

**Editor's Note:** This article, the third installment in a three-part series, first appeared in the April 2015 Edition of *Catholic Family News*. See [here](#) for Part I and [here](#) for Part II.

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## Introduction

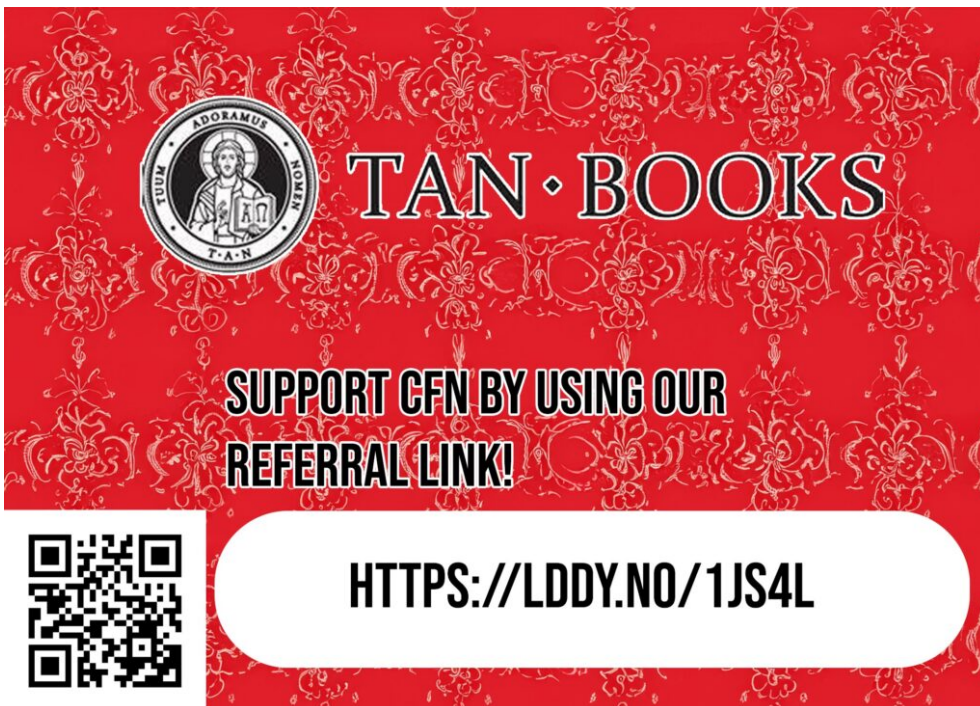
This is the final installment of a three-part article on the moral and Biblical foundations of the modern state of Israel, particularly regarding the land. In [Part One](#), we explored the Old Testament roots of the concept of land, dating back to Genesis. We saw from numerous Biblical texts that the land was a blessing from God and was an integral part of His covenant with man. Further, should man fail to observe the covenant, God would — and did — punish man by expelling him from the land and/or depriving him of its fruits. The Old Testament provided us with three such major examples: the banishment from the Garden of Eden, the great flood (Deluge) at the time of Noah, and the exile of the Jews from land of Canaan. We focused in particular on the history of the Jews, who ignored the warnings of Moses and the prophets, insisted on instituting a kingship for themselves “as other countries have” (1 Sam. 8:5), and suffered the consequences of their infidelity to God’s law by oppression and later expulsion from their “Promised Land.”

Last month in [Part Two](#), we turned to the New Testament, noting those words and actions of Jesus Christ with implications for the land. We saw that Christ was entirely consistent with the message of Moses and the prophets in the Hebrew covenant — the land belongs to God, and its occupation by the Jews, as tenants, was “contingent on Israel’s ongoing faithfulness to God and obedience to His law.”<sup>[1]</sup> Indeed, the parable of the tenants in the vineyard (Luke 20:9-19, also found in Matthew and Mark) was a clear warning to the Jewish leaders of the day who rightly saw themselves as the target of Christ’s words.

