

The Peace of Jerusalem Requires Our Prayers

The Bible instructs us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Ps. 122:6). For tens of millions of Christians in America, this admonition means standing for the modern state of Israel and its right to exist in accordance with God's will and plan.

Yet on a practical level, some Christians find themselves unprepared when confronted by those who cite Israel as an occupying oppressor of the Palestinians or an obstacle to peace due to its failure to return to pre-1967 borders. I often hear believers respond by saying that God gave the land to Abraham's descendants, not to the Palestinians, and leave it at that.

While this response is certainly accurate, it's also incomplete. It fails to refute the frequently heard charge that Israel cares more about land than peace, making war inevitable. As Christian leaders, we have the biblical responsibility to respond in full, and the best way to do that is to intentionally educate ourselves on the story of the modern state of Israel. Below, I've provided a broad timeline to help us better understand that story.

1917 – Politically speaking, the story begins when Lord Balfour, a British Christian, issues the Balfour Declaration, stating that Great Britain favors the Zionist aim of a Jewish state in Palestine. In those days, Palestine included what we now call Israel, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza. All of it was part of God's original land grant to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in Genesis, which actually extended far beyond Palestine.

1922 – Britain, which now occupies Palestine, sets aside nearly 80 percent of its land for its Arab population, calling the new entity Transjordan, which today is known as the

Kingdom of Jordan.

1929 – Though this allotment leaves only 20 percent of original Palestine for the Jewish people, the Zionist settlers accept this compromise while the Arabs oppose it. A series of violent attacks on Jewish settlements follows, including the notorious Hebron massacre on Aug. 23, 1929.

The Arab Muslim use of bloodshed to terrorize and traumatize Jews into leaving the land is endorsed by Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. Like many in the Arab Muslim Middle East, the Grand Mufti supported Adolph Hitler's murderous Nazi regime during World War II. The Grand Mufti actually moved to Germany, where he publicly supported the Holocaust and lobbied Hitler to bring it to Palestine.

1947 – Though the Arab enemies of the Jews chose the wrong side during the war, they receive a further concession after it. In November 1947, the United Nations votes in favor of a Partition Plan which gives a portion of what was left of Palestine to the Arabs. This is in addition to the original 80 percent, which became Transjordan. As was the case in 1922 when Transjordan was created, the Jews accept this compromise while the Arabs oppose it. Once again, violence erupts, including massacres of Jews.

1948 – Less than a year later, on May 14, 1948, the British leave the land, and the modern State of Israel is born. For Christians who took God's ancient Word and promises literally, it is a stunning fulfillment of biblical prophecy, as His exiled people come home and re-establish a Jewish commonwealth for the first time in 20 centuries. For Jews, it is a bittersweet victory, coming three years after the Nazi Holocaust in Europe that destroyed 6 million lives. But for the enemies of Zionism, it is the crowning indignity, which could not stand. Following Israel's birth, the surrounding countries attack the new nation, seeking its destruction and the extermination of its people. Against all

odds, Israel defends itself successfully, thwarting the multi-pronged assault on her people.

Clearly, the events leading up to Israel's creation reveal a pattern. From the beginning, events proved the Jews were willing to accept a state of any size, even if smaller than original Palestine, let alone the size of God's original promise to Abraham and His descendants. At the same time, their Arab adversaries consistently rejected any such state, no matter how small. Even when given the lion's share of Palestine in 1922, and more land in 1947, they refused. Before Israel was created, they sought to drive the Jews out of the land; after Israel was created, they attempted to destroy her.

Another pattern is this: The foes of Zionism learned that by attacking the Jews, they were engaging in no-risk aggression. If they won, the Jews would be gone, and there would be no Jewish state. But if they lost, and the Jews remained, the world community would still support them. Rejecting the Transjordan concession in 1922 led to further concession through the 1947 Partition Plan. After 1948, the new state's enemies continue to seek its demise by every means possible, from military to diplomatic.

1967 – The 1967 War marks a great turning point in this aggression. It commences in May when President Nasser of Egypt begins pouring troops into the Sinai Peninsula. Throughout the month, both Egypt and Syria proclaim that the goal is the long-sought destruction of Israel. Reiterating that peaceful co-existence is impossible, they pledge to put an end to "Zionist existence." By the end of May, the leaders of Jordan agree to join them in their quest.

Rather than allow itself to be invaded, as in 1948, Israel responds by attacking the Arab armies first. In six stunning days, Israel defeats these forces, once again preserving her existence. And this time, Israel's enemies finally begin paying a price for their belligerence. Israel takes territory

from her enemies, including the Golan Heights from Syria, the Sinai and Gaza from Egypt, and the West Bank and the Old City of Jerusalem from Jordan. For Bible-believing Christians, Jerusalem's full return into Jewish hands is yet another prophetic milestone, foretold in the Scriptures. For Jews, it is the miraculous return of their ancient capital. But for Israel's enemies, it is another humiliating setback in their push for her extinction.

1973 – Arab armies launch a surprise attack in Israel on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year. While Jews fast and pray in synagogues, enemy forces advance toward their state. With the help of arms from the United States, Israel fights back and prevails.

Unable to vanquish Israel in battle, her foes resort increasingly to acts of terrorism. Formed in the 1960s to obliterate Israel, Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) commits countless atrocities against Israeli civilians.

Along with surrounding Arab states, the PLO also launches an international propaganda war against Israel. As part of that war, they blame their refusal to make peace with Israel on Israel's occupation of land taken in the 1967 War. Forgotten was the fact that they were at war with an Israel of any size before 1967. Contrary to this propaganda, Israel since 1967 has repeatedly proved willing to cede land for peace. When they finally decide to recognize the state of Israel, the nations of Egypt and Jordan receive land back in return.

Ignoring these concessions, Israel's vocal critics reply that she has failed to deal with the issue of Arabs displaced during the 1948 War of Independence. The premise is that Zionists drove out the Arabs and were fully responsible for their plight as refugees. Yet the reality is that during the war, the surrounding Arab nations deceptively encouraged many to flee, assuring them that they could come back once they

crushed the Zionist foe. After the war, these same Arab nations refused to resettle these refugees, preferring to use them instead as a propaganda tool against Israel.

2000 – Despite this campaign, Israel offers Arafat a Palestinian state and in return asks for complete recognition by Arafat of Israel's right to exist. This was precisely the agreement that Arafat had said he supported. His bluff called, Arafat responds by launching a multi-year terror campaign against Israel's civilians.

2005 – Five years after this campaign, Israeli forces pull completely and unilaterally out of Gaza. Clearly, history refutes the canard that Israel's holding onto land is harming the quest for peace in the Middle East. On the contrary, history shows that before there was an Israel, Jews were willing to accept a Jewish state of any size. History shows how her enemies were determined to prevent such a state from appearing. And history reveals that since Israel came into being, the pattern continues: Israel is willing to trade land for peace, while her foes want all of her land and her people driven out.

2013 – Today, history is again being forgotten. While much of the world remains obsessed about Israel, the Middle East is dominated by radical Islamist forces unalterably opposed to peace. With Syria torn by civil war and Iran moving ever closer to obtaining a nuclear bomb while it fuels terrorism against Israel, it remains astonishing how many westerners consider Israel the main obstacle to peace. For Christians who love the God of Israel, the Bible is clear that we must pray for the peace of Jerusalem. And for those who take the Word of God seriously, it is incumbent on us to bless and stand with the children of Israel. In the last days, as the world turns against the Jewish nation, it is vital that we as God's people stand all the more with her.

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