven percent of its total annual economic production to defense spending. Despite the burden of sustaining one of the world's most efficient and lethal fighting forces,¹¹ Israel doubled the size of its economy from 2001 to 2011. Its economy is ranked 39th worldwide with a 2011 GDP of \$243 billion.¹² Israel's vaulting growth has come despite an Arab boycott, first imposed in 1945. The boycott is cracking as even Arab nations like Qatar, Oman, and Morocco have begun to do business with Israel.¹³

God promised Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, that, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 22:18), a promise chiefly fulfilled in Jesus Christ. However, the children of Abraham have brought blessing to the world in many other ways, as well, including scientific and technological advances. Six Israelis have won Nobel prizes since 2002¹⁴ and Israel's economy is an engine of innovation on many fronts, especially the high-tech industry. "Israel has the most important high-tech center in the world after the US," says Eric Schmidt, chairman of Google. Microsoft chairman Bill Gates said in 2006 that the "innovation going on in Israel

is critical to the future of the technology business.”¹⁵ Along with Google and Microsoft, other American tech leaders and manufacturers have flocked to Israel, including IBM, Apple, Intel, Cisco, GE, and GM.

A 2008 Deloitte and Touche survey of venture capitalists cited by author George Gilder revealed that in six key areas—telecom, microchips, software, biopharmaceuticals, medical devices, and clean energy—Israel is second only to the United States in technological innovation.¹⁶

Israel has more medical device patents per capita than any other nation and is fourth globally in the number of biotech patents per capita. One innovation out of Israel is the “Pillcam,” a digestible capsulized mini-camera which gives doctors and patients the option of a non-invasive endoscopy.

Innovations in water recycling, drip irrigation, and desalination are Israel’s answer to the acute water shortage faced in a nation that is half desert with average annual rainfall that ranges from 35.4 inches in the north to 1.18 inches in the south. Israel recycles 80 percent of the water it uses, even purifying and recycling sewage water. Israel’s desalination plant supplies 50 percent of Israel’s city water,¹⁷ and drip irrigation, a technology pioneered in Israel, has helped the Jewish state reduce its water use by 10 percent while expanding agriculture yield sixteen-fold.¹⁸ Israeli firm Netafim is the world’s leading provider of drip irrigation systems, bringing

technology to increase crop yields using dramatically less water to millions.

Long forced to rely on imports for its energy needs, Israel may soon be energy independent because of huge natural gas and oil reserves discoveries. An enormous supply of natural gas under its territorial waters in the Mediterranean came online for domestic use in March and may allow Israel to begin exporting natural gas in the future as well.¹⁹ Add to that an estimated 250 billion barrels of oil discovered in Israel, a supply rivaling the 260 billion barrels of known reserves in Saudi Arabia.²⁰ An executive for the Israel Energy Initiatives estimates production of 250,000 barrels daily sometime around 2020,²¹ a number roughly equal to Israel's current consumption.²²

Making the Desert Bloom

God promised the nation of Israel 3,500 years ago that he would bring them into a land of agricultural abundance, “flowing with milk and honey.” It was a place of “hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven, a land for which the LORD your God cares” (Deuteronomy 11:11-12).

When Mark Twain toured Palestine in 1867, he called it “rocky and bare, repulsive and dreary.”²³ Walter Clay Lowdermilk, a U.S. soil specialist who visited the region in 1939, wrote that:

When Jewish colonists first began their work in 1882 ... the soils were eroded off the uplands to bedrock over fully one half the hills; streams across the coastal plain were choked with erosional debris from the hills to form pestilential marshes infested with dreaded malaria; the fair cities and elaborate works of ancient times were left in doleful ruins.²⁴

Since then, the planting of 250 million trees by the Jewish National Fund in a century-long afforestation project, has transformed bare hills to green forests. Just 24,000 Jews, or five percent of the total population, lived in Palestine in the 1880s when Jewish Zionists began to arrive, starting a long process of restoring a land neglected for centuries. The Jewish population swelled to 100,000 by 1914 and with their arrival came a host of socio-economic improvements that benefited Jew and Arab alike. A 1937 British commission of inquiry stated that the “general beneficent effect of Jewish immigration on Arab welfare is illustrated by the fact that the increase in the Arab population is most marked in urban areas affected by Jewish development.”²⁵

Aided by Jewish expertise and capital, Arab agriculture, especially citrus-growing, expanded rapidly between the two world wars. Efraim Karsh reports that Arab mortality rates declined dramatically, increasing life expectancy from 37.5 years in 1926-27 to 50 in 1942-44. Meanwhile,

life expectancy in Egypt was just 33 years. “That nothing remotely akin to this was taking place in the neighboring British-ruled Arab countries, not to mention India,” Karsh writes, “can be explained only by the decisive Jewish contribution to mandatory Palestine’s socio-economic wellbeing.”²⁶ Today, some 5.5 million Arabs live in the region of the former British mandate and have a life expectancy of 70 years, a fact attributable, George Gilder writes, to the work of Jewish settlers.²⁷

The impact of Jewish know-how in Palestine was such that between 1921 and 1942 jobs increased by a factor of ten and total capital investment soared to \$70 million from just several hundred thousand dollars.²⁸ Lowdermilk, a Rhodes Scholar married to a Christian missionary, wrote that “If we are interested in the regeneration of man, let all the righteous forces on earth support these settlements in Palestine as a wholesome example for the backward Near East, and indeed, for all who seek to work out a permanent adjustment of people to their lands.”²⁹

Today, Israel exports both produce as well as agricultural technology. It supplies most of its own food requirements despite the fact that just 20 percent of its land is arable and water is in extremely short supply. Israel also serves as Europe’s greenhouse during winter months, supplying a broad variety of flowers, fruit, and vegetables, including roses, carnations, citrus

fruits, melons, strawberries, kiwis, mangoes, avocados, tomatoes, cucumbers, and peppers.³⁰

After 130 years of Jewish labor to renew the land, it is hard not to see modern Israel as a direct fulfillment of God's promise that "In days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit" (Isaiah 27:6).

