

A Brief History of Israel

Pastor Matt Postiff Updated 5/9/2024

Interesting Facts

Israel is a bit larger than the state of New Jersey. At its narrowest, it is about 9 miles wide.

Israel is populated by 9.24 million people as of January 2024. About 73.5% are Jewish, 21% Arabs, and 5.5% other.

Timeline Thus Far

2140 BC God calls Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees to a land God will show him. God promises the land to Abram and his descendants forever (Gen. 12:7, 13:15-17, 15:7, etc.).

2066-1886 BC Isaac dwells in the land we now know as Israel.

2006-1859 B.C Jacob dwells in the land, except he stays with Laban for 20 years and returns, then goes to Egypt, lives 17 years there, and dies there.

1876 BC The little nation of Israel enters Egypt to be saved from famine. They were 70 people.

1445 B.C. Israel was rescued out of Egypt by God in the Exodus. Some say that happened around 1300 BC but we understand that Scripture teaches an earlier date of 1445 BC

Around 1400 BC. After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, the nation returned to the land of Canaan and conquered the various Canaanite city-states starting with Jericho.

Around 1380 to 1050 BC For 300+ years, the nation of Israel was under the rule of the judges, still in the land we call Israel.

About 1010-970 BC was the Kingdom of David, and Jerusalem is his capital city.

951 Solomon completes the first temple. It took seven years from start to finish.

Shortly after Solomon, the unified kingdom splits into northern (Israel) and southern (Judah) kingdoms, what we call the “divided monarchy.”

722 BC The northern kingdom called Israel is exiled by Assyria, and the area occupied by other nations. This is the origin of the Samaritan people.

586 BC The southern kingdom called Judah is exiled to Babylon. The Jerusalem Temple is destroyed. Actually, the exile occurred in three phases:

605 BC Daniel
597 BC Jehoiachin
586 BC Zedekiah

538 BC The Jews begin to return from Babylon to Israel and Jerusalem.

538 BC Zerubbabel
458 BC Ezra
444 BC Nehemiah

515 BC The second temple is built.

The intertestamental period brought a lot of difficulties into the nation, with it being occupied by various world powers.

63 BC Rome takes over “Judaea” as a vassal state.

20 BC to 25 AD (46 years, John 2:20) Herod rebuilds the second temple into the great edifice visited by Jesus and the disciples.

53 AD Roman historian Suetonius reports that Jews were expelled from Rome (Acts 18:2) because of disturbances over “Chrestus.” This appears to be a reference to Christ. Some were expelled from Rome in 139 BC as well. It seems there is a pattern of Jews being or becoming “nomadic” because they have been hated over the centuries—in Russia, Europe, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, etc. Thus arises the desire for them to have a homeland (see below) so that they can settle in one place and be left alone. I believe God has arranged for the concept of nations and national boundaries (Acts 17:26) to keep the nations from tearing one another apart. In other words, some level of separation is helpful to keep the peace and prevent the mass accumulation of corrupting power.

70 AD Jerusalem is destroyed by the Romans after the Jewish revolt. The temple is destroyed.

130-136 AD The Bar Kochba Revolt. Rome put down the revolt at great cost to themselves, and then renamed the area “Palestine” (Latin *Palaestina*), perhaps as a direct insult to the Jews. *Palaestina* comes from *Philistine*. The word Palestine had been used of the area for about 160 years already at this point but was now an official Roman name for the area.

By this point, Israel had been in their land for at least 1500 years after the Exodus. God assigned them some time off for seriously bad behavior in which they were not on the land

for 70 or so years. Counting from when Abram moved to Canaan they have been living in Israel for over two millennia already before the land was called Palestine.

610 AD The birth of Islam

636 AD The Arabs take over the land.

1099 – 1291 AD The Crusades are the battle for the “holy land.” Mamluks took over.

1517 to 1918 The Ottoman Empire takes over the region. They barred Jewish land purchase. This made “aliyah” – return to the land – very difficult.

There was always a presence of Jews in this area through all these years.

1882 The first Aliyah, consisting of Russian Jews escaping persecution in Russia. They were escaping what is called a “pogrom” which is “an organized massacre of helpless people *specifically*: such a massacre of Jews”¹ Another dictionary defines it as “an organized massacre of a particular ethnic group, in particular that of Jewish people in Russia or eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.” (Google’s definition). The word comes to us from Yiddish and Russian and means “devastation” or “destroy by using violence.”

1897 Beginning of the Zionist Movement, by Theodor Herzl, because of antisemitism in France particularly but also throughout Europe. The Zionist movement came about to establish an independent Jewish state in Israel. The term does *not* refer to a cabal of individuals who are trying to take over the world, although there are probably many such people today!

