

Jerusalem and Justice: A Messianic Jewish Perspective

Baruch Maoz

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I. Introduction

The Christian faith requires us to be utterly worldly in the best sense of the term: we look forward to the day when the 'kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of our Lord' (Rev. 11:15). So Christians must be opposed to the appearance of evil in the world. They have a prophetic calling to address all mankind with the Gospel and to call both Jew and Gentile to repent, believe the Gospel, and live in this world in obedience to God's perfect will. Christians must inevitably be concerned with the Arab-Israeli conflict and be aiming at some solution of the problems, whilst acknowledging that in this sin-damaged world no perfect solution will ever truly be found.

As Christians our method of finding solutions will inevitably stem from a prior examination of the scriptural teaching and an awareness of both the recent history and the inevitable political implications of our theology. Our ultimate authority is unashamedly the Bible; yet we must deny any temptation to proof-texting and interpret the ancient texts carefully in the light of their historical contexts.

Many Christian contributions to this subject have been made from one of two prevalent positions: first, those who believe that eschatology (particularly pre-millennial eschatology) must be the primary consideration in any discussion of the Middle East conflict; alternatively, those whose evangelical commitment is less than firm and whose *a priori* assumptions cause them to be highly selective when dealing with the various biblical data.

Both positions ought to be avoided. Eschatology must indeed be one of our considerations, but why should it be the primary one? There is much less prediction in the biblical text than is commonly assumed; if the texts are read in relation to their respective historical contexts, it emerges that our task has more to do with religious (that is to say, spiritual and moral) obligation than with fortune-telling. The primary issue turns out to be one of justice.

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From the outset I acknowledge my lack of objectivity. I am a Zionist who believes the best interests of my people are served by the existence of a Jewish state, that such a state should continue to be in the land of Israel, and that there are moral grounds upon which such a Jewish state can be defended, according to which it may and must conduct itself. However, I am not a Zionist because I am a Christian. My Zionist convictions issue out of the fact that I am a Jew and

am convinced that Zionism offers the most correct solution to my people's predicament in this imperfect world.

One does not have to agree with all that assumes the name of Zionism or with all that has been done in its name—any more than one has to agree with all that has been done throughout history in the name of Jesus. Above and beyond one's loving obligation to one's people there exists a greater obligation to God. For that reason, many Jewish-Christians should be critical of much that has been done in the name of Zionism: Israel as a nation will yet have to answer to God for its behaviour.

II. The Bible and the Land

Those who wrestle with the issue of justice and the land cannot afford the luxury of merely theoretical meditation. Reality impinges upon our thoughts, demands our immediate decision and threatens to expose our prejudices. Each side in the current dispute insists upon divine justification for its position and seeks to enlist God's support for its cause. What follows is an attempt at political theology, tentative in its results.

In turning to the Bible one notices immediately God's very 'earthy' concerns for human faithfulness in his created world. This is especially true of the Old Testament. For that reason we focus in this section upon the Old Testament, though we do so because of our firm belief that the Old Testament serves as the raw material out of which the final form of truth is established in the New.

Land is not incidental to biblical revelation. It occupies a large part of God's message to mankind. Man himself came from the earth (Gen. 2:7) and therefore has an inseparable bond with it. Man was called, within the limits of his capacity, to be like God in relation to the earth (Gen. 1:26, 27). The earth was to be replenished and cared for by man (Gen. 1:26).

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When man sinned, the earth itself was affected both directly, with a curse (Gen. 3:17-18), and indirectly, by the loss of its caretaker (Gen. 3:23-24, *cf.* 4:11). In spite of man's sin, the call to fill, subdue and replenish the earth was not withdrawn, though its final accomplishment was postponed (Rom. 8:19-21). The earth is involved in man's blessing and in his curse: in the Noah saga God warns, 'I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth' (Gen. 6:13, *cf.* Lev. 19:22), whilst man loses the privileges associated with the earth when he sins (Gen. 4:11-12; Num. 20:12, 24: Lev. 26 *et al.*). Man and the earth are evidently so closely related that the latter partakes of the moral consequences of the former. When man sins, the earth becomes 'corrupt' (Gen. 6:11-12; Lev. 18:19, 24-25; 19:29). When he follows God's commandments, the earth is blessed (Lev. 26:3-10).

All of these principles find their later outworking in the history of the nation of Israel in relation to the land (as seen especially in Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Jeremiah). In this regard, as in all

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others, Israel is no exception; rather, it is the example from which all other nations are to learn. Israel was given a land, a specific place on earth, in which to serve God. Israel's enjoyment of the land was not so to absorb the people's attention that God's will and honour would be forgotten (Deut. 6:10-13). They were brought to the land in order to serve him, and if they forgot this central purpose they would be guilty of a sin which would not go unpunished.

Yet the land is also a gift of God's grace (Deut. 9:4-6). God began the process, through which he gave them the land even, when his people were in Egypt and neglecting to serve him. He assures them of his faithfulness to that covenant promise for as long as the sun and the moon abide in their courses (Jer. 32: 42-44; 33:23-26). Grace is fundamental to the Biblical message.