After then looking briefly at a span of 1,800 years of Jewish wandering and exile, we outlined the rise in the 19th century of what would become known as Zionism. We observed that Zionism was largely the result of an Anglican Protestant movement stemming from a sympathetic if naïve desire to provide a “homeland” for Europe’s Jews, and potentially convert them to Christianity (which proved a dismal failure). Born during the era of Europe’s race for colonial territories, the Zionist goal of a Jewish homeland in Palestine soon coincided, for the moment, with the strategic interests of the British Empire. Finally, the cataclysm of World War I resulted in the curious and politically motivated Balfour Declaration of 1917 and, after the Versailles Peace Conference, British control of Palestine as a mandate under the League of Nations.

Here in Part Three, we will examine the unhappy history of Palestine under the British

mandate, which culminated in an ignominious British capitulation and the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. We will further see that Zionist ideology concerning the land, as implemented first by the Zionist settlers and later by the government of Israel, has not only been a disaster for the native Palestinian inhabitants but has been entirely opposed to the Old Testament covenant, not to mention the words of Christ. Finally, to conclude with the title of this article, we will take a look at the current disastrous situation in the Gaza Strip, the ultimate tragic consequence of Zionism, and offer a conjecture on the future of the state of Israel.

A red banner with a white floral pattern. In the top left is a circular logo featuring a figure holding a book, surrounded by the text 'ADORAMUS' at the top, 'TAN' at the bottom, and 'TAN BOOKS' on the sides. To the right of the logo, the text 'TAN BOOKS' is written in a large, white, serif font. Below this, the text 'SUPPORT CFN BY USING OUR REFERRAL LINK!' is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. At the bottom left is a QR code. To the right of the QR code, the URL 'HTTPS://LDDY.NO/1JS4L' is displayed in a white, sans-serif font inside a white rounded rectangle.

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## Deceptions

As noted in [Part Two](#), in the years leading up to the establishment of the British Mandate for Palestine in 1920, both the British and the Zionists routinely dismissed or minimized two crucial issues which eventually caused the mandate to implode after World War II and which still plague Jewish-Palestinian relations today. First, they ignored the legitimate concerns — and even the presence — of the Palestinians (both Muslim and Christian) who had occupied the land for centuries. Secondly, the deliberately vague references to a “homeland” for the Jews, in both the Zionist Congresses and the Balfour Declaration, left open the most critical issue, especially in the great age of nationalism: would that “homeland” become a nation-state? If so, who would govern it? Who would have civil and military authority? *Who would control the land?*

The great slogan — and first myth — associated with the rise of Zionism is that it proposed to provide “[a land without a people for a people without a land.](#)” This concept, traced to an 1853 letter by Lord Shaftesbury, was anticipating the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which inconveniently did not occur for another 70 years. Those same years proved to be the heyday of British imperialism, as it steadily expanded its colonial holdings and increased overseas markets for its goods. As historian Barbara Tuchman notes, these twin goals were buttressed by the “imperious, and often genuine, belief that Britain was fulfilling her manifest destiny to extend the civilizing benefits of rule by the British race.”<sup>[2]</sup> At the apex of empire, prominent Englishmen from Joseph Chamberlain, the (anti-Semitic) businessman and statesman, to Poet Laureate Alfred Austin were proclaiming England as “the greatest of governing races the world has ever seen” and that her task was to “harvest Empire, wiser than was Greece, wider than Rome!”<sup>[3]</sup> The Zionists and the British found themselves allies of convenience, but the alliance would not last long.