Britannica says: “Zionism, Jewish nationalist movement that has had as its goal the creation and support of a Jewish national state in Palestine, the ancient homeland of the Jews (Hebrew: Eretz Yisra’el, “the Land of Israel”). Though Zionism originated in eastern and central Europe in the latter part of the 19th century, it is in many ways a continuation of the ancient attachment of the Jews and of the Jewish religion to the historical region of Palestine, where one of the hills of ancient Jerusalem was called Zion.”²

1917 The Balfour Declaration. There was to be a Jewish homeland in the area we know as Israel *and* Jordan. It was penned by James Balfour, Earl of Balfour, to “Lionel Walter Rothschild, 2nd Baron Rothschild, Baron de Rothschild, FRS [Fellow of the Royal Society]

¹ Inc Merriam-Webster, [Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary](#). (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003), s.v. “pogrom.”

² <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Zionism>

was a British banker, politician, zoologist and soldier, who was a member of the Rothschild family.”³

The text of the declaration is as follows:

November 2nd, 1917

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet.

"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for 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."

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Yours sincerely,

Arthur James Balfour⁴

1920 Pogroms against Jews *in Jerusalem* by Arabs. This prevented, among other things, Jews from praying at the Western wall on the temple mount.

1922 British government receives a mandate over Palestine. Transjordan becomes separated from the section of land promised in the Balfour declaration, and becomes an area for Arabs in the region, effectively a “second state.” It is called Jordan.

1929 More unrest, this time in Hebron. British restrict land transfers to Jews. But Jews have been moving to Israel because of antisemitism in Europe before World War II. They were making their land productive.

1937 Peel Commission partition plan gives Israel only a little bit of land.

1939 British restrict immigration to 75,000 Jews per year.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Rothschild,_2nd_Baron_Rothschild

⁴ https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/balfour.asp

1939-45 World War II. Jews side with the British. Arabs side with Hitler. Hajmin Al Hussein, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, a leader of the Palestian Arabs, negotiating with Hitler and trying to get the “final solution” to happen in Palestine. Germans did get to Egypt but not to Israel.

1945 British restrictions on immigration remain.

1947 UN offers a partition plan for two states. Jerusalem would be an international city, not Jewish or Arab. Arabs would not agree, but Jews wished to agree to get whatever they could. I note again that this is basically a two-state solution for the problem. But the Transjordan issue was a two-state solution in 1922, just 25 years earlier. It feels like Israel is cut in half, now proposed to be cut in half again. After a couple more iterations, how much will be left?!

May 14, 1948 the British Mandate ends, and Israel declares itself a state under David Ben-Gurion. In their declaration of independence, they ask Arabs to stay and become citizens. The Arab states declare war.

May 15 to June 10, 1948 Arab war against Israel. They want to wipe the state away. Jews retained everything except old city of Jerusalem. There was no state of any sort before this point, certainly not a Palestinian nation.

1964 PLO is founded. Calls for destruction of Israel. At that time, Israel did not control the west bank, nor did they control Gaza. So, the meaning of “Palestinian Liberation” is to remove Israel entirely from the map.

1967 Arab states organize for war. Israel launches preemptive attack to defend themselves and take large swaths of territory in the north, south, and the old city of Jerusalem. They consider it a miracle because the war was over in six days.

Israel then gives up most of what they conquered in the war but kept the Golan Heights for defensive purposes. At this time also, the Arab League Summit declares its “three no statements” which are no peace, no recognition, no negotiation. This will guide their actions up to the Abraham accords. There would be no possibility of a two-state solution in this period because the Arabs decided ahead of time they would accept nothing.

1973 Yom Kippur War under Golda Meir. They did not take seriously the warnings, suffered bad losses, but did expand their borders some.

1979 Camp David Accords. Menachem Begin agrees with Anwar Sadat to a peace accord. Gives up Sinai Desert. Sadat was assassinated.

1982 Jordan's monarchy expel Palestinians to Lebanon because they fear the PLO will take them over.

1982 PLO fires rockets into Israel. Israel nearly takes over much of Lebanon, but then gives it back. What happens is that terrorists take over the area and use it as a base of operations against Israel.

1987 Intifada. This Arabic word means "uprising" or "shaking off" in which the Palestinians fight against Israel. The first Intifada was in 1987-1991. The second Intifada was in 2000-2005. They include riots, war, etc.