U.S. Christian Support for Israel

"Israel has no better friend than the United States of America," Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared at a joint press conference with President Barack Obama on March 20, 2013.³¹ Obama, who called in his first term for Israel to return to its pre-1967 borders, a move that damaged the U.S.-Israel relationship, nonetheless affirmed the strength of the U.S.-Israel bond, saying on the same occasion that "America's support for Israel's security is unprecedented, and the alliance between our nations has never been stronger."

Israel needs the support. A 2012 BBC poll measuring global attitudes toward 22 countries found Israel ranked near the bottom right next to North Korea with a 50 percent negative ranking. U.S. respondents gave Israel a 50 percent positive rating.³²

America's close ties with Israel stem not just from the collective voice of the American Jewish community, but

from a majority of America's 90 million evangelicals.³³ A 2011 poll found that 64 percent of "white evangelical Protestants say helping to protect Israel should be a very important policy goal for the U.S. in the Middle East."³⁴

"It is my belief that the Bible Belt in America is Israel's only safety belt right now," said the late Dr. Jerry Falwell, who made "support for Israel and Jewish people everywhere" one of the Moral Majority's central concerns.³⁵

Christian broadcaster Pat Robertson states that "evangelical Christians support Israel because we believe that the words of Moses and the ancient prophets of Israel were inspired by God. We believe that the emergence of a Jewish state in the land promised by God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was ordained by God."

Famed evangelist Billy Graham, who has preached to more than 215 million people and visited with every American president since Harry Truman, published an ad carried in newspapers nationwide just before the 2012 presidential election. Graham called on voters in the ad to "cast our ballots for candidates who base their decisions on biblical principles and support the nation of Israel."

John Hagee, pastor of Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, Texas, first hosted a "Night to Honor Israel" rally in 1981. Similar events have since been held in communities across America through Christians United for Israel, a million-member organization Hagee founded

in 2006. Christians have a “biblical mandate to bless the Jews,” Hagee says.

Liberty Counsel is a leading pro-Israel voice in America today. Founder and Chairman Mat Staver frequently speaks out on behalf of Israel and the shared values that link America to the Jewish state. Liberty Ambassador Counsel trips to Israel connect Americans to Israel on a personal basis as well as strengthen believers in their faith and equip them to be Goodwill Ambassadors for Israel (AmbassadorCounsel.org).

“Israel and America share a common bond through our history, heritage, and faith,” says Staver, who with his wife, Anita, has had the opportunity to meet in Israel with Prime Minister Netanyahu. “Christians and Jews must stand in solidarity to one another and together must stand in solidarity with Israel and its right to exist as a sovereign nation,” says Staver.

The Crucial Role of Christian Zionists

British Christian Zionists, believers who support the return of Jews to their ancient home, helped set the stage for the creation of a Jewish homeland and can be traced to seventeenth century Puritans who championed Jewish return. Puritans espousing Jewish restoration to the land included John Milton, John Bunyan, Roger Williams, John Sadler, and Oliver Cromwell.³⁶

John Owen (1616-1683), a leading Puritan theologian, declared that “The Jews shall be gathered from all parts of the earth where they are scattered, and brought home into their homeland.” Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661), a Scottish Presbyterian theologian was passionate in his love for the Jews:

I could stay out of heaven many years to see that victorious triumphing Lord act that prophesied part of His soul-conquering love, in taking into His kingdom the greater sister, that kirk [church] of the Jews.³⁷

O sweet Jesus, let me see that sight which will be as life from the dead, Thee and Thy ancient people in mutual embraces.³⁸

Elias Boudinot, one of America’s great Founding Fathers, speaking of Israel more than one-hundred years before it became a new nation in 1948, said:

Who knows but God has raised up these United States in these latter days, for the very purpose of accomplishing his will in bringing his beloved people to their own land.³⁹

Sir Isaac Newton, while not a Puritan, was a student of biblical prophecy who firmly believed that the Jews would

return to Israel a second time, having already returned once from exile in Babylon in the sixth century B.C.