Meanwhile, Jewish settlers began arriving in the 1880s in a series of *aliyahs* (“ascents” to the historic land of Israel). They came largely from the great plains of Eastern Europe and the Pale of the Settlement within czarist Russia to escape persecution and find opportunity. Having no knowledge of local history or culture, and no common language or religion with the locals (except the tiny remnant of Jews), they were understandably clannish and at best indifferent toward the Palestinians. As author Karen Armstrong has observed, “The first Zionists had very little understanding of the terrestrial history of Palestine during the previous two thousand years; their slogan: ‘A land without a people for a people without a land!’ showed a complete disregard for the fact that the land was inhabited by Palestinian Arabs who had their own aspirations for the country.”<sup>[4]</sup> The [Zionist slogan](#) itself has become an emotionally charged expression over time but there is no denying that it succinctly expressed the views, or at least hopes, of the British and the Zionists. That said, as late as 1931, during the fifth *aliyah*, the [native Arabs numbered 880,000 persons](#), representing 83% of the population of the British mandate. Palestine was hardly a “land without a people.”

A second deception lay in the comforting public words of Zionist leaders such as Chaim Weizmann, the Jewish chemist who was a major motivating force behind the Balfour Declaration. In a 1919 address, Weizmann, who would become the first president of Israel in 1949, made these remarks to a London audience: “The Arabs are not strangers, they have lived in the country for centuries. They are a primitive people, and they do not wish to leave Palestine as we enter Palestine. We say: ‘There is room for both you and for us; you will benefit by our coming in, and we shall benefit by friendly relations between you and us.’ ... We cannot go into the country like Junkers; we cannot afford to drive out other people. We who have been driven out ourselves cannot drive out others. We shall be the last people to

drive off the *fellah* [peasant] from his land; we shall establish normal relations between us and them. The Arabs will live among us; they won't suffer; they will live among us as Jews do here in England. That is our attitude toward the Arabs. Any other attitude is criminal, childish, impolitic, stupid.”<sup>[5]</sup> In the same address, Weizmann stated that “[t]he Arabs need us with our knowledge, and our experience and our money. If they do not have us they will fall into the hands of others, they will fall among sharks.”<sup>[6]</sup> Weizmann persisted in such remarks through the era of the mandate and was proven wrong, as we will see, even before the establishment of the state of Israel.

## Warnings

One of the few to challenge Weizmann's position was G.K. Chesterton after his 1920 visit to Palestine. Chesterton observed that the reaction of the Arabs to the Jews was one of fear, not hatred. “Rightly or wrongly, certain people in Palestine fear the coming of the Jews as they fear the coming of the locusts; they regard them as parasites that feed on a community by a thousand methods of financial intrigue and economic exploitation...[The Arabs] fear, in exact terms, their knowledge and their experience and their money.”<sup>[7]</sup> Chesterton rightly perceived that it was the Zionists, not “others,” who would assume the role of sharks vis-à-vis the Palestinians.

Chesterton was hardly the first to warn of the pending calamity of Zionism. Fully three decades earlier, in 1891, after his own visit to Palestine, the Ukrainian Jewish essayist Asher Zvi Hirsch Ginsberg (who wrote under the pen name Ahad Ha'am), sounded his own prophetic alarm: “Palestine is not an uninhabited land and can offer a home only to a very small portion of the Jews scattered throughout the world. Those who settle in Palestine must above all seek to win the friendship of the Palestinians, by approaching them courteously and with respect. But what do our brothers do? Precisely the opposite. They were slaves in the land of their exile, and suddenly they find themselves with unlimited freedom. This sudden change has aroused in them a tendency to despotism, which is what always happens when slaves come to power. They treat the Arabs with hostility and cruelty, rob them of their rights in a dishonest way, hurt them without reason and then pride themselves on such actions; and no one attacks this despicable and dangerous tendency.”<sup>[8]</sup> As Fr. Michael Prior notes, Ahad Ha'am “died a broken-hearted man in Tel Aviv in 1927, outraged by the cycle of violence” even at that early date.<sup>[9]</sup>

The warnings against Zionism by Jews themselves have continued since Ahad Ha'am. Another early example was Judah Magnes, the prominent American rabbi of Reform Judaism, who eventually became the first chancellor of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Renouncing his initial enthusiasm for Zionism, he [issued his own caution](#) in a letter to

