

The CORNERSTONE

Special Commemorative Issue



Reflections On The Holy Land

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MY TRIP TO ISRAEL

“THE HOLY LAND”

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HOW I VIEWED ISRAEL BEFORE I TRAVELLED TO ISRAEL?

In his little book Illustrations of Bible Truth, H.A. Ironside pointed out the folly of judging others. He related an incident in the life of a man called Bishop Potter. "He was sailing for Europe on one of the great transatlantic ocean liners. When he went on board, he found that another passenger was to share the cabin with him. After going to see the accommodations, he came up to the purser's desk and inquired if he could leave his gold watch and other valuables in the ship's safe. He explained that ordinarily he never availed himself of that privilege, but he had been to his cabin and had met the man who was to share the cabin with him. Judging from his appearance, he was afraid that he might not be a very trustworthy person. The purser accepted the responsibility for the valuables and remarked, 'It's all right, bishop, I'll be very glad to take care of them for you. The other man has been up here and left his for the same reason!'"

Judging people before you get to know them is never a good idea. Using our own store of information—a few facts, figures or preconceived notions—to derive at a conclusion about any race of people before actually having contact with them, so that you can personally get to know them yourself, feeds our distrust, suspicions and handed down prejudices. If we are to rid ourselves of the poisonous behaviors of prejudging and stereotyping people, it would be unfailingly thoughtful--and sagacious—for us to take the time to hear each others stories, become familiar with the deep values, pains, frustrations, hopes and dreams of other races of people. That was the purpose of my trip to the wonderful land of Israel.

As a result of being in Israel, I expected to be shocked, depressed, and grieved; these emotions competing in me in rapid fire. I expected to hear bombs going off every now and then. I expected to have to run to a bomb shelter at least two or three times, and perhaps, with what I've been told, even seeing arbitrary death, while I was in Israel. I expected to see law enforcement and unauthorized people roaming the streets with machine guns. I expected to see more unlawfulness than I saw. In fact, I only heard the law enforcement siren go off one time while I was there. I did not expect to see a complex, multifaceted and modern city.

I expected, and others as well who knew I was going to Israel, that my life would be in constant danger. Why do I say this...? 99% of the people who knew I was going to Israel or I told in a conversation that I was going would always give me a strange look or say "Be careful" or "Why do you want to go there?" In fact, I was having a slight pain in my mouth, and my dentist said that he couldn't find anything wrong with my teeth. So he attributed the pain in my mouth, teeth to be specific, to anxiety about my trip to Israel.

My secretary constantly gave me updates about areas that I should not let the Israeli officials take me. Everyday she said there was an update about dangerous travel places to avoid. Usually it was the same place: the Gaza Strip. So you can see why I expected my life to be in constant danger.

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I expected to see people—rabbis and priest, Israeli and Palestinian people—standing in the streets, temples, synagogues, and holy sites, fervently arguing and debating about religion. I expected the hotel that I would stay in to be sub-standard (widows with no screens opened all day long with white dirty curtains hanging out the window, smoked filled halls and loud radios playing from other rooms or other facilities in the neighborhood.)

WHAT I LEARNED?

I had a lot of pre-conceived notions because of all the things I saw on TV and heard on the radio. But I think the historical legacy of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict overshadows a whole lot of good things happening in Israel, in that region of the world: there are so many different religions (Jews, 76.2%; Muslims, 16.1; Christians, 2.1%, Druze, 1.6%) represented in Israel, yet I discovered not chaos as a result of these various religions but harmony. I discovered a people, although they have a different process for arriving at these objectives, who, despite their differences, have a common desire for peace, and a common hope for continued prosperity for the Middle East.

Israel with its natural beauty is filled with contradictions, yet it is able to sustain itself. Not all Jews are religious (at least 80% or not). They use the Bible to preserve their culture and to remember from whence they came, not necessarily to practice the religious faiths.

Although it is a relatively new country, it is a technologically progressive country. Israel is a melting pot of many ideas, religions, customs, social experiences, and it is held together by herculean efforts and great finesse: give and take, respect and acknowledgment, negotiation and compromise.