Victorian England's leading advocate for Jewish restoration was Anthony Ashley Cooper, the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury (1801–1885), a devout evangelical and social reformer who was “the most influential nonpolitical figure, excepting Darwin, of the Victorian age,” according to historian Barbara Tuchman.⁴⁰

Shaftesbury served as president of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews from 1848 until his death in 1885. He wrote England's prime minister in 1853 that Greater Syria was “a country without a nation” in need of “a nation without a country.” That nation, he announced, was “the ancient and rightful lords of the soil, the Jews!”⁴¹

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, one of Victorian England's most well-known preachers believed that God would restore the Jews to their land:

The hour is approaching, when the tribes shall go up to their own country; when Judea, so long a howling wilderness, shall once more blossom like the rose. . . . I imagine that you cannot read the Bible without seeing clearly that there is to be an actual restoration of the Children of Israel.⁴²

J.C. Ryle, an Anglican bishop and influential evangelical in nineteenth century England, said much the same:

I believe that the Jews shall ultimately be gathered again as a separate nation, restored to their own Land, and converted to the faith of Christ, after going through great tribulation.⁴³

William Hechler (1845-1922), the son of missionaries to India, was a well-connected Anglican clergyman who gave Zionist movement founder Theodore Herzl entrée to Europe's ruling class in his pursuit of aid for the Zionist cause. Hechler authored "The Restoration of Jews to Palestine according to the Prophets" and formed a committee along with other Christian Zionists to resettle Russian Jews in Palestine, in the wake of Czar-inspired pogroms that inflicted death on thousands of Jews and left thousands more homeless.

Balfour, Wilson, and Truman

British Foreign Secretary Lord Arthur Balfour (1848-1930), who drafted the 1917 letter that signaled British support for the return of the Jews to their ancient home, was himself a Christian Zionist. A British statesman who was prime minister of England from 1902-1905, Balfour "was raised in a strongly evangelical Scottish Presbyterian home."⁴⁴ His mother was a wealthy aristocrat and "earnest evangelical who taught her children in

daily Bible classes, instilling in her son a remarkable knowledge of the geography of Palestine and familiarizing him with stories of the Old Testament.”⁴⁵

The Balfour Declaration, a one-paragraph note Balfour sent to Lord Rothschild, head of the British Zionist Federation, on Nov. 2, 1917, was a stunning triumph for Zionism. The letter stated:

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors 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.

That endorsement by a leading world power of the Zionist cause was followed in 1922 by international support, through the League of Nations, for Britain to administer Palestine and “place the country under such political, administrative and economic conditions as will secure the establishment of the Jewish National Home.”

When the House of Lords mulled a motion to reject British administration of Palestine, Balfour rose in

opposition, citing the Christian impulse behind his Balfour Declaration:

I hold that from a purely material point of view that policy that we initiated is likely to prove a successful policy. But we have never pretended—certainly I have never pretended—that it was purely from these materialistic considerations that the Declaration of November 1917 originally sprung.... Surely, it is in order that we may send a message to every land where the Jewish race has been scattered, a message that will tell them that Christendom is not oblivious of their faith, is not unmindful of the service they have rendered to the great religions of the world, and most of all to the religion that the majority of Your Lordships' house profess, and that we desire to the best of our ability to give them the opportunity of developing in peace and quietness under British rule, those great gifts which hitherto they have been compelled to bring to fruition in countries which know not their language and belong not to their race. That is the ideal which I desire to see accomplished, that is the aim which lay at the root of the policy I am trying to defend; and though it be defensible indeed

on every ground, that is the ground which chiefly moves me.⁴⁶

The Balfour Declaration itself may never have been issued without the endorsement of Britain's key World War I ally, the United States. Securing President Woodrow Wilson's support was a task that fell to Louis Brandeis, the nation's first Jewish Supreme Court Justice, a Zionist, and Wilson confidant. Brandeis recruited the aid of William Blackstone, a prominent evangelical who in 1891 sent a petition signed by 413 influential Americans to President Harrison asking him to convene an international conference to "consider the condition of Israelites and their claims to Palestine as their ancient home. . . ."

Blackstone, a successful businessman and close student of the Scriptures, sent a second petition to Wilson on June 30, 1917, with additional signatures from leading church bodies, including the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians.⁴⁷ On October 13, 1917, Brandeis conveyed to Lord Balfour, on Wilson's behalf, the president's "entire sympathy" with the creation of a Jewish homeland.

President Harry Truman supported statehood for Israel over the strenuous objections of his foreign policy advisors in part because of biblical prophecies that the Jews would return to their ancient homeland. Truman's much-contested decision to support the U.N. partition plan granting statehood to both Jews and Palestinians was

crucial to the plan's approval in the U.N. General Assembly on October 11, 1947. Eight months later, the U.S. was the first nation to recognize Israel, just minutes after it declared statehood on May 14, 1948.

A Southern Baptist who had read the Bible four times by the time he was 14, Truman's "own reading of ancient history and the Bible made him a supporter of the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine..." according to former presidential counsel Clark Clifford. "As a student of the Bible," Clifford observed, "he believed in the historic justification for a Jewish homeland, and it was a conviction with him that the Balfour Declaration of 1917 constituted a solemn promise that fulfilled the age-old hope and dream of the Jewish people."⁴⁸

When the Chief Rabbi of Israel called on Truman in 1949, he told the president, "God put you in your mother's womb so that you could be the instrument to bring about the rebirth of Israel after two thousand years."

As tears welled up in Truman's eyes, the Chief Rabbi opened his Bible to the book of Ezra and read the words of Cyrus, the Persian potentate who issued a decree in 539 B.C., allowing the Jews to return to their homeland. According to an eyewitness:

On hearing these words Truman rose from his chair and with great emotion, tears glistening in his eyes, he turned to the Chief

Rabbi and asked him if his actions for the sake of the Jewish people were indeed to be interpreted thus and the hand of the Almighty was in the matter.