Chaim Weizmann: “A Jewish Home in Palestine built up on bayonets and oppression [is] not worth having, even though it succeed, whereas the very attempt to build it up peacefully, cooperatively, with understanding, education, and good will, [is] worth a great deal, even though the attempt should fail.” Elsewhere, Magnes observed that “Judaism did not begin with Zionism, and if Zionism is ethically not in accord with Judaism, so much the worse for Zionism.”<sup>[10]</sup> Among many other prominent Jews who warned about the need to find common ground with the native Arabs were Albert Einstein and Hanna Arendt.<sup>[11]</sup>

A final warning of note stems from the 1919 King-Crane Commission, chartered by President Wilson at the Versailles Conference to ascertain the desires of the peoples of the former Ottoman Empire. Among its [recommendations on Palestine](#): “It can hardly be doubted that the extreme Zionist Program must be greatly modified. For ‘a national home for the Jewish people’ is not equivalent to making Palestine into a Jewish State; nor can the erection of such a Jewish State be accomplished without the gravest trespass upon the ‘civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.’ The fact came out repeatedly in the Commission’s conference with Jewish representatives, that the Zionists looked forward to a practically complete dispossession of the present non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine, by various forms of purchase.”

From the first, however, the early Zionist leaders were determined to fulfill their dream even at the cost of expulsion of the Arabs. As early as 1882, they anticipated the need to use force: “The Jews, if necessary with arms in their hands, will publicly proclaim themselves masters of their own ancient fatherland.”<sup>[12]</sup> Theodore Herzl himself, in a diary entry in 1895, noted that “[w]e shall endeavor to expel the poor population across the border unnoticed, procuring employment for it in the transit countries, but denying it any employment in our own country.” David Ben-Gurion made a similar remark to his son in a 1937 letter.<sup>[13]</sup> As the British mandate unfolded, these privately expressed intentions proved to be the real goal of Zionism, belying the soothing public statements of Weizmann, Ben-Gurion, and others.





## The Mandate and the Jewish National Fund

From the outset, the British execution of their mandate showed a bias for the Zionists. The preamble of the [Mandate charter](#) recognized the “historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine and ... the grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country” while Article 6 committed the administration to “facilitate Jewish immigration.” The Palestinians, who then comprised 89% of the inhabitants, were referred to only as “other sections of the population.” Likewise, the first High Commissioner was [Sir Herbert Samuel](#), a prominent Jewish member of the Liberal Party and Zionist sympathizer, who was appointed over the objections of General Allenby.

Meanwhile, the Zionists had begun an international campaign to obtain land for new Jewish settlers. Their primary instrument was the [Jewish National Fund](#) (JNF), founded by the Fifth Zionist Congress in 1901. “Its role in the Zionist enterprise was to acquire land in Palestine as the exclusive and inalienable property in perpetuity of the Jewish people; to develop this land for Jewish colonization; and, to the extent possible, to ensure that the enterprise be for the benefit of Jews only.”<sup>[14]</sup> Through the JNF, which functioned as a trust, wealthy American and European Jews began to donate funds used to purchase *kibbutzim* and other lands for the exclusive use of Jewish settlers. While many Arab landowners, especially absentees, sold their property quite willingly at the outset, the JNF’s efforts soon caused great animosity. As early as 1908, well before the days of the mandate, there were violent

clashes between Palestinians and Zionist settlers over the loss of Palestinian land.<sup>[15]</sup> JNF regulations stipulated that land, once acquired, could never be sold, and could be leased only to Jews. This policy was consistent with the Zionist ideology of “redeeming” the land, i.e., bringing it under Jewish ownership or control, whether by purchase or — later — by force. Additionally, this resulted in a boycott of Arab labor, since only Jews could work on such lands.<sup>[16]</sup> These rules remain in effect even today within the state of Israel.