The land is also a sovereign gift: God is under obligation to no one. He can make of the same lump of clay some to honour and some to dishonour, and who dares challenge him? He chooses Israel by the free action of his own will. Israel is not chosen due to any attribute or accomplishment—past, present or future; rather, Israel is the 'very least of all the nations' (Deut. 7:7). God chooses Israel for reasons which lie wholly in himself. Nor is Israel chosen for its own sake. The nation is set

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apart for a demonstration of God's grace, as it becomes a 'light to the nations' (Isa. 42:6) and a blessing to the world (Gen. 22:18). And, in order to fulfill that task, it is apportioned a land.

'The earth is the Lord's' (Psa. 24:1); so he disposes of it in part or as a whole in the free exercise of his sovereign will, unfettered by human expectations or accomplishments. One expression of this, carved into Israel's annual calendar by divine decree, are the rules of the Year of jubilee, when all debts were annulled because God reigned supreme in Israel's (earth-based) economy. For the land is the Lord's (Lev. 25:23).

Since the land is not only a gift of grace but also one exercised under the sovereignty of God (Ezek. 36), living in the land necessarily implies obedience.

Judaism's insistence that the occupancy of the land is not absolute but conditioned... points to the truth that ecology is indissoluble from morality, land and law being mutually dependent, and that a people is ultimately responsible for the maintenance of its 'place'.¹

If Israel sins, they will be sent out of the land and forego the privileges attached to it; if faithful, they will enjoy its blessings. Living in the land implies real duties (Lev. 2:24-25; 23:22).²

Israel was not at liberty to choose whatever part of the earth it fancied. The history of Israel as a nation begins with a journey to a specific earthly real estate;³ from then on, Israel's history and fortune are

¹ W.D. Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism* (Berkeley, California University 1982).

² This is not to say that people earn a right to dwell in the land by virtue of their goodness. No man or nation has 'rights' before God; the modern pre-occupation with 'human rights' is unbiblical in that the Bible never speaks of 'rights' but of duties both in relation to God and to our fellows.

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inextricably bound up with the land so much so that land and people are often indistinguishable in biblical parlance.

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The quintessence of Israel's national territorial hopes came to be focused on one place: the city of Jerusalem. Time and again Jews repeated the Psalmist's vow:

if I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill; may my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy (Psa. 137:5-6).

Jerusalem was not only Israel's capital and the site of God's Temple; it also embodied everything that the people hoped for. In this Israel followed the example of the prophets, who spoke of Zion and of Jerusalem as representative of both the land and the people as a whole (Isa. 10:24; 46:13 etc.).

The New Testament builds upon these foundations. The New Testament never describes itself as superseding Old Testament religion, nor Jesus as coming to annul the Old Testament, but rather to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). It is therefore legitimate to think of Israel remaining as a distinct nation in the purposes of God and still to be a blessing to the world. It is of national Israel that we read that, 'if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?' (Rom. 11:15). In this important chapter Paul still describes the people of national Israel, in spite of their sins, as 'beloved' (v. 28): 'for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable' (v. 29).⁴ Moreover, the continuity of God's purposes towards the Jewish nation are surely seen in the mere fact that, when the time came for the revelation of his Son, Jesus was born to a Jewish family in the land of Israel, died in Jerusalem on the eve of Passover and appeared after he rose to his Jewish disciples in Jerusalem.

The land therefore in no sense loses its importance. Where is the drama of the New Testament revelation of God's love played out but in the area of Jerusalem, Galilee, Judea and Samaria? So long as the people of Israel, even in their rejection, are deemed 'beloved' by God's grace, so long will the land of Israel continue to figure in the purposes of God for the world. Palestinian Christian discussions of the land are weak here, because they either dismiss the emphasis on a particular land as belonging to a 'primitive layer' of revelation within the Old Testament, or (more commonly) they accord authority in this realm to the New Testament alone. This leads to a kind of

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³ It is important to note that the actual borders of the land apportioned to Israel were more fluid than is often acknowledged. The people generally lived to the west of the Jordan, although the promises (in Gen. 15:18 and elsewhere) had indicated borders stretching as far as the Euphrates. In *e.g.* Num. 32-34 it is clear that the east bank of the Jordan did not even figure in Moses' considerations until the two tribes of Reuben and Gad with the half of Manasseh requested permission to settle there.

⁴ For a contrary approach, see above pp. 17f. and 62-4

doceticism in which the tangible world is in danger of losing any real meaning—at least so far as the worldly aspirations of the other person are concerned. The church rightly rejected doceticism as heresy, and so should we.

III. The Bible and justice

Our conclusions concerning the Middle East conflict will inevitably be ‘critically affected by what justice is.’⁵ The Bible nowhere gives us reason to think of justice in abstract or objective terms. Righteousness is existential, in that it is a working out of unchanging principles within the context of variable human situations. ‘Justice’ is not a mere juridic term, it has to do with given circumstances: thus God’s law to Israel was case-law rather than juridic abstraction. This is an aspect of the beauty of divine self-revelation. God did not disclose himself to mankind in a set of systematic assertions; he came to man within the ongoing circumstances of life and declared his unchanging lordship among the vicissitudes of human experience.⁶ The word came from without, apart from time, and is therefore timeless; yet it was given within the context of time, and is therefore relevant.