The Rabbi answered that Truman “had been given the task once fulfilled by the mighty King of Persia, and that he too, like Cyrus, would occupy a place of honor in the annals of the Jewish people.”⁴⁹

Later, when a long-time friend introduced Truman at Jewish Theological Seminary in New York as “the man who helped create Israel,” Truman stepped to the podium and shot back, “What do you mean, ‘helped to create?’ I am Cyrus. I am Cyrus.”⁵⁰

What Does the Bible Say?

So what does the Bible say about Israel and the Jews? Is the covenant God made with Abraham still in effect? Are the Jews still God’s chosen people? Does the Old Testament prophesy a second return from exile for the Jews and was that realized in 1948? Will the Jewish people yet turn to Jesus, recognizing Him as their Messiah? And should Christians support Israel today?

The answers we give to those questions carry enormous weight. Christian Zionism sped the way in Britain and the U.S. for the return of the Jews to their ancient homeland. The opposite attitude—sometimes called “replacement

theology,” the idea that God’s promises to Israel have been transferred to the church—has fanned the flames of anti-Semitism for nearly 2,000 years.

Historian Paul Merkley observes that “The real contest within Christianity—on which the survival of the Jews may well depend—is over one of the oldest theological issues in the church; How the destiny of the Jews is related to the destiny of the Church.”⁵¹

Second century Christian apologist Justin Martyr was one of the first to displace the Jews from God’s promise to Abraham when he declared that “We [Christians] have been led to God through this crucified Christ, and we are the true spiritual Israel, and the descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham. . . .”⁵²

The claim that God rejected the Jews after they refused Christ laid the foundation for centuries of Christian anti-Semitism. It’s not widely recognized, but a long trail of anti-Jewish bigotry and persecution litters church history.

John Chrysostom, a fourth century theologian exhaled noxious fumes of hate against the children of Abraham, telling them:

It is because you killed Christ. It is because you stretched out your hand against the Lord. It is because you shed the precious blood that there is now no restoration, no mercy anymore and no defense.⁵³

Church synods from the fourth to the fifteenth century prohibited Jews from holding public office, owning Christian servants, constructing new synagogues, and forcing them to wear special clothes and live in ghettos.⁵⁴

Martin Luther complained in 1523 that the Roman Catholic Church had “dealt with the Jews as if they were dogs and not human beings,”⁵⁵ but at the end of his life, Luther wrote *The Jews and Their Lies*, outlining his “plan” to deal with them:

First, their synagogues or churches should be set on fire, and whatever does not burn up should be covered or spread over with dirt so that no one may ever be able to see a cinder or stone of it. And this ought to be done for the honor of God and of Christianity in order that God may see that we are Christians. . . . Secondly, their homes should be broken down and destroyed. Thirdly, they should be deprived of their prayer books and Talmuds in which such idolatry, lies, cursing and blasphemy are taught. Fourthly, their Rabbis must be forbidden under threat of death to . . . to teach any more.⁵⁶

Luther’s chilling words, along with centuries of mistreatment and oppression of Jews by Christians, set the table for Hitler’s evil work to exterminate European Jewry.

Holocaust historian Raul Hilberg showed that all Nazi policies—except for the extermination of the Jews—merely mimicked practices already put in place by the church centuries earlier.⁵⁷ As Hilberg wrote, “The German Nazis, then, did not discard the past; they built upon it. They did not begin a development; they completed it.”⁵⁸

It is no small matter what we conclude from the Scriptures about the Jewish people and their place in God’s plan. So what do the Scriptures say?

God makes it very easy to understand. He told Abraham:

I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be
blessed. (Genesis 12:3)

That unconditional promise has never been withdrawn and has been confirmed from Haman to Hitler. Haman swung from the gallows he built for his Jewish adversary Mordecai after Esther exposed Haman’s plot to kill all the Jews across the Persian empire. Hitler promised a thousand-year reign but took his own life on April 30, 1945, as Allied troops advanced on Berlin.

Ancient Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Rome, and the Ottoman empire all fell in the wake of their mistreatment of the Jews. The church itself has suffered for its anti-Semitic sins. Scholar Michael Brown, a Jewish believer in Jesus, writes:

To the extent that the Church has recognized her Jewish roots and the rightful place of Israel, the Church has had light. The Dark Ages of the Church were the days of her greatest theological ignorance of Israel as well as the times of her most violent hostility against the Jews.⁵⁹

God's blessing on America since our founding coincides with our welcoming stance toward the Jews from George Washington on. President Washington famously assured the Newport Jews of safe treatment, telling them that the U.S. government "gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."⁶⁰

God's promise to bless those who bless the Jews is still in force. It obligates all people—especially Christians—to treat Israel and all Jewish people with kindness and love.

But what about the land promise God gave to Abraham? Is that still in force? God told Abram almost 4,000 years ago to:

Lift your eyes now and look...for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. (Genesis 13:14-15)

Psalm 105 indicates that God's promise is for all time:

He remembers His covenant forever, The word which He commanded, for a thousand

generations, The covenant which He made with Abraham, And His oath to Isaac, And confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, To Israel as an everlasting covenant, Saying, “To you I will give the land of Canaan As the allotment of your inheritance.” (Psalm 105:8-11)

Is God’s Covenant With the Jews Unconditional?