Without delving into the details of the Mandate, it was a disaster for all concerned. Britain quickly realized, if it did not readily admit, that the strategic value of Palestine for the basing of British forces was offset by a steadily deteriorating domestic situation which it could not control. The Zionists continued their aggressive acquisition of land through the Jewish National Fund and private purchases. But the increase in demand for Jewish immigration from Germany, after the rise of Adolph Hitler and the Nazis, was to cause more friction. As the Mandatory power, Britain tried to appease both the Zionists and the Palestinians, which proved impossible. The Jews accused the British of betraying their race by enacting immigration quotas. A charismatic Arab nationalist, Hajj Amin Al-Hussaini, flirted with the Nazis, angering both the British and the Zionists. Major Arab riots occurred in 1929 and 1933. They were followed by the [Arab Revolt of 1936-1939](#), which resulted in the deaths of more than 5,000 Arabs, 400 Jews, and 200 British. The Palestinians had an array of grievances against both the British and the Zionists. The *fellahin* (Arab peasants) were increasingly pushed off the land into urban environments, such as shanty towns in Jaffa and Haifa, where they often encountered poverty and social marginalization. The Palestinians were likewise alarmed by the rapidly increasing pace of Jewish immigration, the continued Zionist acquisition of land, rising rents, and unemployment. Lastly, they were vexed by Britain’s lack of interest in granting them independence. In 1917, Britain had sown the wind in Palestine. By the eve of World War II, it was reaping the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7).

## British Exhaustion and Arab Catastrophe

After the defeat of Germany in 1945, Britain became desperate to escape from the entanglement of Palestine. Frustrated by the impasse between Arab and Jew, exhausted by six years of global war, and pressured by the Americans to repay loans, the British had lost their appetite for imperialism with its attendant financial burdens and headaches. By 1947, they decided to refer the problem of Palestine to the new United Nations. Former British Prime Minister Harold Wilson later wrote about how irrelevant had become the Balfour Declaration by 1947 in British government discussions and overtures. “It was as though [Zionist sympathizers] Balfour, Lloyd George — and Churchill — had never lived.”<sup>[17]</sup> With the independence of Egypt and Iraq, Britain’s moment in the Middle East as master of all “from the Nile to the Euphrates” (Gen. 15:18) proved very fleeting, lasting barely a

generation.

As a United Nations special commission studied the problem, the Palestinians were adamantly opposed to a partition of their land, which the Zionists were quite willing to accept. By this time, the role of the United States — and the support of President Harry Truman — was decisive. The partition plan eventually proposed to the UN General Assembly in 1947 was strikingly similar to a Zionist-drafted map which Truman had sponsored the previous year. The Jews, who then owned 7% of the land, were to be awarded 56% of the total land under the UN plan, “including most of the best arable land which was already home to a substantial Arab population.” Moreover, even though the Jews had dramatically increased their numbers in Palestine since the end of World War II, the Palestinians would still comprise at least 45% of the population in the proposed Jewish state. Also conceded to the Jewish state was the Negev Desert, “although some 100,000 Bedouin cultivated a vast area of it, while only some 475 Jews lived in four settlements there.”[\[18\]](#)

Over the years, the popular perception of the Palestinians has been that they reject any compromise. On closer inspection, few if any of these accusations have merit. The absurdly biased partition plan of 1947 (approved as UN General Assembly Resolution 181) was the first such example of Palestinian “intransigence.” Likewise, this is the first of numerous instances in which the United States successfully applied diplomatic pressure — actually coercion — behind the scenes (or publicly exercised a veto), to influence a United Nations resolution involving Israel.[\[19\]](#)

With the British having declared six months in advance that they intended to end the Mandate on May 14, 1948, chaos soon descended on the land of Palestine. The escalating violence was punctuated by terrorist attacks on Arabs and British by the militant Zionist organizations [Lehi](#) and Irgun. Lehi, also known as the Stern Gang, at one point considered itself Bolshevik and carried out the assassination of UN mediator Count Folke Bernadotte. Founder Avraham Stern identified in his *18 Principles of Rebirth* that the Jews have a sole and eternal right to the land of Israel and advocated constant war against those who stand in the way of fulfilling the goals, including “redemption” of the land. Future Israeli prime ministers Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir emerged from these violent organizations.

