This article first appeared in the January 2018 Print Edition of *Catholic Family News* (click HERE to subscribe; current subscribers can access the E-Edition HERE).

On December 6, 2017, President Donald J. Trump announced the formal American recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and directed that steps begin to relocate the American Embassy from Tel Aviv. The president's decision was orchestrated by Trump's Jewish son-in-law, Jared Kushner, but opposed by all of Trump's national security team, including Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Secretary of Defense James Mattis, and CIA Director Mike Pompeo. For his part, the 36-year-old Kushner, whose paternal grandparents were Holocaust survivors, hardly gives the impression of an unbiased broker as the president's unofficial Middle East peace envoy. Indeed, he appears more as a babe lost in the woods of a century of conflict between Arab and Jew. Incongruously, the president's announcement stated that his decision

> "is not intended, in any way, to reflect a departure from our strong commitment to facilitate a lasting peace agreement. We want an agreement that is a great deal for the Israelis and a great deal for the Palestinians. We are not taking a position of any final status issues, including the specific boundaries of the Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem, or the resolution of contested borders."

Israel's Treatment of Palestinians

No one in the world has more ready access to information on policy issues or current events than the President of the United States. If Trump or Kushner had bothered to inquire, they would have educated themselves about recent Israeli activities and policies towards the Palestinians in East Jerusalem and other occupied territories, information that is widely available from Jerusalem and the wider Middle East to the United Nations and the State Department – although not in the mainstream media. The entries below are a small and random sample:

> •As reported by the International Middle East Media Center, in the first ten months of 2017, the Israeli government "carried out 76 full or partial demolitions of Palestinian structures in East Jerusalem because of permit issues…These demolitions displaced 192 Palestinians, including 111 children." Building permits for Palestinians, especially in East Jerusalem, are routinely denied while Jewish settlements inside the West Bank continue to be built at a brisk pace. In a recent five-year period, the Israeli government issued 11,603 building permits in Jerusalem, of which only 878 (less than

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

8 percent) were for Palestinian neighborhoods. This is in spite of the fact that Palestinian homes and businesses are older, smaller, and in greater need of upkeep.

•According to a December 2017 report by the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, the Israeli government routinely denies or fails to respond to requests from Palestinians in the Gaza Strip for medical treatment that is available only inside Israel. Citing World Health Organization statistics, B'Tselem noted that the Israeli government approved only 53% of such applications, leaving over 9,000 Palestinians (2017 figures through September) without the medical care that is readily available to citizens of Israel. Former British Prime Minister David Cameron is one of many who have called the Gaza Strip an outdoor "prison camp."

•According to another recent report by B'Tselem, Israel has been exploiting the West Bank in order to treat waste – including hazardous waste – generated in Israel. In so doing, Israel abuses its responsibilities as an occupying power and exposes the Palestinian residents to environmental and health hazards.

•The 2016 State Department human rights report for Israel and the Occupied Territories, as in previous years, cites a systemic and brutal pattern of discrimination and persecution by both the Israeli government and Jewish settlers against Palestinians and other non-Jews in areas far too numerous to list here. To be sure, the Palestinian Authority also comes in for its share of criticism but it pales in comparison to the scope and pervasiveness of human rights violations by Israel, which touts itself as the only democracy in the Middle East.

Another source of opinion for the administration might have been the various Christian leaders in Jerusalem. In an open letter to Trump, the thirteen patriarchs and other heads pleaded with the president to "continue recognizing the present international status of Jerusalem." The letter noted that "such steps [i.e., recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel] will yield increased hatred, conflict, violence and suffering in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, moving us farther from the goal of unity and deeper toward destructive division." However, Trump apparently preferred to take his advice from American evangelical Christians, such as the anti-Catholic John Hagee, head of Christians United for Israel (CUFI). In a December 10 email to his supporters, Hagee bragged about his influence with the president, noting that he and his wife had dined with the President and the First Lady and that CUFI members had sent 137,000 emails to the White House in support of the embassy move.

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

America's Passionate Attachment to Israel

Regardless of one's opinion of Trump, it must be admitted that he has kept his campaign promise about Jerusalem. In fact, according to the 2016 Republican platform, Israel "stands out among the nations as a beacon of democracy and humanity." The actions of the Israeli government, as referenced above, scarcely reflect this statement. Further in the GOP platform, "we recognize Jerusalem as the eternal and indivisible capital of the Jewish state." This statement is curious for two reasons. First, if Israel is a "Jewish" state, is there no room for people of any other faith, such as the Palestinian Christians? Secondly, is there not some arrogance in the term "eternal capital," a phrase originated by the Israelis themselves? What other country refers to its capital as "eternal"? Certainly not the United States.