But what if Israel sins and violates the covenant God made with Abraham? Will that void the agreement, so to speak, and prompt God to seek another covenant partner? God answers that question in no uncertain terms:

“For I am with you,” declares the LORD, “to save you; For I will destroy completely all the nations where I have scattered you, Only I will not destroy you completely. But I will chasten you justly, And will by no means leave you unpunished.” (Jeremiah 30:11 NASB)

God eliminates all doubt about the permanency of His relationship with Israel in Jeremiah 31:35-37:

Thus says the Lord,
Who gives the sun for a light by day,
The ordinances of the moon and the stars for
a light by night,

Who disturbs the sea,
And its waves roar
(The Lord of hosts is His name):

“If those ordinances depart
From before Me, says the Lord,
Then the seed of Israel shall also cease
From being a nation before Me forever.”

Thus says the Lord:
“If heaven above can be measured,
And the foundations of the earth searched out
beneath,
I will also cast off all the seed of Israel
For all that they have done, says the Lord.

God’s binding commitment to physical Israel is so permanent that the natural order would have to be altered before his commitment would come to an end. “No matter what Israel does, God will never forsake them as a distinct people,” writes Old Testament scholar Michael Brown.⁶¹

Still, some now believe that national Israel has no further purpose in God’s plan. The Lord answers this assertion in Jeremiah 33:23-26, where He restates his enduring and unshakable covenant with Judah and Israel:

Moreover the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, “Have you not considered

what these people have spoken, saying, ‘The two families [Judah and Israel] which the Lord has chosen, He has also cast them off’? Thus they have despised My people, as if they should no more be a nation before them.

“Thus says the LORD: ‘If My covenant is not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth, then I will cast away the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, so that I will not take any of his descendants to be rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will cause their captives to return, and will have mercy on them.’”

The utterly unconditional character of God’s covenant with Israel is restated in both Leviticus and Deuteronomy:

Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God. But for their sake I will remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the LORD. (Leviticus 26:44-45)

And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the LORD your God and obey His voice (for the LORD your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them. (Deuteronomy 4:27, 30-31)

But now that Christ has come and established the New Covenant, making salvation possible through faith in Him to Jew and Gentile alike, has “spiritual Israel” displaced Israel? Some think so, relying, for example, on Paul’s letter to the Romans where he states:

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God. (Romans 2:28-29)

In other words, Jewish identity is not defined merely by physical descent and the sign of circumcision, but it is a matter of the heart. And that means Gentiles can qualify as true Jews, too, right?

“Most probably not,” says Dr. Michael Brown. Paul “is directing his argument to Jews, primarily to unsaved Jews, in Romans 2:17-29. Within that context he is defining who is the real Jew—spiritually speaking.”⁶²

Paul is drawing a distinction, Brown writes, “between two Jews, one who is only circumcised physically, and the other who is also circumcised spiritually, which one is the real Jew, the Jew in this special sense? The answer is obvious: The one who is also circumcised spiritually!”⁶³

Brown cites New Testament scholar C. E. B. Cranfield who writes that Paul’s statement in Romans 2:28-29 “should not be taken as implying that those who are Jews only outwardly are excluded from the promises.”⁶⁴

Indeed, Paul devotes three entire chapters in Romans to God’s purpose for the nation of Israel, declaring that “As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable” (Romans 11:28-29).

Paul makes it abundantly clear that God still has a plan for His people, the Jews!

That plan is unfolding in our time, with the second return of the Jews to the land God promised their father Abraham nearly 4,000 years ago. Both Israel and Judah, the divided northern and southern kingdoms, were

exiled in 722 and 597 B.C., respectively. Many exiles from Judah returned to Israel after Cyrus issued his decree in 539 B.C. but after rejecting Christ the Jewish nation was again defeated and dispersed when Rome crushed Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

For almost 1,900 years, Israel did not exist and the Jews were scattered across the globe until God acted in fulfillment of His Word and Israel became a nation again in 1948. Consider this prophecy from Isaiah:

And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse,
Who shall stand as a banner to the people;
For the Gentiles shall seek Him,
And His resting place shall be glorious.

It shall come to pass in that day
That the Lord shall set His hand again the second time
To recover the remnant of His people who are left,
From Assyria and Egypt,
From Pathros and Cush,
From Elam and Shinar,
From Hamath and the islands of the sea.

He will set up a banner for the nations,
And will assemble the outcasts of Israel,
And gather together the dispersed of Judah
From the four corners of the earth. (Isaiah 11:10-12)

Physical and Spiritual Restoration

Ezekiel also prophesies Israel's return to the land, which will happen, God makes clear, not because of His people's merit, but His mercy. This prophecy adds the promise of spiritual restoration as well:

Therefore say to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord GOD: I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD, says the Lord GOD, when I am hallowed in you before their eyes.