As the Mandate expired on May 14, Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion solemnly read on the radio Israel’s “Proclamation of Independence,” ostensibly modeled on the American Constitution. Crafted with the aid of an American rabbi, the document promised “development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants ... complete equality of social and political rights ... irrespective of religion, race, or sex....” As Israeli scholar Ilan Pappé notes, this part of the proclamation “was the window dressing aimed at safeguarding Israel’s future international image and status.”[\[20\]](#)



In declaring its independence, Israel chose not to identify its borders. At the end of [the war with Arab states that followed](#), Israel retained the area that had been recommended by UN General Assembly Resolution 181, *but also took control of almost 60% of the area allocated to the proposed Arab state, placing it under military rule*. Even today, despite peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, Israel has yet to define its borders with Lebanon, whose territory it occupied for nearly 20 years, and Syria, whose Golan Heights it unilaterally annexed. Most importantly, it has refused to define its border vis-à-vis the West Bank, while continuing a decades-long campaign to demolish Palestinian housing and build Jewish settlements. The [Zionist strategy](#) was cunning: “If there was no defined border between Israel and the rest of Palestine, then all of Palestine could be considered open territory, available for conquest.”

Israel’s proclamation of independence prompted five Arab states to join the Palestinians in the fighting against the Jews. The combat ended in early 1949 with a series of bilateral armistices, but not before Palestinian society [lay in ruins](#). In 1951, the UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine estimated that the number of Palestinian refugees displaced from Israel was 711,000. This number did not include Palestinians displaced from their homes who remained inside Israeli-held territory. In total, over 50% of all Palestinians were uprooted from their land, in numerous cases at the point of a gun, and ended up in squalid refugee camps outside Israeli control. The term “displaced persons,” which reflected the status of a quarter of a million Jews at the end of World War II, soon applied to three times as many Palestinians. Looking for a scapegoat for this inconvenient statistic, the Zionists devised another myth, i.e., that the Palestinians were either urged or ordered to flee by their own leaders or by neighboring Arab governments. However, extensive research, done at the later request of the government of Israel, has been unable to verify a single such instance.

## Tragedies

Although the Zionists committed many atrocities during this period, none was more horrific than that inflicted on the Arab village of Deir Yassin. There, more than five weeks before the Proclamation of Independence, a combined force of Irgun and Stern Gang militia staged a brutal massacre of more than 100 Arab residents (some accounts list over 250), most of whom were women and children. Days later, British investigators concluded that sexual atrocities had accompanied the massacre. Far from being a rogue operation, it was a calculated (and successful) attempt to spread fear and panic among the Palestinians, inducing them to flee. Menachem Begin’s diary, for example, refers to the Deir Yassin massacre as “a strategic victory.”[\[21\]](#)

Although almost every Palestinian family has its own unhappy story to tell from the time of

*Al-Nakba* (“The Catastrophe”), some among the Christian community have become widely known over time. One such family was that of Audeh Rantisi, which could trace its lineage in the city of Lydda back to the fourth century A.D. In July of 1948, 11-year-old Audeh watched in horror as his family was evicted from their home, along with thousands of other Palestinians, and placed on a forced march by Israeli soldiers. Rantisi would survive the terrifying ordeal to become an Anglican priest and wrote his autobiography, [Blessed Are the Peacemakers](#). The Israeli government, which for years had disavowed the forced expulsions of 1948 around Lydda (now Lod), could no longer deny the truth with the publication of Yitzhak Rabin’s memoirs in 1979.[\[22\]](#)

Days before the Israeli Proclamation of Independence, a virtually identical fate had already befallen the Christian family of 11-year-old [Naim Ateek](#) in the village of Beisan (now Beit She’an). Like Rantisi, Ateek eventually became an Anglican priest and dedicated himself to resolving the conflict with Israel, as documented in his book *Justice and Only Justice*. There he describes a visit to his home 10 years later in 1958. “I still remember that when we asked permission to go inside, just to take a look, our request was turned down. One occupant said very emphatically, ‘This is not your house; it is ours.’”[\[23\]](#)