1993 Oslo Accords. Yasser Arafat is brought out of exile on Tunis and Yitzhak Rabin is prime minister of Israel. Israel then negotiates with the PLO. President Bill Clinton presided over the ceremonies. It was a significant event that Rabin shook hands with the terrorist Arafat. According to the agreement, the PLO would recognize Israel and Israel would recognize a Palestinian state. The Palestinians were to stop educating their children to hate Jews. The Accords ended up going nowhere.

1998-2000 Further negotiations called Wye River Agreements (hawk Netanyahu) and Camp David Accords with Bill Clinton (with dove Ehud Barak). Barak offered a lot to achieve peace, but Arafat does not negotiate and launched the second Intifada. This confirms that the PLO wants Israel gone.

2004 Mahmoud Abbas, a holocaust denier, succeeds Arafat.

2005 Ariel Sharon removed Jewish soldiers and forcibly removed settlers from the area as well, handing over Gaza to the Palestinians. This was a major win for the Palestinians. Hamas burned everything and took over.

2006 Hamas wins election in Gaza.

2008 Ehud Olmert offers Judea and Samaria, land swaps, keep the Gaza strip. Abbas does not negotiate.

There are three groups involved: Hamas, Fatah (military wing of Palestinian Authority), and Islamic Jihad.

2008 First Gaza War. Rockets are fired at Israel.

2014 Second Gaza War. Israel goes in to remove offenders.

September 5, 2020 With the Abraham Accords, several Arab states have abandoned the "three no's" because Iran has risen as a enemy of the region and Israel is not a threat.

2021 Third Gaza War. More rockets, Israel must defend itself. Israel developed a variation of Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative called the Iron Dome which is very effective.⁵

October 7, 2023 What we could call the Fourth Gaza War begins with a *land* incursion by Hamas from Gaza and kills 1200 people and kidnaps 240. Israel responds with great ferocity.

What events will transpire between now and the unfolding of God's future promised events is probably more of the same.

Timeline in the Future

Rapture of the Church at Year $R \geq 2024$ (so far). At this date, Israel will have a covenant with antichrist which will give them apparent peace.

$R + 3.5$ years. Antichrist breaks the covenant, and a great time of tragedy befalls the people of Israel, and the entire world.

$R + 7$ years. Nearly wiped out, Israel will turn to the returning Messiah for help. He will defeat their enemies and inaugurate the kingdom age for 1,000 years. This will be Israel's golden age, as well as the golden era of all the nations. Satan will be bound.

$R + 1007$ years. Satan will be released for a short time to deceive the nations. Once more, God will defeat them and put an end to *all* rebellion *forever*.

$R + \sim 1008$ years. Israel will enjoy an eternal continuation of the kingdom. Their "forever" promises will be fulfilled during this time.

How Should Christians Think of Israel Today?

How should we treat Israel in international affairs? Here is where we come back to Biblical theology, departing from the study of world history that we were on above.

International relations between Israel, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, UAE, Iran, and the United States, etc. are "complicated" to say the least. It is not in this church's purview to adjudicate those matters because it is the God-assigned role of the civil government to handle those matters. Nor is it in the purview of any other church. We have a different area of "administration" and function in the world, and that is the religious or spiritual function in which we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and call people to repent and believe.

⁵ Much of the above timeline, from the Bar Kochba revolt to this point, is drawn from Ben Shapiro's history of Israel, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEoVzKyD_IM

The following is taken from Mark Snoeberger's course notes on Dispensationalism, Excursus 14 concerning the question of preferential treatment for Jews today. The problem is the word *preferential*. It suggests partiality, which we are not to exhibit as Christians, and which God does not exhibit.

“The fact that dispensationalism has not been the prevailing theological system throughout the history of the Christian church has resulted in a great deal of anti-Semitic sentiment and sometimes even brutality in the name of Christ. After all, the Jews rejected their Messiah and killed him, with the result that God rejected them as his people and turned to the Gentiles.”⁶

“Paul addresses this nascent sentiment among Gentile believers in Romans 11 and corrects it with the observation that God has not rejected Israel permanently (vv. 1, 11, etc.). In fact, many Scriptures suggest a certain priority and advantage that accrues to Jews (John 4:22; Rom 3:1–2; 9:1–5; etc.). But does dispensational theology demand that Jews receive preferential treatment in the NT era?

