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Land of Burden

One of the greatest international debates in terms of foreign policy these days is the land of Israel and its right to exist. A region tormented with violence and turmoil, Israel has drawn international attention as the hottest strip of real estate in the world, more particularly, Jerusalem, as it is considered the most sacred site on the planet to the three major world religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The country of Israel as we know it today is a Jewish state. Occupied by force, the Jewish people believe that the land belongs to them by means of an ancient covenant between the father of the Jewish religion, Abraham, and God. So, why is it that such a small piece of land is causing such global tension and disagreement between world leaders and councils as to the future of the country and a search for peace? The source of conflict is rooted deep in religious theology and the politics of mainly 2 ethnic groups, Arabs and the Jewish people. The creation of the Jewish state of Israel seemed to be the spark that ignited the fire of obsession over which group rightfully has claim to the region.

The history of the settlers to Israel began in ancient times before the birth of Christ. The Canaanites, entered the land, also known as Palestine, or Canaan, between 3000 and 1500 B.C.; the Philistines, later becoming the Palestinians, and the Jewish people entered Canaan between 1200 and 1100 B.C. (Smith 5,16).

The Jewish have had an up and down history since they first arrived in Canaan, what is now known as Palestine, or Israel. The story continued with the rise of King David in 1010 B.C. and Solomon in 970 B.C. (“Life Application”xvi-xvii). The entire

bible tells stories of the Jewish enduring years of captivity, division and conflict before, during, and following the reigns of King David and Solomon. The Jewish people almost lost their promised land during the Roman Empire. Bernard Gilland states that the Jewish were persecuted and some escaped only to be scattered throughout the world by the Romans in A.D. 132 to 135 (27). Jewish persecution has endured for centuries, and one of the most recent horror stories of anti-Semitism occurred during World War II in Europe and Nazi Germany. Pulling back the curtains of this part of world history, a small glimpse into the entire story is reflected in a document written by Dr. William Hoettl, a SS Sturmbannfuhrer where he recounts a conversation he had with a Nazi official. The document had an estimate by the Nazi officials of about 6 million Jewish being exterminated during Hitler's "Final Solution" campaign of death (Smith 213). The atrocities that occurred in the holocaust are too numerous to cover in this article, along with all the stories of persecution throughout the history of the Jewish people.

The desire of the Jewish people to find a homeland grew in response to the Holocaust, and Israel became a place of interest (Gilland 29). Bernard Gilland said that the United Nations approved a vote that gave the Jewish 56 percent of Palestine in 1947; all Arab nations voted against it. Gilland went on to explain that the Palestinian Arabs did not view themselves "a separate people at the time" and the Arabs had a hard time accepting that the Jewish could be the majority in a small percentage of Arab land when the Jewish had been forced "to accept minority status in every country they had inhabited since the Dispersion." including the middle east (30). God speaking in the Holy Bible planned for the Jewish people to return to Palestine since before the creation of the earth, however. The prophet Ezekiel 28:25 in the Holy Bible:

This is what the Sovereign Lord Says: ‘When I gather the people of Israel from the nations where they have been scattered, I will show myself holy among them in the sight of the nations. Then they will live in their own land, which I gave to my servant Jacob.’

On May 14th, 1948, Israel became an independent nation (“Centuries”) following years of persecution and exile.

The Arabs believe that they also have claims to the land of Palestine. The Arabs were also known as camel herders who eventually embraced the religion of Islam. They began a campaign of conquest in 632 A.D., which signaled a revival within the Arab community of invasions in the Middle East (Smith 5). Mitchell Bard says “The term Palestine is believed to be derived from the Philistines, an Argean people who, in the 12th Century B.C., settled along the Mediterranean coastal plain of what is now Israel and the Gaza Strip.” (25) He also suggests that “Palestinian Arab Nationalism” was not even a significant movement until after the 1967 Six-Day War and the Jewish’s conquest of the West Bank in Israel (26). The Islamic movement created an interest in the region for Arabs mainly because they claim Jerusalem as a holy site.

The faithful of Islam argue that Jerusalem is their holy city. The birth of Muhammad, the prophet of the Muslims, was born on 570 A.D. in Mecca (Smith 5). Islam is based on the premise that Muhammad was a prophet that received a personal revelation that there was only one God, Allah. Islam preaches complete “submission to the will of God” and the words from Allah are in the Qur’an, a sacred text for Muslims. (Voll 1). Jerusalem was chosen by Abd al-Malik, the Umayyad Calif in 682 A.D. as a holy site because the previous holy site, Mecca, had been taken over by force by Abd

Allah ibn al-Zubayr, and would not allow muslims to travel there for their pilgrimage to the land. (Kedar 1). Mordechai Kedar suggested that the choice for Jerusalem as a holy site was chosen from a verse out of the Qur'an:

Glory to Him who cause His servant to travel by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose precincts We have blessed, in order to show him some of Our Signs, He is indeed the All-Hearing, the All-seeing. (Qtd in Kedar 2)

Mordechai Kedar said that a mosque in Jerusalem at the time was technically the mosque that was the "Farthest Mosque" also known as al-masgid al-aqsa (2). It does not appear that Muslims can claim Jerusalem by name, rather they claim it by an association made in their sacred text to a particular mosque that is named in the Qur'an.