Perhaps the best-known testament of a Palestinian Christian is that of Elias Chacour who, as a Melkite Greek Catholic, became archbishop of the Galilee region in 2006. Chacour’s native village of Biram was occupied by Israeli troops in November of 1948. In his book *We Belong to the Land* he records how, at the age of eight, he watched helplessly as Israeli soldiers “tricked the people of Biram into leaving by telling them about an imaginary attack and giving a worthless written guarantee of return. After two weeks in the nearby fields, we discovered our warm, pleasant village life in Biram was gone forever. The soldiers had ransacked our houses and ruined our food supply. Most of the village men were herded into trucks at gunpoint and driven away. Old people, women, and children were left to fend for themselves. Some fled to Lebanon, others to neighboring villages....” After the Arabs of Biram decided to pursue a challenge in the Israeli court system to regain their land, the government pre-empted the issue by bombing and bulldozing their village in 1953.[\[24\]](#) Like Rantisi and Ateek, Chacour’s attitude over the years has been an exemplary model of Christian compassion and forgiveness in the face of incredible adversity.

Further in *We Belong to the Land*, Chacour summarizes the story from 1 Kings 21, which has been eerily unfolding again in modern Israel during his lifetime: “Naboth, a Gentile, owned a vineyard next to the country palace of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel in the northern kingdom, Israel, in the ninth century B.C. Ahab wanted to purchase the vineyard, but Naboth refused, wishing to keep it as a family inheritance. Jezebel proceeded to secure the land for her husband through deceit and gross injustice. Naboth was stoned to death on

a false conviction of blasphemy that Jezebel arranged. Jezebel then told Ahab that Naboth was dead and that he could take possession of the vineyard. The prophet Elijah found the king in Naboth's vineyard and said, 'Have you killed and also taken possession?' Elijah described how God would punish both Ahab and Jezebel for this evil act."[\[25\]](#) The parallels between the actions of Ahab and Jezebel, and those of the modern Israeli government, although almost three millennia apart, are striking. Only the ending is different. While Ahab and Jezebel both met violent and bloody deaths, the government of Israel has, after nearly seven decades, almost entirely escaped the consequences of its abuse of the land and its residents.