The GOP platform is not significantly more effusive in support for Israel than that of the Democrats. Indeed, both parties have been vying to outdo each other in support of Israel for nearly half a century. Although American Jews have been traditionally associated with the Democratic Party, the Republicans in recent years have surpassed the Democrats, as evangelical Christians and other so-called Christian Zionists have gravitated to the GOP. While the two parties may disagree on dozens of issues, from energy policy to tax reform, unstinting support for "the Jewish state" is a constant. Congressional enthusiasm for Israel is apparent in a number of ways; here we will note only two. In the area of foreign aid, Israel, although hardly a poor country, continues to receive more U.S. Government assistance than any other country, all of it on a grant (free) basis. For 2018, as in previous years, Congress is expected to approve a total of $3.1 billion for Israel, well over ten percent of the global total. Secondly, Israeli leaders have been given a distinctive honor – to address a joint session of Congress – on seven occasions over the past 30 years, more than any other country. The current Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has spoken three times, as often as Winston Churchill. Incidentally, "The Passionate Attachment" to Israel was the title of a thoughtful 1992 book whose authors cited George Washington's famous farewell address to the nation, in which he warned the young America to avoiding "passionate attachments" with other countries. Sadly, that advice has been ignored.

Biblical Basis for the Promised Land

The relationship between the Jews and the "Promised Land" of Israel is a major theme of the Old Testament.[1] Modern-day Zionists and their Christian allies glibly refer to a handful of verses in the Book of Genesis to justify their support for a "greater Israel." Principally among them are the following, citing promises from the Lord God to Abraham:

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

• "That day God made a covenant with Abram, saying: To thy seed will I give this land, from the river of Egypt even to the great river Euphrates." (Gen 15:18)

• "And I will give to thee, and to thy seed, the land of thy sojournment, all the land of Chanaan for a perpetual possession, and I will be their God." (Gen 17:8)

Conveniently forgotten is any reference to the concept of *covenant*, which was introduced in the following verse (Gen 17:9): "Again God said to Abraham: And thou therefore shalt keep my covenant, and thy seed after thee in their generations." While God spoke here only of circumcision as a requirement to abide by the covenant, it is clear from subsequent texts that God wanted far more.

Centuries later, Moses warned the Israelites about the behavior that God would demand of them as a *quid pro quo* in the covenant. In Leviticus, he cautioned the people that their possession of the Promised Land would be dependent on their fidelity to God's moral law:

> "Defile not yourselves with any of these [immoral] things with which all the nations have been defiled, which I will cast out before you, and with which the land is defiled: the abominations of which I will visit, that it may vomit out its inhabitants. Keep ye My ordinances and My judgments, and do not any of these abominations: neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you. For all these detestable things the inhabitants of the land have done, that were before you, and have defiled it. Beware then, lest in like manner, it vomit you also out, if you do the like things, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. Every soul that shall commit any of these abominations, shall perish from the midst of his people." (Lev 18:24-29)

On the eve of the Israelite entry into Canaan, the warning of Moses to his people turned into virtually a stark threat, as conveyed in Deuteronomy:

> "If you shall beget sons and grandsons, and abide in the land, and being deceived, make to yourselves any similitude [i.e., idol], committing evil before the Lord your God, to provoke Him to wrath: I call this day heaven and earth to witness, that you shall quickly perish out of the land, which, when you have passed over the Jordan, you shall possess. You shall not dwell therein long, but the Lord will destroy you, and scatter you among all nations, and you shall remain a few among the nations, to which the Lord shall lead you." (Deut.

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

4:25-27)

In summary, the Torah provides us with three crucial characteristics of the Promised Land. First, in the words of author Gary Burge, "…the land is not a possession that may be enjoyed without reference to God. Possessing this land is contingent on Israel's ongoing faithfulness to God and obedience to His law…It is not a possession that can be held independently." Secondly, the land is a divine gift that has "expectations for covenant holiness and justice. God is watching this land. He has personal expectations for this land. It is a land that should evoke memories of His own holiness." Last is the issue of ownership. "In a profound sense, Israel never 'owns' the land of promise. *God owns this land*. Leviticus [25:23] uses this idea to explain why the land cannot be sold permanently to others, 'The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, *for the land is Mine* [author's italics]; with Me you are but aliens and tenants.'"[2]

The Fate of Ancient Israel

History has proven that the Jews did not heed the words of Moses and the prophets and their fate was tragic – the disappearance of ten of the twelve tribes after conquest by the Assyrians (722 B.C.) and an exile in Babylon for the remnant within the Kingdom of Judah (586 B.C.). Although some Jews would return to Judea and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, they would never again see the brief period of glory under King Solomon. (Implausibly, some Christian Zionists are referring to Trump as the new Cyrus the Great, the Persian king who conquered Babylon and allowed the Jews to return to Judea and rebuild the temple. The analogy is certainly appealing to a man of Trump's ego, although it fails in several respects. But among America's evangelical Christians, the notion that their president is helping to fulfill Biblical prophecy is a thrilling and galvanizing prospect.)

