

Steps to the State of Israel - 3

The End of the Story

In our two earlier articles, we considered some of the events that led to the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948. It has been a remarkable story: a displaced people, scattered amongst the nations of the world, has been repatriated after nearly 2000 years of exile. Bible students have been expecting the Jews to return to their land for centuries (see for example the beliefs of Isaac Newton in *Glad Tidings* issue 1596).



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When it actually happened in the 20th Century, the truth of Bible prophecy was powerfully demonstrated. For the first time in millennia, the Jews formed an independent nation. Israel can now be counted amongst the nations of the world. 2018 will mark the 70th anniversary of the formation of the State. But the original concept of a national home for the Jewish people as laid out in the Balfour Declaration (see part 1 of this series) has been badly spoiled as a result of the continuing conflicts between Israel and her neighbours. The story is clearly not yet over.

The Arab–Israeli Conflict

Within hours of the Declaration of Independence being made on 14th May 1948, fighting between Jew and Arab erupted. The following day, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and forces from Iraq invaded the former British mandated territory in an attempt to wipe out the fledgling state. Amazingly, despite a large superiority in numbers, the Arab invasion failed to achieve its objectives and after 10 months of fighting, Israel held on to the area allotted to them by UN Resolution 181 and had taken more than half of the area recommended for an Arab state in the Partition Plan.

The nation of Israel continued to grow and prosper, with three quarters of a million new settlers arriving between 1948 and 1951, mostly from countries in the Middle East which had expelled them. About the same number of Arabs were displaced as a result of the fighting. The Jewish population of Israel grew from 657,000 in 1948 to 1,810,000 in 1958, and it now stands at 6,500,000. The Palestinians look back to this time and call it *Al-Nakba* (the Catastrophe). Troubles between Israel and her neighbours – known as the Arab–Israeli Conflict – have continually featured in our newspapers ever since. Here are some of the most notable incidents.

The Suez Crisis

In response to the nationalisation of the Suez Canal by President Nasser of Egypt in 1956, Israel, Britain and

France attacked Egypt by invading the Sinai Peninsula. While militarily successful, with Israel taking the Gaza Strip and Sinai, it was a disaster for the allies, since the UN and USA refused to support the action. In fact this marks the point at which Britain's role in the area effectively ceased. This affair now confirmed the USA as Israel's chief ally. America has given huge financial and military aid to Israel, and can usually be counted on to support Israel when other countries are against her.

The Six-Day War

Relative peace was enjoyed for a little over 10 years. But the underlying hatred of Israel continued, especially amongst Egypt and the displaced Palestinians. In May 1967, President Nasser sent Egyptian troops into Sinai and closed the 7-mile wide Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, thus stopping



Israeli Troops led by Generals Moshe Dayan & Yitzhak Rabin entering the Old City of Jerusalem, 7th June 1967

all trade between Israel and the East. The result was another conflict in the Middle East.

Despite facing Arab countries with nearly twice as many troops, Israel convincingly defeated first Egypt then Jordan and Syria, taking the whole of the Sinai Peninsula, all of the West Bank and the Golan Heights in the north. With a loss of 689 Israeli lives, the victory was won in a mere six days. The rest of the world looked on in amazement. Here was a victory reminiscent of the days of Joshua in the Old Testament!

For the Israelis, the capture of the ancient city of Jerusalem from Jordanian occupation was a very emotional moment. For the first time in two thousand years, Jerusalem was in Jewish hands again.

This event was particularly important for Bible readers, since Jesus prophesied that *“Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled”* Luke 21:24. Jesus spoke these words some 40 years before the Roman armies besieged Jerusalem and destroyed the temple (as Jesus had said earlier in his Olivet Prophecy in Luke 21). From that time until 7th June 1967, Jerusalem had been under the dominion of one Gentile power after another. Surely this is a sign to the world that God's plan is nearing its climax.

The Yom Kippur War

Following the Six-Day War, peace was short-lived. Egypt and Syria were determined to take back the land that Israel had conquered in 1967. On the 6th October 1973, while Israelis were at prayer on the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur (The Day of Atonement), Israel was attacked by Egypt and Syria. It

took 11 days for Israeli forces to recover from their shock. By this stage they had crossed the Suez Canal into Egyptian territory. Egypt was on the brink of a military disaster. The war was eventually stopped following pressure on Israel from the UN and USA.