The land is rich with fertile fields and crops. They don't import any fruits unless their own crops have been destroyed by some natural disaster.

After the first Roman conquest, Jews were driven out of Palestine. Therefore, Israel is a vision and desire for all Jews to return to their homeland after being dispersed and displaced throughout the world for twenty centuries.

It is a land where people from all walks of life—Jews, Protestants, Catholics, Muslims... are drawn because of origins of spiritual resources, ancestral history and Biblical prophecy.

Although Israel does not have Constitution, it is a Democracy. In fact, it is considered the only Democratic Government in the Middle-East, a government of the people, by the people, for the people.

Jewish history is so old because they insist on having common memories. Deuteronomy 25:17--there is no part in the Bible that is more important than this Scripture. Across the chasm all these centuries, after Pharaoh enslaved and set the Jews free, still every Jew must remember what it was like to live in Egypt and see himself/herself as leaving Egypt.

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The blueprint for the Holocaust was designed around preserving a common memory. How was the Holocaust used to preserve common memory for the Jewish people? After much studying and reflecting, it was decided that the Holocaust would be preserved as all the Jewish history has been preserved: By (1) listening (2) acquiring (3) understanding. Children begin to learn about the Holocaust at the age of 4 (cannot be later). On this day there is no television; they are told stories. Once they reach high school, they begin to analyze the Holocaust and seek to understand it. 1982 was the first time that the Holocaust was taught in a systematic way.

In addition, I learned that Israel, even after being gravely threatened, even after fighting many bloody-desperate battles, is ready for peace and ready to settle the territory dispute with Palestine with the following pre-conditions: (1) Israel must be recognized as who she is; a Jewish State; (2) All agreements must be kept; (3) The Palestinians must renounce and fight terrorism. The following are negotiable: No foreign arms west of the Jordan; Decide who will control the air space; Decide where the Palestinian Army will be located. Nothing is agreed upon unless all is agreed on. All the present settlements cannot be removed and building cannot be stopped in settlements already established before the 1948 agreement.

There are around 30,000 Christians in Israel, around 50,000 in Palestinian, and around 245,000 in Jordan. I have deduced from what I heard such as 80% of Jews are not religious, the Catholic Bishop's comments in our visit with him, that the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is not a religious problem but a political problem. It is about civil and human rights.

PALESTINE SPOKEPERSON:

According to a Palestinian Spokesperson, who spoke to our group, who used to work for the PLO but now works for the Israeli Newspaper made some interest pointed comments—not parenthetical comments, but apparently well thought out—in his opinion Palestine went in the wrong direction under Arafat. The US poured billions of dollars into Palestine and Arafat did not use it to improve the Palestinian people's lives. He spent it on himself and sending his wife on shopping sprees. This has disillusioned both Arabs and Jews: The Arabs because they haven't obtained the independence and honest government they want; the Jews because security has become more elusive than it was two decades ago. This made the people lose hope and trust, and they started to fight each other and blame the Israeli Government...He believes that the two state solutions is not the solution; he believes that there should be dialogue without pre-conditions.

He stated that the Palestinians are now divided between two bloodthirsty sects—Fatah, which holds fragile power in the West Bank, and Hamas, which controls Gaza. He further stated that the Palestinians are fighting among themselves, and it is not about what would be best for Palestinians but instead over money and power—and they are blaming the Jews for their internal conflicts—that the US needs to tell Palestine to solve their conflict in Palestine first, and this will solve the Palestinian/Israeli conflict.

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He believes that President Obama is part of the problem. He believes the US needs to stand down. When the US pushed for free elect, it pushed the PLO out and Hamas, who is in the majority anyway and who is considered to be a terrorist group, won the election. Instead of the US letting this situation work itself out, they sought to undermine Hamas.

He believes that the obstacle to peace is not about Jews building settlements but failure of the Palestinians to have a government. There is no partner on the Palestinian side to hold real peace talks. What needs to happen?