Jerusalem has been the center of Judaism since Abraham entered the land of Israel. Jerusalem is mentioned in the Holy Bible numerous times, and is considered a holy city by the Jewish and Christians. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh speaks about Jerusalem and how Christians and Jewish people revere it. He states, "Jerusalem is more than a city or a capitol. It is a [Biblical] idea. Lazarus-Yafeh continued, "People, city and temple became one...linked in destiny and in God's plan, then transformed and apotheosized into Heavenly Jerusalem." (5) The Jewish believe that they were blessed with the land of Palestine, or Israel by God, or Yahweh. The land was known as Canaan in 2091 B.C. When Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, entered it. ("Life Application" xiv) God spoke to Abram, or Abraham, in the book of Genesis in the Holy Bible. God said, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you." (Qtd. in Genesis

12:1-2) The Jewish believe that this covenant between God and Abraham is their claim to the land of Israel. The roots of the Jewish people run deep in the region as history tells.

Following the creation of the state of Israel, why has the world's eyes been obsessed and focused on this small strip of land, more particularly, the Palestinians? The book of Zechariah in the Holy Bible predicted:

This is the word of the Lord Concerning Israel. The Lord, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him, declares: "I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves," declares the lord... Then the leaders of Judah will say in their hearts, 'The people of Jerusalem are strong, because the Lord almighty is their God.'" (12:1-5)

Zechariah was a prophet in 520 B.C. who, in the Holy Bible, was given revelations by the Lord with many visions of the future, some of which have not yet been fulfilled ("Life Application" 1608). This particular passage would suggest that the story of Israel is currently unfolding before our eyes.

Following the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the Arabs immediately went into action. Ilan Pappé stated that 20,000 troops from bordering Arab nations mobilized to fight the Israelites and the Arabs were defeated. Ilan Pappé also suggested that the Israelites began a campaign of ethnocentrism, evicting the Palestinians, and "massacring"

as they went(3). The international community continues to criticize Israel for the expelling of Palestinian Arabs from the region. This act of self-defense hardly seems unreasonable considering Mitchell Bard's reporting on the Arabs outspoken position of the elimination of Israel from the map(73). Wouldn't any nation protect itself from groups within that have this type of agenda?

The movement of Palestinian liberation became more organized by the rise of Yasir Arafat. Arafat, who began as an activist at the University of Cairo, founded Fatah, which became known as the Palestinian Liberation Organization (Stephens 2). Bret Stephens of the Wall Street Journal explained that Arafat lead his groups first attack against Israel in 1965 following his organization's training of fighters in Syria and Algeria (2). Stephens continued on saying that Europe eventually recognized Yasir Arafat as a legitimate leader of the PLO, and the only leader of the Palestinians (2). The Palestinians had become a nation without a territory, and the controversial Yasir Arafat rose to be regarded as both a terrorist to the Israelis and a freedom fighter for the Palestinian people.

Arafat's agenda was to eliminate Israel. Charles Smith commented on Yasir Arafat's November of 1974 speech to the United Nations General Assembly where he appeared carrying an olive branch and wore an empty holster. Smith said that Arafat's speech to the General Assembly painted the picture that Zionism was racist, and had an alliance with Western Imperialism. Smith continued, stating that Arafat was speaking of peace, but Arafat "did so in a framework within which Israel would no longer exist." Smith went on to say, "Nonetheless, his appeal to Jews then in Israel to live in a secular, democratic state contradicted Article 6 of the 1968 [Palestinian Liberation Organization]

Charter.” (345-346) Arafat argued in his speech that he was viewed as a terrorist by his critics, but he was fighting for the freedom of his people, the Palestinian Arabs (Smith 347-349). The recent death of Yasir Arafat may cause a substantial change in the direction the Palestinian Liberation Organization moves, but time will tell.

The United Nations’ involvement and support in the affairs of Israel as an independent state have been mixed. Mitchell Bard argued that in 1975, the U.N. approved resolution 3379, which defined Zionism as a form of racism, a year after the speech of Yasir Arafat to the United Nations General Assembly. (153) Bard continued on, saying that up until 2000, Israel was part of the United Nations as being geographically placed in the Asian group, but the Arab nations within the group would not allow their membership. Consequently, Bard reported that Israel could “not sit on the Security Council or other key UN bodies.” (156) The United Nations view of Israel at that time could have suggested that Arafat successfully influenced the opinion of the global organization with his speech and his cause for his people.

The issue of Israel and its right to exist as a state is extremely complex. Two ethnic groups, motivated by politics and faith, are unwavering in their claim to the region, particularly, Jerusalem. The lines continue to be drawn in the sand by the international community as to who has the ultimate right to be in the land. The Middle East continues to be a hotbed of tension and unrest, frustrating world leaders in the area of conflict resolution. Nations all across the globe it seems, have to put in their two cents as to the fate of the Jewish nation, and the road map to peace. The Palestinian people, who did not care that the region was not considered a Palestinian state prior to 1948, continue their acts of terrorism and suicide bombings on Israeli citizens. The Israelis continue their

retaliatory strikes against the Palestinians which they claim as self-defense. The History of Arab and Jewish tension runs back generation after generation. It seems unlikely that the Israelis and the Palestinian Arabs will reach a solution to the dilemma as long as they breed hatred against one another. So, what is the future of Jerusalem and its people? The book of Revelation in the Holy Bible gives us an encouraging glimpse:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (21:1-4)

What happens between now and the fulfillment of this prophecy that was written almost 2000 years ago remains uncertain. The growing tensions in this area could be a foreboding sign that global conflict is on the horizon for the claim to this land of burden.

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