For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them." (Ezekiel 36:22-27)

Just as Isaiah and Ezekiel prophesied, Jews from “among the nations” and the “four corners of the earth” have made *aliyah* to Israel. Israel’s Law of Return grants citizenship to all Jews who seek to live in Israel, which has absorbed 3.1 million immigrants since 1948. The former Soviet Union alone has supplied more than 1.2 million immigrants to Israel, with the vast bulk, 908,000, coming between 1990 and 2001.⁶⁵

God promised in Ezekiel 36 to bring spiritual restoration to Israel, to “put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes,” but that has not yet happened on a large scale in Israel. Tel Aviv was named the world’s “best gay city” for 2011⁶⁶ and an estimated 40,000 abortions take place annually in Israel where abortion is legal in certain circumstances.⁶⁷

Forty-two percent of Israeli Jews over 20 call themselves “secular,” according to a 2010 study, while an additional 24 percent view themselves as “not very religious traditionalists.”⁶⁸ The balance are ultra orthodox (8 percent), religious (12 percent), and traditional-religious (13 percent).⁶⁹ The restoration of God’s people in Israel is happening. Messianic Jews, those who trust in Jesus as Messiah, meet in an estimated 150 congregations across the nation and number 20,000, up from just 5,000 in 1997.⁷⁰ Jewish believers in Jesus worldwide number 350,000, according to estimates.⁷¹

The growth in Messianic Judaism comes as many in the Jewish world are reevaluating Jesus and his claims. A CNN columnist recently observed that, “In the past year, a spate of Jewish authors, from the popular to the rabbinic to the scholarly, have wrestled with what Jews should think about Jesus.”⁷²

Actually, Jewish reconsideration of Jesus has been going on for two centuries. Matthew Hoffman observed in his book, *From Rebel to Rabbi: Reclaiming Jesus and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture*, that:

From the end of the eighteenth century, Jewish proponents of modernization, enlightenment (Haskalah), and reform began to reject the traditionally negative Jewish views of Jesus in favor of increasingly sympathetic appraisals of him. This complex and intriguing trend in modern Jewish history has come to be known by scholars as the Jewish reclamation of Jesus.⁷³

Catholic priest John T. Pawlikowski who teaches at the Catholic Theological Union, noted much the same in 2008:

The “Jesus question” is definitely making a comeback on the agenda in certain Jewish circles, much more than it was even a decade ago. The new Jewish quest for Jesus, however, is now being done much more in

collaboration with Christian scholarship than was the case in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Where it will lead remains an open question.⁷⁴

This renewed interest in the Jewish Jesus, along with the increasing number of Jewish men and women who have professed faith in Jesus as their Messiah, brings to mind Paul's declaration in Romans 11 about what awaits God's people, the Jews. Paul, who said he had "great sorrow and continual grief in my heart . . . for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh" for their refusal to believe in Jesus, made it explicitly clear that God had not rejected His people.

I say then, has God cast away His people?
Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the
seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.
God has not cast away His people whom He
foreknew. (Romans 11:1-2)

Not only has He not discarded His people, a great spiritual ingathering is to come. God will bring salvation to the Jews, completing the process begun with the return to the land of Israel by giving them a "new heart" and a "new spirit" as prophesied by Ezekiel. Paul writes,

. . .blindness in part has happened to Israel
until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.” (Romans 11:25-27)

The salvation of Israel will bring extraordinary blessing to the world. Just as the rejection of the Gospel by the Jews led to the Gospel going to the Gentiles so the acceptance of Jesus as Messiah by the Jews will lead, Paul writes, to “life from the dead.” Specifically, he states:

I say then, have they [Israel] stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! ... For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? (Romans 11:11-12, 15)

Pray For and Support Israel

In light of this promise, what should Christians do? Pray fervently and frequently for Israel’s safety and the Jewish people, and take every opportunity to bless Israel and all Jews everywhere!

Scripture tells us to “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (Psalm 122:6) and to do so with perseverance:

For Zion’s sake I will not hold My peace, And for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, Until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, And her salvation as a lamp that burns. (Isaiah 62:1)

I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; They shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent. (Isaiah 62:6)

Our prayers should be mingled with tears. Jesus, our role model, was passionate for His people. Knowing the judgment to come in 70 A.D., he literally wept over Jerusalem, saying:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! (Matthew 23:37)

Paul said he had had “great sorrow and continual grief in my heart” for the Jewish people. We should allow ourselves to be moved with compassion for the Jews, who have suffered so greatly.

We ought also to be a blessing to Israel through financial support for the state of Israel, giving to help poor Jews around the world, and defending Israel from her attackers. One of the ways American Christians can bless Israel today is by making our voice heard when Israel is attacked in the media and by calling on our federal government to adopt a pro-Israel foreign policy. One good way to influence U.S. foreign relations with modern Israel is to join like-minded people in visiting the Holy Land as part of Liberty Counsel's Liberty Ambassador Counsel VIP Tour of Israel. For more information, see AmbassadorCounsel.org.

Israel and U.S. Middle East Policy

The United States has a unique relationship to Israel and a special responsibility to stand by our sole reliable ally in the Middle East. The U.S. and Israel share common values rooted in the Scriptures. Along with these common values we also share common threats to those shared values. Unlike its neighbors, Israel is a prosperous, functional parliamentary democracy, which guarantees civil and religious liberty to all. And for Christians who recognize the prophetic significance of Israel and God's enduring covenant with His beloved people, the Jewish state is all the more deserving of America's friendship and support.

Jewish author, radio host, and columnist Dennis Prager notes:

The Jewish people have suffered longer and more horribly than any other living people. But they are still around. Their historic enemies are all gone. Those who cursed the Jews were indeed cursed.