Since this time there has been no full-scale war between Israel and her neighbours. But there have been many incidents such as the Israeli incursion into Lebanon in 2006 following repeated rocket attacks into Northern Israel by Hezbollah, a terrorist organisation sponsored by Iran. Incursions into the Gaza strip have taken place in 2008 and 2014 following rocket attacks by the Palestinian organisation Hamas.

On the other hand, there have been a number of attempts to find peace in the Middle East, the most notable being the visit of President Sadat of Egypt to Israel in November 1977. This was an historic event, which led to the normalising of relations between Israel and Egypt. Sadly the quest for peace between Israel and her other neighbours has been less successful, apart from an agreement with Jordan. The animosity between Israel and the Palestinian peoples has proved to be a particularly difficult problem.

Will There Ever Be Peace?

The key to this question lies in Jerusalem. While it is true to say that the city is in Jewish hands, it is still the most disputed place on Earth. It is a holy site for three of the world's major religions, being sacred to Christians, Muslims and Jews alike. There can be no lasting peace in the Middle East until the sovereignty of Jerusalem has been settled. Israel refuses to countenance the partition of Jerusalem, claiming it as her capital city.

It is clear to see that Israel is becoming less popular in the world. Not many nations are prepared to speak openly in Israel's favour any more. In fact it is not difficult to see that the dispute over Jerusalem could escalate into a serious war, even dragging the super-powers into conflict.

Bible Prophecy

The Bible prophesies a time when Israel, newly gathered from the nations, will face a huge invasion of peoples intent on her final destruction. For example in Jeremiah:

For behold, days are coming declares the LORD, when I will restore the fortunes of My people, Israel and Judah, says the LORD, and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it... Thus says the LORD: we have heard a cry of panic, of terror and no peace. Ask now, and see, can a man bear a child? Why then do I see every man with his hands on his stomach, like a woman in labour? Why has every face turned pale? Alas! That day is so great, there is none like it; it is a time of distress for Jacob; yet he shall be saved out of it (Jeremiah 30:3, 5-7, ESV).

Similarly, in Zechariah:

For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women raped. Half of the city shall go into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city (Zechariah 14:2).

But the prophet then continues, making it clear that, when Israel has

nowhere to turn, God will intervene and demonstrate that He is still interested in His people:

The LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when He fights on a day of battle (Zechariah 14:3).

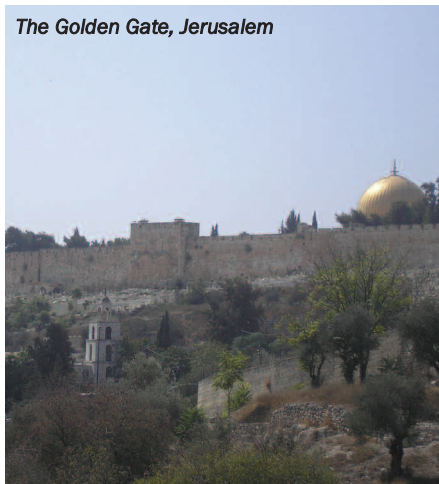
The remarkable thing about the prophecy of Zechariah is that when these things happen, the people of Israel who remain shall see the one who has saved them:

I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child (Zechariah 12:10).

On that day Israel will recognise their Messiah: the one they pierced and hung on a cross!

Conclusion

The steps to the current State of Israel have been remarkable. So many



The Golden Gate, Jerusalem

events that could not have been foreseen by human knowledge were written in the Bible long before they took place. The very existence of Israel as a nation is a fulfilment of Bible prophecy and is a clear sign to the world that we live in the last days, before the intervention of God in human affairs. Only then will there be a true “National Home for the Jewish People”.

The nations of the world have unwittingly played a part in this great epic, but the end of the story will not be a secular Israeli State in the Middle East! Neither will it be a land partitioned between Israel and Palestine. All the peoples of the Middle East as well as the three major world religions will have to recognise the authority of God in the matter.

The true end of the story, as prophesied in Scripture, will be none other than the establishment of the Kingdom of God on this earth. A kingdom centred on Jerusalem, the place where the Old Testament King David reigned:

The Angel said to her “Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the House of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:30–33).

Simon Collard

(Concluded)