God’s justice is no abstraction; it seeks to express his mercy concretely and to accomplish his salvation. The kind of justice that accords with God’s character is dynamic rather than static, creative rather than codified, realistic rather than idealistic.⁷

God requires mercy, not sacrifice. Nor is this a lower standard. On the contrary, God requires more than rigorous pedantry, not less. The Scriptures repeatedly state that God required justice in the land, and that the justice required was not mere

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juridic rectitude but a vibrant concern for the needy, the widow, the stranger and the orphan. Israel was warned that, if she fell short of God’s requirements in this area, she would be liable to exile. No amount of military prowess would protect the nation from God’s righteous wrath: the Lord had declared their destruction, and it would surely come.

Israel’s history is an outworking of the principles outlined above concerning the land. Jeremiah in his day countered those who, inspired by an abstraction of the divine covenants without regard to duties enjoined, assured the people:

⁵ From the introduction to J. Peters, *From Time Immemorial: the Origins of the Arab-Jewish Conflict over Palestine* (London, Michael Joseph 1984).

⁶ This does not deny the value of systematic theology or of distilling God’s truth into propositional form. Yet God has clearly chosen to reveal himself to mankind in terms which are more often situational than otherwise.

⁷ G.W. Bromiley, ‘Justice’, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, II (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 1982); cf. such texts as Isa. 46:13; 51:5 etc. The ‘unjust’ judge in Jesus’ parable is described as such although he ultimately decreed what was legally right, because he did so with neither concern for man nor fear of God.

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You will not see the sword or suffer famine. Indeed, I will give you lasting peace in this place (Jer. 14:13).

There is no 'peace to the wicked', be they Jews or Gentiles, and no divine covenant has ever promised otherwise. Whoever has truly 'stood in the council of the Lord' will seek to turn sinful people 'from their evil ways' (Jer. 23:22).

This obligation is not true only of Israel. God, who apportioned to the nations their inheritance, calls them also to account for the manner of life they lead in their respective lands. The fullness of the Amorites' sin brought about their exclusion from the land; Sodom and Gomorrah, Assyria, Babylonia, Moab, and Egypt are all called into account by the righteous God and punished according to their deeds.

On the other hand, let none make light of the goodness of God, who is both a just God and a Saviour. He is as merciful as the justice he requires. Nowhere is it intimated that God's punishment to Israel implies the people's final rejection. God has not rejected the people whom he foreknew, nor can he, for he cannot deny himself (Lev. 26:44-45). Nothing can separate his chosen ones-whoever they may be-from his love.

As the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be in the stump in the land (Isa. 7:11-13).

God promised to restore the people both to the land and to his good favour. He will transform them into his image, for the glory of his grace.

The book of Jeremiah, so remarkable for its repeated statements of divine rejection, is all the more remarkable for its repeated assurances of God's unilateral mercy.

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After I uproot them, I will again have compassion and will bring each of them back to his own inheritance (Jer. 12:15).⁸

This then is the background to Paul's jubilant assertion that God is both just and the 'justifier of the ungodly' (Rom. 3:26; 4:5). God's dealings with Israel is the divine demonstration *par excellence* as to the nature of true righteousness.

Here, too, Israel is but a reflection of God's grace toward the nations, for the prophets often speak of the day when nations will walk in the light of God's goodness, serving him with hearts made new by his sovereign mercies. Thus the terms of Old and New Covenants refer

⁸ Cf. Jer. 17:9-15 *etc.* and Deut. 32:43: 'Rejoice, O nations with his people, for he will make atonement for his land and people'.

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to two forms of the one eternal covenant of grace. The external details may change, but there is an underlying consistency and coherence to the Word and Acts of God.⁹

According to the Bible, therefore, Israel's calling and identity are inextricably linked to land. Hence we are not free to expect Israel to be indifferent to that land to which God led their fathers, and to which he attached so many of his promised blessings. On the other hand, land also implies responsibility. Israel's claim to the land—in whole or in part—must be supported by godly living, the lack of which renders the nation unworthy of the land and liable to be cast out. Godly living implies a just society, and justice is not mere legal rectitude; it involves mercy and kindness. Sinning in order to obtain land or while retaining it are sins to which God often responds by causing the land to disgorge its inhabitants. This is as true of the Jews as it is of any other nation on earth. God holds the nations accountable.

Nevertheless, while sin is real, grace often abounds. Grace is of the essence of God's relations with man, a truth exemplified for mankind in God's dealings with Israel: while Israel can forfeit the right to God's blessing, it can never sin so as to put itself beyond the reach of God's mercies.

If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself (2 Tim. 2:13).

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Many would wish to see the establishment of the state of Israel as an obvious fulfillment of the prophetic promises. Surely we must remain agnostic on this issue. Even if, as I believe, God's promises to the people of Israel indeed include political independence in the land of their forefathers, it is 'not for us to know times or seasons' (Acts 1:7), and any theory of eschatology that weakens Israel's sense of moral responsibility towards others is faulty. Nor can it serve Israel's true interests: the Jewish people have twice been sent out of the land because their society had become cruel, unjust and ungodly. Any view of the present or future that assures Israel of possession of the land in spite of its sin misses the true burden of biblical prophecy. The prophets were concerned, as we should be, that the land should be filled with justice.

IV. The Modern Political Problem: Eight Important Points

1) Jewish Suffering and the Rise of Zionism

The history of the Jewish people and their two millennia of suffering is well known (and has been touched upon in chapter 5). Jews were frequently treated as second-rate citizens, liable to being treated as scapegoats, used but seldom respected; their Scriptures burnt and their

⁹ J.B. Walker, *Israel: Covenant and Land* (Edinburgh, Handsel 1986) 1. For an alternative approach to Israel and the Gentiles, see above pp. 2, 15f.