And those who blessed the Jews were indeed blessed. The most blessed country for more than 200 years has been the United States. It has also been the most blessed place Jews have ever lived in. Is this a coincidence? Many of us think not.⁷⁵

Iran

The most often-discussed and thorny dilemma facing the U.S. in the Middle East is the long-simmering and intractable dilemma over the claims of Palestinian Arabs in Gaza, the so-called West Bank, and East Jerusalem to land and statehood. But Palestinian grievances, which occupy news and editorial pages across Europe and the U.S., are less a priority now than the ominous existential threat posed by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

If this problem is not solved, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict won't matter because the Mideast will be engulfed in a thermo-nuclear exchange with incalculable consequences.

Oil-rich Iran still holds to its threadbare cover story that it seeks nuclear power for medical purposes and

to generate electricity, but its nuclear-tipped aims are transparent. A member in good standing of the “axis of evil,” Iran has been designated by the State Department as a sponsor of terror since 1984. Iranian agents have launched terror attacks in 20 nations since 2010 and Iran supplies missiles and rockets to Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza. Tehran has sent its soldiers to help prop up beleaguered Syrian strongman Bashar al-Assad.

But the short-fused Iranian nuclear threat is “the biggest challenge of our time,” as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said. With an arsenal of nuclear missiles at its disposal, the Islamic state could threaten its neighbors, including Europe, disrupt the world oil supply by closing the straits of Hormuz, and if unchecked, rain down terror on Israel. The threat extends to the United States, as well. The “Great Satan” is Iran’s ultimate target for destruction.

Iran is close to passing the uranium enrichment “red line” identified by Prime Minister Netanyahu on September 27, 2012 in a speech to the United Nations General Assembly. Once Iran acquires more than 250 kilograms of 20 percent enriched uranium—Israel’s red line—it will be well on its way to its first nuclear weapon, a game changer in the Middle East.

Both Israel and the U.S. say they will not let that happen, but U.S. resolve is open to question.

Rhetorically, at least, the president is shoulder-to-shoulder with Israel, as is Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel.

During his Israel visit in March 2013, Obama said “Iran must not get a nuclear weapon. This is not a danger that can be contained. I have said to the world that all options are on the table for achieving our objectives.”⁷⁶

Hagel confirmed Israel’s unilateral right to defend itself⁷⁷ and offered a package of armaments to Israel in April 2013 that includes air tankers for mid-air refueling and the V-22 Osprey, a plane capable of vertical take-off and landing, the latter a plane the U.S. has not sold to any other nation.

The president says there is still time for diplomacy and sanctions, but they have yet to work. A May 2013 report from the International Atomic Energy Association shows Iran is pressing ahead with its nuclear program, installing hundreds of additional next-generation centrifuges (used to enrich uranium), and developing a heavy water reactor that could be used to acquire plutonium and, thereby, more compact and powerful nuclear bombs.

Short of divine intervention, military action is the only imaginable alternative with a reasonable chance of success in the few months left before Iran’s acquisition of one or more nuclear weapons makes striking the Islamic regime a much costlier enterprise.

“We need a credible military option,” Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya’alon said in February 2013, a month before he became Israel’s defense minister in Prime

Minister Netanyahu's newly formed cabinet. "The Iranians understand the West has capabilities, but as long as the Iranians don't think that the West has the political stomach and determination to use it, they will not stop. Currently they don't think the world is determined."⁷⁸

Israeli/Palestinian Conflict

The impasse on achieving peace with the Palestinian Authority goes back to 1947 when the United Nations approved a plan that gave Arabs and Jews independent states in the land called Palestine.

But instead of settling down to live in peace, Arab leaders were unwilling to coexist with a Jewish state and rejected the U.N. plan, waging a war that led, ultimately, to larger borders for the new state of Israel than in the original U.N. plan.

The Palestinian narrative denounces Israel for stealing Palestinian lands during its War for Independence, forcing Arabs out of their homes and villages. In fact, Jewish leaders welcomed the partition plan and invited Arabs to be a part of their new state. After the U.N. partition plan was announced on November 29, 1947, Zionist leader Golda Meir, later Israel's prime minister, said:

We are happy and ready for what lies ahead.
Our hands are extended in peace to our
neighbors. Both States can live in peace with

one another and cooperate for the welfare of their inhabitants.⁷⁹

Around the same time, Arab League general secretary Azzam Pasha threatened “a war of annihilation.... [A] momentous massacre ... like the massacres of the Mongols or the Crusades.”

When Israel declared statehood on May 14, 1948, Arab irregular forces had already been assaulting Jews in Palestine for five-and-a-half months. Despite that, Israel’s Declaration of Independence appealed:

to the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to preserve peace and participate in the upbuilding of the State on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its provisional and permanent institutions.⁸⁰

Instead, five Arab nations invaded Israel in a failed attempt to drive the infant nation into the sea. Nearly 600,000 Arabs became homeless as a result, something for which Israel is now blamed. But a 1949 British investigation in Gaza revealed that...

While [the refugees] express no bitterness against the Jews, they speak with the utmost bitterness of the Egyptians and other Arab states. “We know who our enemies are,” they will say, and they are referring to their Arab

brothers who, they declare, persuaded them unnecessarily to leave their homes.⁸¹

Sixty-five years later, “the refugees of 1948 and their descendants remain in the squalid camps where they have been kept by their fellow Arabs for decades, nourished on hate and false hope,” writes historian Efraim Karsh.