- *Missiologically*, some dispensationalists have appealed to Romans 1:16; 2:9–10; etc., as normalizing the priority of Jewish evangelism in the present dispensation. That this was clearly a historical reality in the apostolic era cannot be denied (Acts 1:8 (Jerusalem first) and the whole of the book of Acts with Paul's focus on synagogue ministry); however, that the priority of which Paul speaks in Romans 1–2 is evangelistic is not so certain. Certainly Romans 1:16 is not crafted as a command (a strange omission if it reflects the primary mission of the church), and the leveling of ethnic distinctions in the church described elsewhere (e.g., Gal 3:27) seems to militate against this understanding. In view of this, it is probably best to see the priority described here as one of *suitability*. The coming of Christ was the climax of the Jewish expectation, and should have resonated with them with little or no additional explanation. The Gentiles, on the other hand, had no such background, and much explanation was needed to “graft them in.”
- *Socio-politically*, some dispensationalists argue that biblically informed Christians

⁶ MAP: I hasten to remind the reader that the Romans had a major part in the brutality as well. We can say with the Lord that the one who delivered him over has the greater sin (John 19:11). Was that Judas? Perhaps. But more directly in this context Jesus probably refers to the high priest, representing the council and the Jews more generally. But “the Jews” is not the right group to blame. Who is to blame? Some Jewish religious leaders, some in the Jewish crowd, Roman governor Pontius Pilate, Roman soldiers, jeering crowds, and you and I whose sin nailed effectively nailed him to the cross.

and governments should grant Israel, as God's chosen nation, privileged status among the nations, affording them *carte-blanche* military and economic support and even turning a blind eye to their moral excesses and abuses.⁷ While there are good reasons to support Israel,⁸ their status as God's chosen people does not seem to be one of them. God has turned away from Israel and has handed them over to the Gentile nations for just judgment in keeping with the terms of their covenant. This certainly gives us no license for unwarranted abuse or attempts at genocide (which certainly will fail!), but neither does it demand that we show them special favoritism. God's program with Israel is in hiatus, i.e., a parenthetical interruption until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. There is no favored nation status conferred on Israel today⁹."

I would state the case similarly but more moderately. The secular government should support Israel inasmuch as we morally can do so in order to show due deference *to God*.

However, we recognize that Israel as currently constituted is gathered in its land in a state of unbelief. They have not yet recognized "Him whom they pierced." The Scriptures foretell that the nation will fall under great tribulation and be scattered once again, until the Lord regathers them and inaugurates His kingdom on this earth.

I do not know of much NT teaching on this issue. But there are a few places in Scripture that can give us some guidance.

1. Matthew 25:40, 45. When Jewish people are persecuted, it is good to try to protect them. The United States and other European states failed miserably at this during World War 2. They could have done much better to receive refugees, help them resettle in Israel, not appease Hitler, etc. No differentiation is made as to whether the Jewish people were believers or not. I believe this applies more broadly as well. If it is possible for a nation to help another, then we should do so. We could have invited millions *more* Jews into the United States in the 1930s and 40s.¹⁰ Other nations could do the same for genuine refugees from other lands, not just Jews. Integration and economics and other things are difficult,

⁷ MAP: This seems too extreme in its manner of statement. A lot of Christians support Israel, but they do not give *carte blanche* support.

⁸ Snoeberger adds: Continued sympathy for their suffering that saw the nation established after WWII, a buffer against terrorist nations, etc.

⁹ Snoeberger writes, "God's promise to bless those who bless Israel, while an eternal provision, seems to be tied primarily with Israel's priestly role toward the nations—it is not in place during the present dispensation." I am not convinced that this is the entire story. Before the priestly role of the nation was established, this provision was operative.

¹⁰ I understand that from 1880 to 1925, about 2.8 million Jewish people moved to the United States, mostly from eastern Europe.

but something could be done, even if not at a “luxury” level with things like healthcare, education, etc.

2. Genesis 12:17, Gen. 20:2-7 (similar to Gen. 26:2-11). Even when Abram sinned and thus brought a very awkward situation to Pharaoh and Abimelech, God *still* protected Abram. He was shamed, yes, but not mistreated by these civil leaders. They rebuked him. It is well within the realm of possibility that similar circumstances could happen today.

3. The principle that we should do to others as we would have them do to us, which is in part a matter of consistency. If we would not tolerate an incursion into our territory with mass murder and kidnapping, and our government would meet it with fierce vengeance, then we should permit Israel to do the same as we would do, and even assist them in it, certainly not hinder them in a righteous cause. A double-standard for political gain is an obvious injustice.

As with all political and civil matters, we do not believe it wise to get engrossed in them because they are worldly, temporal. We do not see “signs” in these events because the imminent rapture of the church is a signless event. It will in fact be quite a surprise even to Christians when it occurs—not that it happened, but perhaps *how* and *when*.

What are your thoughts or questions on this matter?