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persons subjected to repeated indignities. Such experiences, undergone for so long, cannot but enscribe themselves upon the national soul of a people. They explain the Jews' attitudes towards other people, and they explain the appeal of Zionism.

This experience of suffering has naturally led to a certain distortion in the way the Jews view themselves and the world around them: all the more so when these experiences have been hardened in the recent crucible of Auchwitz and Treblinka. The attitude of the Jewish people toward its fellow nations is sometimes deemed slightly perverted, not without cause. Yet is it ill-founded? Has it no logic? For the suspicion with which modern Israel regards the nations at large is the result of much pain and will need much healing. Inevitably, before it can relax its defensive stance, Israel must first be allowed to undergo the unfamiliar experience of being accepted as one of many among the nations. The State of Israel is indeed driven by a sense of threat, but that is not the product of an illusion. Its citizens are convinced that their state's

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security lies in its ability to maintain a viable independence within which Jews will be assured of their corporate and individual welfare.

This desire for freedom and independence lies at the very core of Zionism—the desire of the Jewish people to be one among the family of nations, living in their own land, administering their own government and conducting their life freely according to their own customs. Again, the rise of Jewish Zionism and its causes (both political and religious) have been outlined above.¹⁰ Here some points will briefly be underlined and others added.

In addition to its being the result of the experience of persecution in other lands, Zionism has also been fuelled theologically by the continued significance of the land of Israel and of Jerusalem in Jewish thinking throughout the last two thousand years.¹¹ No other people have been removed from their land for so long and yet continued to exist. No other people has so consistently maintained its link to a land.

Whatever one may think of a spiritual calling subject to geography, we must take this tradition for what it is: not only a protest against a disincarnate spirituality but, more specifically, an unconscious testimony to the inability to affirm any sort of Jewish spirituality other than that of a people—it being understood that this people fully realised its existence only in hypostatic union with the land. [Moreover the land is not] an end in itself, but a means whereby the people of Israel are the better to fulfill their destiny.

¹⁰ Much of the historical data concerning Zionism is outlined in ch. 5 above, though it should be observed that our perspectives differ in many points, not least in the conclusion that the Gospel of Christ need not be presented to the Jewish people.

¹¹ See more fully above ch. 5 (iv).

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This then is the added complication to the 'Jewish Problem': not only is a state needed, but a Jewish state, and such a state can only be truly Jewish in the land of Israel. Moreover Zionists would wish to point out that (with the exception of the Philistines and the Crusaders) no nation apart from the Jews has maintained political independence in the land since the days of Saul—some 3000 years; nor has any other nation treated the land as home. Stronger nations have administered it from afar, but no people other than Israel have

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looked upon the land as 'motherland'. This is all the more remarkable in light of the land's geopolitical importance.

2) Issues of Demography

Against the charge that the Jewish population has only ever been a minority, it needs to be made clear that the small number of Jews relative to that of other residents was the product of forced exiles and insufferable circumstances under which the Jews were forced to live by Muslim and Christian invaders.¹²

After the First World War, due to Jewish development of the land and extensive military works, some 60,000-100,000 Arabs immigrated to Palestine in order to take advantage of the employment opportunities offered by the Jewish settlers, many of whom 'entered Palestine without their presence being officially recorded'.¹³ In consequence, the non-Jewish population of Palestine expanded by more than 75% between the years 1922 and 1929.¹⁴ The Palestine Royal Commission Report (1939) stated that:

the shortage of land is due less to the amount of land required by Jews than to the increase in the Arab population... The Arab charge that the Jews have obtained too large a proportion of good land cannot be maintained. Much of the land now carrying orange groves was sand dunes or swamp and uncultivated when it was purchased.

3) The Rise of Palestinian Nationalism

Many Zionists would wish to assert that Palestinian Nationalism and the Palestinian desire for self-determination is a comparatively new phenomenon, which must therefore be seen in a different light from the age-long hope of the Jewish people for a return to their land. Any Arab nationalism was not at first a distinctly Palestinian nationalism, and an Arab Palestinian theology of the land has appeared only recently.

This perspective is confirmed by anti-Zionist writers such as Herman and Rosemary Ruether, in their book *The Wrath of Jonah*. Palestinian nationalism, they argue, only em-

¹² M. Comay, *Zionism and Israel: Questions and Answers* (Jerusalem, Ketter 1976) 24-25.

¹³ UNWRA (1962).

¹⁴ Na'im Ateek records a growth in the Jewish population from 56,000 in 1918 to 553,600 in 1944: see *Justice and Only Justice* (New York, Orbis 1989) 53.

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erged alongside the expansion of Jewish settlement in Palestine. Before that time there was no indication of a national Arab Palestinian consciousness; the Arab nationalist movement spoke in terms of a pan-Arab state stretching over the whole of the Middle East and beyond. 'Particular Arab nationalisms emerged out of the colonial fragmentation of the region'.¹⁵

There was no distinctly Palestinian culture, language, literature or history; Arab Palestinians had neither national institutions of any kind, nor a corporate sense of belonging. It was Jewish immigration and the improvement of job opportunities which together served to lay the grounds for what was to become after 1948 a growing national Arab-Palestinian consciousness. In 1948, however, no such consciousness was in evidence. Arab nationalism in Palestine was part and parcel of the Arab hope for a greater Arabia. It was only after that date, in the denigrating conditions of the refugee camps, that Palestinian nationalism was finally born.