Palestinian leaders have walked away on two other occasions when offered statehood. Palestinian chief Mahmoud Abbas turned down a 2008 offer from Israeli Prime Minister Olmert giving the Palestinians nearly all of the West Bank and Gaza. PLO leader Yasser Arafat did the same in 2000 when handed a very similar generous offer at Camp David from Ehud Barak.

Again, “no thanks.”

Having rejected statehood three times, Palestinians under leader Abbas went to the United Nations in late 2012 and won recognition as a non-member observer state, a maneuver that violated the 1993 Oslo Accords. The United States opposed the Palestinian move which won lopsided support in the U.N. General Assembly. The newly recognized “Palestine” is not a voting member of the U.N., but its new status allows Palestinians to press their grievances against Israel at the International Criminal Court and other U.N. bodies.

If he joins the peace talks, Netanyahu will be facing in Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas a

man whose political group, Fatah, seeks the “Complete liberation of Palestine, and eradication of Zionist economic, political, military and cultural existence.”⁸² Abbas is labeled a moderate but he was a long-time aide of late PLO leader Yasser Arafat. Abbas delivered a 2005 televised speech in which he called Israel’s founding an enormous injustice that he would never accept.⁸³

Land for Peace?

Land for peace is the formula proposed by many to end the Palestinian conflict but it has never been successful. Israel turned Gaza over to the Palestinians in 2005, withdrawing soldiers and uprooting 1,700 families as its soldiers left. Since then, Palestinian militants elected the terrorist group Hamas as the ruling government and have fired more than 8,000 rockets into Israel.

“The root of the conflict is not territorial,” Netanyahu said in May 2013. “The Palestinian lack of will to recognize Israel as the national state of the Jewish people is the root of the conflict.”⁸⁴

The refusal to acknowledge Israel’s right to exist may be driving the Palestinian demand for a right of return, a demand which if granted could lead to the return of some five million Arabs within Israel and the end of the Jewish state. Netanyahu has flatly denied any right of return for Arabs.

He has also refused to stop new housing construction for Israelis in the West Bank, something the Obama administration wants, but has not made a pre-condition for peace talks. So-called settlements are a major obstacle, says Abbas, to getting an agreement with Israel.

Israeli settlements outside the Green Line (the border established after a 1949 armistice was reached between Israel and her neighbors) have never been deemed illegal by the U.S. and are on land owned by Israelis. Some 543,000 Israelis live in 121 settlements and an estimated 100 unauthorized locations. Palestinians have not been dispossessed in order to build settlements and the total land space used is less than three percent of the disputed areas.⁸⁵ The land on which these communities have been constructed has either been purchased or is land that was unoccupied and unused and therefore available.⁸⁶

But settlements are not the real issue. Israel has twice offered to give the Palestinians nearly all the disputed land and been refused both times. The real issue is whether or not the Palestinians will agree to live side-by-side with Israel. And that is something that, tragically for all parties, Arab and Palestinian leaders have rejected since 1947.

Land for peace has never worked and never will so long as the Palestinians do not recognize Israel's right to exist.

Jerusalem

The status of Jerusalem is the ultimate issue to be resolved in peace talks but there is no prospect that Netanyahu will give ground on this topic. To his credit, he has vowed that he will “never divide Jerusalem.”⁸⁷ One of the world’s oldest cities, Jerusalem became Israel’s capital in 1000 B.C. under King David. It is the city over which Jesus wept, one which He said would be “trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24).

Modern Israel declared Jerusalem its capital on January 23, 1950, an action that contradicted the U.N. plan to place Jerusalem under an international authority and one which most nations, the U.S. included, have refused to recognize. The American embassy is in Tel Aviv. Congress passed the Jerusalem Embassy Act in 1995, which called for relocation of the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, but the law allows for a presidential waiver, which has been routinely exercised by Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama ever since.

Israel has had complete control of Jerusalem since the Six-Day War in 1967, but wresting Jerusalem from Israeli hands has long been a Palestinian ambition. Yasser Arafat vowed that the Palestinian flag “will fly over the walls of Jerusalem, the churches of Jerusalem, the mosques of Jerusalem.” He told a Gaza audience in 2000 that “Jerusalem is ours, ours, ours,”⁸⁸ a claim

the PLO brandished on its letterhead. Arafat is gone, but the dream has not died. Shortly after winning U.N. recognition for the “state” of Palestine in late 2012, a jubilant Mahmoud Abbas proclaimed, “One day, a young Palestinian will raise the Palestinian flag over Jerusalem, the eternal capital of the state of Palestine!”⁸⁹

The coming conflict over Jerusalem is the ultimate challenge, one which almost certainly cannot be resolved by negotiation. God said He “will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem” (Zech. 12:2). That prospect is all the more reason to pray with fervor for the peace of Jerusalem and to ask God to restore His people Himself through their Messiah, Jesus.

When that happens, at long last, it will bring blessing for all and “life from the dead.” Israel will, in every sense, “blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit.”

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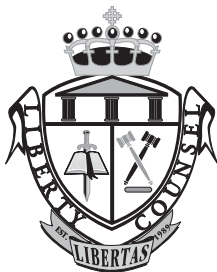
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