By the time of Christ's public ministry, Israel had been under Roman occupation for nearly a century (since 63 B.C.). The Jews saw readily through the parables of Jesus and did not like what they heard. For example, in the parable of the tenants of the vineyard (recounted in all three Synoptic Gospels), Jesus stated that the landowner "rented the vineyard to tenants" (the Jews) who eventually beat or killed all of the landowner's slaves (the prophets). Finally, after the tenants killed the owner's "dear son" (one of many predictions of his own death), Jesus concluded the parable by avowing that the owner of the vineyard "will come and kill those men and turn the vineyard over to other tenants." The story was a thinly-veiled condemnation of the Jewish leaders, who "knew that he had told this parable against them." More directly, Jesus predicted the total destruction of the newly completed second Temple (cf. Matt. 24:2, Mark 13:2, Luke 21:6), as well as devastation of all Jerusalem (cf. Luke

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

19:43-44).

The Six-Day War, 50 Years On

As for modern Israel, its conquest of Jerusalem, the West Bank, and other territories in the 1967 "Six Day War" has been widely proclaimed miraculous by ardent Christian Zionists and atheistic Jews alike. A more realistic assessment had been provided by the CIA to President Lyndon Johnson two weeks earlier, noting that Israel could "defend successfully against simultaneous Arab attacks on all fronts…or hold on any three fronts while mounting successfully a major offensive on the fourth." It is also seldom remembered that Israel began the 1967 war with a series of pre-emptive airstrikes, although admittedly the Arabs were responsible for military moves short of war. From that point on, Israel became an occupying power by international law; it even unilaterally annexed East Jerusalem and eventually the Golan Heights. For the next 50 years, it has refused to abide by the ensuing United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 that established the principle of land for peace. Likewise, it refused to acknowledge the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention governing the duties of one nation occupying the territory of another. The great irony here is that this convention was implemented in 1949 (and with Israeli approval) to prevent a recurrence of the Nazi atrocities that so devastated the Jews of Eastern Europe. Israel's actions vis-à-vis the native Palestinians have since evoked widespread comparisons to the apartheid regime of South Africa. Of course, apartheid ended over twenty years ago whereas Israel's patently unjust policies have continued unabated.

The Ideology of Zionism

Catholics who wish to understand the phenomenon of modern Israel must start with an appreciation of two things: (1) the ideology of Zionism and (2) the significance of Jerusalem. First, Zionism was – and is – a secular and socialist movement which has no place for religion other than its reliance on Orthodox Judaism as a convenient prop. As noted recently by author Shlomo Sand in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, "Zionism as a national movement that rebelled against historical Judaism was mainly atheistic. Most of its leaders and activists ceased believing in redemption through the coming of the Messiah, the long-standing essence of Jewish belief, and took their fate into their own hands. The power of the human subject replaced the power of the omnipotent God." While the origin of Zionism is attributed to the Jewish Austrian journalist Theodore Herzl, its success was made possible only by scores of atheistic, revolutionary Jews who migrated to Palestine from the vast lands of the Russian empire. These figures are honored today as a pantheon of Zionism, including such notables as Vladimir Jabotinsky, Leon Pinsker, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, and future Israeli prime ministers such as David Ben-Gurion, Menachem Begin, and Yitzak Shamir. It should

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

be noted that revolutionary Jews were also the driving force behind Bolshevism in Russia at the same time. Numerous authors, including Winston Churchill, have remarked on this linkage. Moreover, the most critical dates in the timelines of both the Bolshevik and Zionist movements came within days of each other in the fall of 1917. On November 2, the famous Balfour Declaration issued by the British government gave crucial diplomatic support to Zionism, indicating that Britain favored "a national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine. Less than a week later (October 25-26 by the Russian calendar), the Bolsheviks seized control of the city of Petrograd and the Winter Palace, thereby taking control of the Russian government.

Fatima Connection – "Errors" of Russia

In retrospect, these two simultaneous earthshaking events can be seen as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Our Lady of Fatima earlier that same year. During Her July 13 apparition to the three shepherd children, the Blessed Virgin declared that "Russia will spread its errors throughout the world." Pointedly, Mary spoke of "errors" (plural), indicating that Communism would not be the only evil to spring from Russia. If Communism divided people by class, Zionism (like Nazism) does so by race. Lastly, both movements have seemed to derive their energy from the need to confront and crush their enemies, while continually proclaiming their desire for "peace." For Communism, the great foe was at various times the bourgeoisie, the czar, capitalism, Nazi Germany, the United States, NATO, and, of course, always Christianity. For Zionism, the enemy has been the British, the Palestinians, the Arab states, the United Nations, Iran, the entire Muslim world, and most recently, "anti-Semitic" Europe. Perhaps the greatest irony of American evangelical Christians has been their staunch opposition to Communism and their simultaneous embrace of Zionism.