Yet this Palestinian desire for self-determination, albeit modern, is a factor which must now be taken into account. Yet there remains a marked difference between Israeli and Palestinians in their desire for such self-determination. For the Jewish people, after two millenia during which their physical survival has often been in jeopardy, the issue is one of survival: only a Jewish state in Jewish hands can ensure that. By contrast, Arab Palestinian existence, culturally and physically, is not threatened by the lack of an Arab Palestinian state; indeed there is a real danger that such a state, if it came into being, would be soon swallowed up by pan-Arab nation-alism. In the struggle between Arab pride and dignity and Jewish survival, survival must take precedence.

4) The Events of 1948 and After

Nazi atrocities were a final impetus towards the establishment of an independent state. Already, however, the Peel Commission had published its report in 1939, recommending a partition of the land between Jewish and Arab settlers. The Arab nations, acting on behalf of the Arab population in Palestine, unanimously rejected the proposal; the Jewish settlers expressed their willingness to negotiate. Eight years

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later the United Nations decided to partition Palestine. Once again, despite the economically and militarily untenable positions the partition plan imposed upon the Jewish settlers, they accepted the plan. The Arab nations declared their rejection and threatened to invade as soon as the plan was realised.

The borders which pertained until 1967 were the result of the ensuing conflict. Much of what would have belonged to an Arab Palestinian state, had the United Nation's proposal been

¹⁵ R.R. and H.J. Ruether, *The Wrath of Jonah: the Crises of Religious Nationalism in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (New York, Harper and Row 1989) 103.

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implemented, was now under the control of Egypt and Jordan. Neither country took steps to establish a Palestinian state: Jordan annexed the West Bank and held its inhabitants under firm repressive control (denying them even the right to vote) and Egypt kept the Gaza Strip under military command. Squalid refugee camps were built and their inhabitants were forbidden to own land, settle outside the camps or develop their own institutions and industries. Their plight was cynically used by the Arab host nations as a means for constant pressure on the more squeamish Western world.

5) Israel and the Israeli Arab Population

Early in its history the Zionist movement had found itself torn between hopes for a truly Jewish state and a human concern for the growing Arab population in the land. Some called for their deportation, others for granting them a secondary status in the land. A majority insisted that equal civil rights be granted to all and any residents of the Jewish state-to-be. In theory, the majority carried the day, although Israel's record of achievements in this area falls far short of the ideals which motivated their decision.

The invasion of Israel on the part of the surrounding Arab nations in 1948, and the consequent struggle between the two peoples resident in the land, contributed little to Israel's goodwill toward its Arab citizens; the national selfishness of which all mankind partakes also had a part to play. As a result, Arab villages within Israel, while enjoying higher standards of life than in any other country in the Middle East, are still markedly poorer than the neighbouring Jewish settlements.¹⁶ Israel has much yet to improve in this respect. Yet Israeli Arabs

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have equal right to vote and their own representatives in the House of Legislature. Their religious institutions receive government support and their holy places are protected with equal devotion—something more than can be said in most Arab states today.

6) Israel and the 'West Bank'

Since 1967, as a result of defeating the Arab invasion of its land, Israel has found itself in possession of the Golan Heights, the West Bank and Gaza, which have been administered by Israel ever since. Jewish national aspirations, dormant in the light of historical reality, now burst into flame: Hebron! Bethlehem! Judea and Samaria!—all replete with Jewish historical memories—and, above all else, Jerusalem!

Yet these areas were not uninhabited. Some one million Arabs live in the land. What is to be done with these two realities—a land much desired and now in one's possession, and the presence of a people with human rights, longings and needs themselves? As the years have gone by, Arab

¹⁶ Arab schooling is on a much lower level. Electricity, running water and sewage are lacking in many Arab villages. Their roads are unpaved and their industry is on the whole poorly supported in comparison to Jewish industries.

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intransigence and Jewish fears have coupled to make a resolution impossible. A nationalist Israeli government, as well as the undemocratic regimes among the Arabs, added to the difficulty.

Meanwhile, Jewish settlers embraced the land, at times at the expense of Arab welfare. The close proximity of the two peoples and the Israeli's determination to take advantage of Arab and Palestinian hesitation, promoting their own interests with little regard for those of the Arab Palestinian population, have exacerbated tensions. The Arab Palestinians responded with the *Intifada*. A growing number of Israelis have responded with equal anger, toying with ideas such as mass deportation or continued military control.

These developments have not been met without remorse or internal conflict. Israeli society today is torn in a struggle between those who are willing to compromise so as to secure the democratic nature of the State of Israel, and those who wish to secure 'Jewish interests' with less regard for those of others. Every act of terrorism, every stone thrown in the *Intifada*, every young Israeli soldier who is forced to deal with the violent hatred now so evident among the Arab Palestinian populace, threatens to increase the number of the latter group. Every act of suppression, every new settlement and every

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indication of Israeli intransigence enlarges the gap between the two peoples and adds strength to the hatred felt by both sides toward each other. The Middle East is caught up in a whirlpool of human stupidity which threatens to engulf both Jew and Arab in a storm of self-destruction.