He believes Israel needs to simply wait until the Palestinians stop killing each other and create a credible political entity that can make a deal. In other words, reconciliation needs to happen between the Palestinian people first. Peace will then be possible. This is the only way peace will come to the Middle East.

- He dreams of a Democratic Government.
- He dreams of a free media like Israel has; there is no free media in Palestine.

CHRISTIAN SPOKEPERSON

There is no goal for Palestine. There is no love for their, own people. There is high unemployment among Palestinians. No health care. 6000-7000 Christians have left Bethlehem. Untold story is that there is very little support for Christians in Palestine

The needs are (1) Jobs and workshops (2) Food and supplies (3) Schooling. Christians are leaving Christians Schools going to Muslim Schools (4) Medical teams

CONCERNS AND QUESTIONS:

I believe that a Jewish State needs to exist and right where it presently exist. The Jews were driven out of Palestine by the first century Roman conquest. The establishment of Israel fulfills Biblical Prophecy: the establishment of the Kingdom of Israel after the Exodus represents the fulfillment of God’s promise to the Jews. Although the Jews do not claim to be a religious people—and they claim to have moved away from Biblical prophecy to nationhood to support their proposition that there should be a Jew state, they have sustained their vision of a Jewish state through Biblical prophecy, which states that the ultimate redemption of the Jewish people would be in their return to the Holy Land.

There are governments and private individuals who have sought to annihilate the Jews—purge them from the earth. There is a long history of this malevolent plot: European Jews were subject to restrictions forbidding them from entering certain professions, denying them access to universities, barring them from

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state employment, and confining them to specific areas of residence. In the face of this continuous evil plot and the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy, the return of Jews to the Holy land is in order.

According to History, the oppressed conditions in which Eastern European Jews lived prompted the Zionists among them to take up Britain’s promise and attempt to construct in Palestine a Jewish national home; at the same time the Arab community of Palestine opposed the notion of turning its homeland into a Jewish State and, to the extent that it is able to do so, continues to resist the process. The Zionist claim to the same territory inhabited by Palestinians Arabs lay at the root of the conflict over Palestine.

QUESTIONS:

1. So how do we solve the root of the problem, which is that Palestinians see that a small territory that had been inhabited by an Arab majority for some 1,200 years was promised by a third party (Great Britain) as a national home to another people (the international Jews), the majority of whom lived in Eastern Europe?
2. Herzl’s thesis was that the Jews constituted a nation but lacked a political state which within they could freely express their national culture. What constitutes a nation?
3. Why move away from Biblical prophecy—religious association with the Old Testament to nationhood?
4. On November 2, 1917, the British foreign secretary, Arthur Balfour, wrote to Lord Rothschild, a prominent figure in British Zionist circles, informing him that the cabinet had approved the following declaration of sympathy for Jewish Zionist aspirations.

His majority government view would favor the establishment in Palestine a National Home for 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.

This was the fateful Balfour Declaration, a brief document filled with such ambiguities and contradictions that it confused all the parties named in it.

How could Britain and now the US facilitate the establishment of a Jewish national home on the one hand and ensure that the rights of the Arab majority would not be threatened on the other?

WHAT I AM THANKFUL FOR AS A RESULT OF THIS TRIP?

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I am thankful that Abraham Lincoln held the Union together because if he had not the US would have had the same regional differences that now exist in the Middle East.

I want to thank Dr. Michael Battle for nominating me, the Atlanta Jewish Committee for choosing me, and God for blessing me with the wonderful opportunity to visit Israel. I am optimistic about the future of both Israel and Palestine because I genuinely believe that the fellow citizens of both nations want a vibrant and peaceful Middle East ethos that reaches its full potential.

As you can see from this article, I had preconceived notions about Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian peace agreements but I have grown tremendously. What I saw with my own eyes while I was in Israel was so tellingly and insightful that it gave me an informative and healthy understanding of the reasons for the endless clashes between the Israelis and Palestinians and common hopes these two wonderful peoples have to procure freedom from strife and bitter battles. My goal is to continue to learn about these great nations so that I can stay informed and enlighten others about the value and importance of both the Israeli and Palestinian cultures, and the steps towards peace between these two nations.