Real Importance of Jerusalem

The second point for Catholics concerns the city of Jerusalem. The real (and eternal) significance of Jerusalem has nothing directly to do with the Jewish people but rather with the lives of the two persons central and indispensable to the salvation of all mankind – Mary and Jesus. The Blessed Virgin was Jerusalem's most favored daughter, whose birthplace by tradition was near the temple and is commemorated by the Crusader Church of St. Anne. On the feast of the Immaculate Conception (Dec. 8), the Church applies a paean of praise to Mary which was originally offered to the Old Testament heroine Judith:

> "**Thou art the glory of Jerusalem**, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honor of our people. For thou hast done manfully, and thy heart has been strengthened,

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

> because thou hast loved chastity, and after thy husband hast not known any other. Therefore also the hand of the Lord hath strengthened thee, and therefore thou shalt be blessed forever. And all the people said: So be it, so be it." (Judith 15:10-12)

As for Jesus, His institution of the Holy Eucharist, Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension all occurred in Jerusalem – in fact, within a few hundred yards of the birthplace of His Mother. Although known as a Galilean, Jesus chose Jerusalem as the site of His redemptive acts for reasons we can readily surmise.

Modern Israel's Fate

A final word about Israel: Within a few generations of their occupation of the land of Canaan, the ancient Israelites began to clamor for a king, "as all nations have" (1 Kings [Samuel] 8:5). Per God's instructions, the prophet Samuel did not deny the people their request, but issued a stern warning that their kings would eventually bring great tragedy upon the Jews. (In His Providence, God even gave instructions *centuries in advance* for how a king must conduct himself, as recorded in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. Unfortunately, His commands were not obeyed.)

Today, the Jews again wish to be treated "like all nations" and, for the moment, have succeeded in their goal. Israel has its own national flag, its own currency, its own legislature, its own seat in the United Nations, and its own contestant in the annual Miss Universe Pageant. But Israel cannot have it both ways. It cannot claim divine sanction for unilateral ownership of the Promised Land based on ancient Biblical texts and still expect to be treated as a law-abiding state under the legal norms of the modern international community. Likewise, it cannot continue to call itself both a Jewish state and a democracy as the demographics do not support it.

The international community rightly does not recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital for the reasons of international law cited above. Today, of the 80-plus nations who maintain embassies in Israel, all do so in the Tel Aviv area. In the wake of Trump's Jerusalem announcement, which will take years to implement, only Guatemala has followed suit by moving its embassy. Can it really be possible that all of these other countries are anti-Semitic? It has also been suggested in Catholic circles that other nations have not moved their embassies to Jerusalem due to fear of radical and violent Muslim reactions. That may well be a factor today, but it certainly was not in 1967 when Israel annexed East Jerusalem and other territories, thereby becoming an occupying power according to every reasonable

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

interpretation of international law. It is one thing for the United States to make a decision in defiance of Muslim terror or intimidation; it is another to reverse course and ignore the most basic precepts of international law, which the U.S. has worked so hard to promote.

This modern Israel, built on Zionist tenets and espousing a highly secular culture, cannot stand. Certainly, the Israelis can defend themselves militarily; Israel's nuclear weapons arsenal (which it has never acknowledged) is perhaps the worst-kept secret in the Middle East. Certainly, the United States continues to serve as Israel's patron, underwriting its aggressive policies and shielding it from the unpleasant international consequences of its actions, such as through vetoes at the United Nations. But Israel cannot stand because God will not indefinitely allow His chosen people to reclaim the Promised Land without turning to Him in repentance and, even if belatedly, recognizing the time of their visitation (cf. Luke 19:44) by the Messiah 2,000 years ago. The Jews of contemporary Israel will either suffer the fate that already came twice for the Jews of old, or they will turn in faith and repentance to Jesus Christ, Son of Her whom the Church calls "the glory of Jerusalem." No action by President Trump or the United States will change that outcome.

Want more great Catholic content? SUBSCRIBE to *Catholic Family News* and help support our work! DONATIONS are also accepted and greatly appreciated. God bless you and thanks for reading!

Notes:

[1] *Catholic Family News* has published two series of articles by this author on this very subject: "Why is There a Gaza Strip?" (Feb.–Apr. 2015) and "Christian Zionism: America's Dance with the Devil" (Feb.–June 2016). Reprints are available for order from *CFN*.

[2] Gary M. Burge, *Jesus and the Land* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010), pp. 3-5.

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.