Israel had administered the West Bank and Gaza Strip for twenty years before the outbreak of the *Intifada* in December 1987. These areas were administered under a firm, military hand, yet this Israeli military administration was the most enlightened, the most generous of any military occupations that the world has ever seen. In twenty years the standard of living in the West Bank and Gaza attained the highest average in the Middle East, with the exception of Israel. New industries were established, agriculture advanced and agricultural produce grew by leaps and bounds. Tens of thousands of Arab Palestinians were employed in Israel and the Government expended constant efforts in trying to bring an end to illegal employment, which paid shameful salaries and accorded no social security.¹⁷

Yet the emerging Palestinian national consciousness had no outlet. Moreover, extensive contact with Israeli Jews exposed many Palestinians to a kind of arrogance that one would have thought Jews could never display toward another people. The added restrictions of an uncompromising military government and the threat of Jewish expansion into the West Bank and Gaza created the fear that Israel was determined to displace Arab Palestinians or to transform them into a

¹⁷ Attention should be drawn to the following examples. Five universities were opened by Israel (previously forbidden by Jordan) and from 1967 to 1988 the number of pupils studying in elementary and high school grew from 222,166 to 496,181; in those years the number of teachers rose from 7,377 to 17,374 and the number of schools from 997 to 1,560. As for medical services, infant mortality has dropped from 86 to 24 per thousand.

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permanently subject people. Unfair employment practices, repeated indignities from Israeli Jews and the cynical use by Arab states of the Arab Palestinians plight were increasingly painful.

Israel's policy of settlement in the West Bank and Gaza has been a focal point of controversy both in Israel and abroad. Israel's populace is united in believing that some Jewish settlement is justified, even necessary for security purposes;

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yet there is a division between those who believe that no compromise is possible (and that it is necessary to eliminate the possibility of realizing the national aspirations of Palestinians) and a very large minority who question the rightness of many such settlements. Caught between a rock and a hard place, Arab Palestinians have experienced increasing frustration.

7) Responding to the *Intifada*

In December 1987 there began the Arab Palestinian national uprising, known today as the *Intifada*. Since then this has spread to almost every Arab village in the administered territories, also affecting many Arab Israeli villages and radically altering the nature of relations between Arab Palestinians and Israeli Jews.

There is no doubt that support for the *Intifada* is widespread, although time has given reason to doubt how willingly that support is being given. Many shops have been forced to close by the *Shabab* (militant Arab youth) against the wishes of the owners and an almost unbelievable number of Arabs have died at the hands of their own people.¹⁸ Abu Iyad, one of the more prominent PLO leaders, expressed his concern that this trend will lead to a rule of tyranny in any future Palestinian state; several Christian Palestinians have also expressed concern over the probable fate of non-Muslims in an independent Palestine: in every Arab country, with the notable exception of Jordan, Christian minorities are likely to find themselves at a severe disadvantage. On occasions it appears as if the real war is being waged between the PLO and the ultra-fundamentalist Muslim *Hamas*, each seeking to gain control of the Palestinian national movement.

Of course, not all the violence has been directed inward. Seven hundred and ten (about half) of the attacks in 1989 were directed against Israelis. The *Intifada* has worked marvels in creating an international climate more approximate to Arab Palestinian hopes, and it has served to raise the level of self-recrimination in Israel itself. That is as much as it can hope to achieve. This is a war of attrition. It will be won by the side that can maintain itself longest. While the

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economic price Israel is called upon to pay is not small, it is within Israel's capacity. The most painful price imposed upon Israel is the loss of national confidence and sense of moral dignity due to

¹⁸ In the first half of 1989, 670 attacks were perpetrated by Arabs against Arabs, of whom 136 were killed and 245 were injured: see the undated publication by the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The Intifada Against the Arabs*.

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the choice between either yielding to the Palestinians or suppressing and controlling the *Intifada*. Arab Palestinians have learnt how to use Israel's moral sensitivities, even if they do not share them.

Though the conduct of the Israeli army in the West Bank cannot be praised unreservedly, no military government anywhere in the world has faced such a situation with more sincere efforts to contain the uprising without loss of life. There are many unacceptable humiliations to which Arab Palestinians are exposed in the course of Israel's administration and many atrocities committed by Arabs. These should all be corrected. Yet this writer's deepest concern is for the process of de-humanization that is taking place in the hearts of both peoples.

8) Israel and the PLO

Israelis naturally are concerned by the practices of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) which emerged in the late 1960s and claims to be the chief voice of the Palestinian people. Such anxiety amongst Israelis was not helped by the PLO's siding with Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War, an act which effectively discredited this organization once again. Moreover, the PLO's National Covenant (adopted in 1968 as its official platform, and never subsequently revoked) speaks of the necessity for 'armed struggle' for the 'liberation of Palestine' which will 'liquidate the Zionist and imperialist presence'.¹⁹ In the light of such statements it is not surprising that many in Israel are reticent to negotiate with the PLO or its representatives.²⁰

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Palestinian spokesmen assure the West that their intention is to live peaceably alongside Israel, yet they repeatedly assure their own people that such a concession would merely be temporary, and that their 'real goal' is 'the total destruction of the Zionist state. Moreover, the PLO (although not itself freely voted into office by the population it claims to represent) also promises a 'secular, democratic state' in place of Israel, but does such a state exist anywhere in the Arab world, and would the PLO be able to create it? If the PLO (or any other influential Palestinian organisation) could convince Israelis of their sincere willingness to live alongside Israel, an overwhelming majority in Israel would insist upon immediate negotiations with the PLO and reasonable compromises, the right wing element in Israel notwithstanding.

Why then is Israel wrong when it follows the declared example of the British Government in 1938, which stated in a Policy Paper concerning Palestine that:

¹⁹ See especially Articles 9 and 22.

²⁰ It is important to note the religious background of such Palestinian sentiments. The myth that claims that Jews lived in Arab lands with freedom and dignity for many hundreds of years cannot be substantiated. Non-Muslims were tolerated in Muslim countries only if they accepted the often humiliating status implied by the *Dhimma* system (see above ch. 5, n. 2). For example, Non-Muslims had to pass Muslims on 'Satan's side' (the left), they were always to give way to Muslims and never to come into physical contact with them: see R.R. and H.J. Ruether, *op. cit.*, 32. For further evidence of Muslim religious attitudes towards Israel, see some of the strong statements in *The Proceedings of the Fourth Conference of the Academy of Islamic Research* (Cairo, El Azhar University Sept. 1968) 34-5, in which Muslim theologians discussed Muslim attitudes to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

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His Majesty's Government must reserve the right to refuse to deliberate with those leaders whom they regard as responsible for the campaign of assassination and violence?

Which set of the PLO statements are to be believed? Does the PLO really enjoy the support it claims to have among Arab Palestinians? Will the PLO be able to impose the will of the majority upon the many splinter groups which are still allowed to operate under the PLO aegis in spite of their consistent disavowal of a compromise? How can we trust the PLO's overtures so long as its National Covenant is not altered?

V. Jerusalem: Hope for the Future

The above has sought to highlight the relevant biblical data and the nature of the historical circumstances into which the biblical Word must be spoken. What is God saying through the scriptures today? Can we find some guidelines for this increasingly pressing problem of Jerusalem and the land?

We will need to remember first that, biblically, Jerusalem and the land can scarcely be distinguished: as already noted, Jerusalem is often used in the scriptures as a

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synonym for the people of the land.²¹ A vision for the future of Jerusalem must, from this perspective, be related to one's vision for the whole of the land.

Secondly, politics is indeed 'the art of the possible'. Divine standards of justice are indeed relevant and vital—setting the goal to which we aspire—yet realism is required as well. Absolute justice is within the reach of God alone and is a state of affairs which awaits the final divine act leading to the restoration of all things. Such justice is part of our confident hope, and as such it governs our choices here and now, but we recognise the fact that it is yet a matter for the future.

The person who seeks absolute justice is evading practical decisions. I do not seek pure justice, nor the settling of historical accounts, but rather possible life, no more than imperfect and tolerable, causing as little injustice as possible.²²

The biblical principles outlined above suggest the following general conclusions as God's will for both parties in the conflict:

1) Israelis and Arab Palestinians will answer to God for the way they seek either to gain or retain the land. Sin will expose them to his wrath and to expulsion from the land which they so long to inhabit.

²¹ See above section II.

²² David Grossman, *The Yellow Wind* (Eng. transl., London, Pan Books 1988) 1.

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2) God's justice requires that both parties take serious account of the needs, desires and hopes of the other. Mercy, not legalistic pedantry, is called for; grace rather than territorial measurements is the issue at stake. Selfishness, private as well as national, leads to divine judgement. The biblical principle must surely be:

do nothing out of selfish interest or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others' (Phil. 2:34).

3) Land is as important now as it has ever been. Any suggestion that territorial attachments have been superseded by the Gospel fails to take into account the incarnational element of the Gospel; it also fails to do justice to the cultural and historical dimensions of God's workings on earth.

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Israel cannot be understood in terms of an abstract, mystical and isolated relationship to God. It can only be understood in relation to the glory of its inheritance, the land of Canaan. This land, and Israel's intense attachment to it, did not threaten communion with Yahweh; it is precisely the visible manifestation of that communion. The land is the fulfilment of the promise. This is the essential meaning of the land for the Israelites in the light of God's glory.²³

4) The city of Jerusalem is important today. It serves as a major focus in God's gracious undertakings with Israel. It is the crux of God's promises to the nation, the part representing the whole.

5) If Jerusalem and the land are important, they yet belong to God. Human attachment should never be so exclusive as to rule out the practical outworkings of God's ultimate ownership. Moreover, justice is more important than ownership of land.

6) Israel's relations to the land are biblical, not simply historical. The land is therefore somehow integrally related to Israel's calling for the blessing of the world.

These six general principles suggest that a solution to the present dilemma must be one of territorial compromise, a compromise that will take into account the needs and legitimate desires of both sides. This is by no means impossible, since the exclusivist Arab nationalism, which formerly saw no room at all in the Middle East for a Jewish state, has perhaps now given way to a realistic acceptance that Israel, like it or not, is going to stay.

Yet if a compromise solution is to be sought, what might this be? A fully independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza is hardly viable. With no raw materials, largely uncultivable land, few water resources and a population ill-equipped for either democracy or modern industrial

²³ G.C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Eng. transl., Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 1972) 226ff.; this then affects our Christian expectation of a 'new earth', which 'is never a strange and futuristic fantasy, but a mystery that penetrates into this existence'.

exploits, how could such a state subsist? Some kind of federative relationship with another Arab state (most probably Jordan?) ought to be preferred by the Arab Palestinians themselves.

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Such a solution would involve some sacrifice on the part of both parties. Will it be possible for the varied Palestinian viewpoints to be united peaceably towards such a goal? Will the PLO be interested in democracy, or will it see the process as but one step nearer the final annihilation of the Jewish state? Will Israelis see the moral imperatives laid upon them by God, or will some of them continue to sacrifice other people's interests with little remorse, so long as they can satisfy their own selfish desires? Many actions taken by Israeli soldiers, by the Government and by the Army are totally unacceptable and will expose the nation to the indignation of God. The process of moral degeneration, mutual dehumanisation and growing anger can do neither of our peoples any good.

What about Jerusalem? As far as Israel is concerned, any compromise formulated will have to include a true and full Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem, while according Muslims and Christian some kind of special status. The possibilities are many: extra-territorial rights such as those of an embassy, special religious status, or some kind of joint oversight. The human mind can be very inventive when the task in hand will ultimately further its own interests.

Obviously, no single sweep of a human hand can resolve this conflict. Yet it is capable of resolution if our nations are willing to bridge the abyss of hate and suspicion which now separates our two peoples in a step-by-step process laid out with a view to psychological disengagement. Each step must be contingent upon the successful completion of the former and include real guarantees of its success. Present negotiations between Israel, its neighbours and the Arab Palestinians hold great promise—if conducted wisely. Both sides should make concessions which could help create a more positive atmosphere in which they could negotiate.

Let the PLO demonstrate its moral, uncoerced control of the Arab Palestinian population by calling for a cessation of violence rather than its escalation. Let Israel respond by removing its military forces from Palestinian cities and villages. Let the PLO alter its National Covenant, recognize Israel's right to exist and avow peace with the Jewish state. Let Israel declare its willingness to arrive at some kind of political and territorial compromise. Let the Arab nations declare their

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prior acceptance of whatever resolution is achieved between Israel and the Arab Palestinians. Let guarantees be given to non-Muslim Palestinians, so that they are safeguarded from a fate similar to that of their brethren in Lebanon. Finally, let it be understood that, whatever be the nature of this new political entity, it is unlikely to enjoy full political independence—if ever—until more of the Middle East problems are successfully worked out. Jews and Arabs alike are subject to God's judgement. So we must hasten to bring an end to the present horrible state of affairs lest the Day overtake us in our sins.

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Jewish Christians are concerned naturally rejoice with their people as Jerusalem is rebuilt, its ancient sites excavated and its beauties are once again celebrated throughout the world. As the capital and Israel's largest city, Jerusalem has taken on much more than historical importance to most Israelis, Jewish or Jewish-Christian.

Whatever else one might say about the restoration of Jerusalem to Jewish hands, it is impossible to forget that God had promised to bless the people by restoring the city to them. Whether the present stage of world history is part of the fulfillment of that promise no one should state with certainty, any more than one should deny it. If the present restoration of Jerusalem to Israel is a fulfillment of biblical promise, it is also a harbinger of the promised day when Israel will turn to God in Christ and find in him its salvation.

What happens to Jerusalem is considered to be in a very substantial way the fate of the people as a whole. For that reason, Jewish Christians hope that the city will remain in Jewish hands, that the number of Jewish Christians living in the city will continue to grow, and that Jews and Arabs will find in the city a common faith in God's only Son.

Yet our hope, as already noted, is not to be informed exclusively by biblical data—at least not insofar as we are to deal with more than ultimate perfections; historical realities must be allowed an important role in the formulation of our hopes.

Nor may we limit our hopes to merely spiritual matters. As Israel's prophets so eloquently taught us, political and social justice are also important. Whatever God intends to do in the future—present, imminent, or distant—is to be achieved by himself. On no account may we sin in order to help

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promote those ends which we perceive to be God's ultimate purpose. Nor may we work without taking into account that, however dear a certain thought may be to us, we may be mistaken. We recognize that Jerusalem is special not only to the Jewish people. It is considered holy by Muslims and Christians all over the world, and inhabited by a large Arab minority. So we further recognise our duty to graft our hope into the real world.

Jerusalem does not have to be a dividing-point; it can become the hub of promised blessing. The contenders must be willing to heed each other, take each other's claims into account and respect each other's rights. Is that not what the prophets ultimately promise—that Jerusalem will become the geographic focal point to which 'all nations' will turn (Isa. 2:2)? Note carefully, however, the root cause of such a unity: the God of Israel will be recognized as the God of all the world, and the nations will turn to Jerusalem in order to learn to walk in his ways. If this is to be fulfilled, none of the protagonists involved can expect their absolute claims to be fulfilled without inflicting an injustice on the other. Some kind of compromise must be reached.

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Under the present historical circumstances, that is surely the biblical hope for Jerusalem. Until it is achieved, Jewish-Christians will continue to speak of Christ in the city to all its inhabitants and pray for the day 'when the earth will be covered with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea' (Hab. 2:14). They will also labour for that form of political justice which will do the least harm to either side, while according to each the maximum of gracious justice that is humanly possible.

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