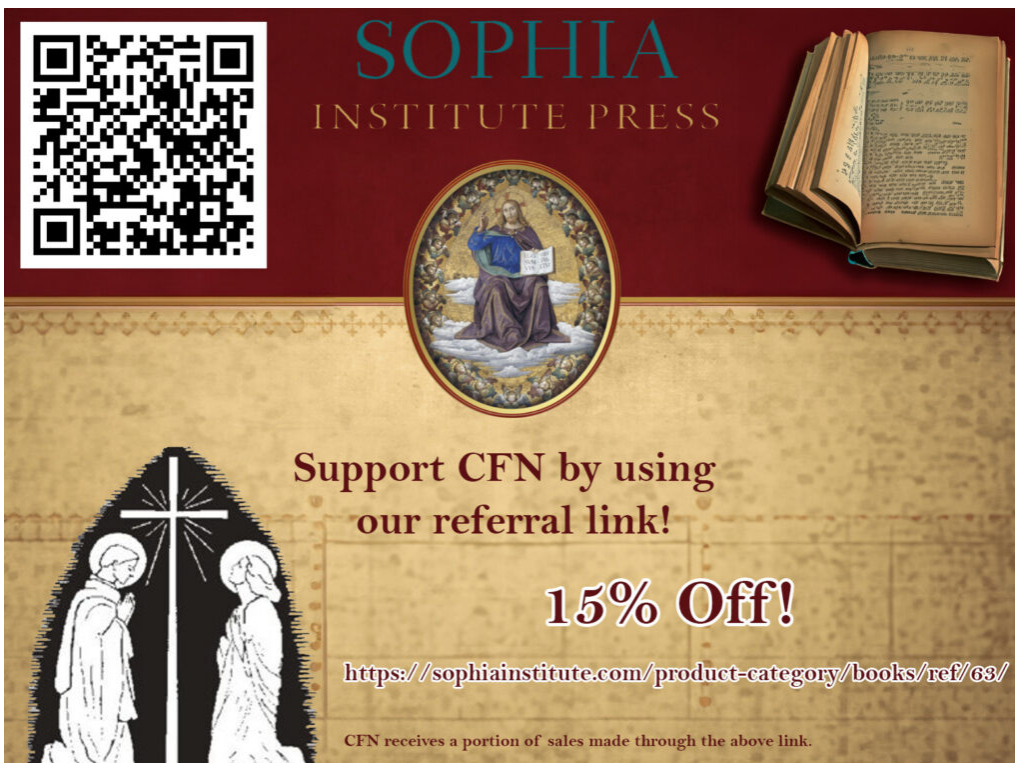
## The Closed Utopia

With the armistices of 1949, the Jews began the process of building their modern state. Those Palestinians who remained inside Israeli borders became Israeli citizens but, as noted euphemistically by the official "Country Study" of Israel by the Library of Congress, their rights "have remained precarious."[\[26\]](#) The Israeli government soon concocted a maze of laws, regulations, and policies designed to curtail Palestinian rights, especially freedom of movement. The areas in which 90% of the Arabs lived were placed under military government and "almost unfettered powers" were given to military governors, normally not subject to review by Israeli civil courts. Palestinian-owned land continued to be confiscated, often to accommodate Jewish immigrants, on the pretext that it lay in "security zones." Arabs could be arrested and imprisoned on unspecified charges, and private property was subject to search and seizure without warrant. Land was legally transferred to kibbutzim or other Jewish settlements because it was lying fallow, as the Palestinian owners could not re-enter Israel. According to Don Peretz, an American scholar, by 1954 "more than one-third of Israel's Jewish population lived on absentee property, and nearly a third of the new immigrants (250,000 people) settled in the urban areas abandoned by Arabs." By 1953, about 370 new Jewish settlements were built, and an estimated 350 of the settlements were established on what was termed abandoned Arab property. The Jewish National Fund remained in place and ensured that land once held by Jews, either individually or by the "sovereign state of the Jewish people," did not revert to non-Jews. This denied Israeli Palestinians access to, and even employment on, about 95% of the land.[\[27\]](#)

The fate of the Palestinians stood in stark contrast to the Jews of the diaspora, who were granted automatic Israeli citizenship under the so-called Law of Return of 1950. Today, Jews from around the world can immigrate easily to Israel while Palestinians who fled or were driven out, despite documented family residence on the land dating back centuries, have no right to return to their homeland. The new Israel also found itself the recipient of both humanitarian aid and investment, especially from Jewish philanthropists around the world.

Combined with the dispossession of Palestinians, Israel from its birth energetically pursued the creation of “facts on the ground,” with its twin pillars of demographics and territory. That strategy has continued in the occupied territories after 1967. Israel Shahak, the Holocaust survivor and Israeli scholar, has called this system the “closed utopia,” an ideal society for some at the expense of others.[28]

A less nuanced description of Israel — from another Israeli Jew — is that it is an apartheid state. Shulamit Aloni, who served as Minister of Education under Yitzhak Rabin and was the Israel Prize laureate for the year 2000, has written as follows: “Jewish self-righteousness is taken for granted among ourselves to such an extent that we fail to see what’s right in front of our eyes. It’s simply inconceivable that the ultimate victims, the Jews, can carry out evil deeds. Nevertheless, the state of Israel practices its own, quite violent, form of apartheid with the native Palestinian population.”[29] While an impressive international campaign in the 1980s eventually pressured South Africa to end its system of apartheid, no such effort has ever taken root vis-à-vis Israel.



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## Stewards of the Land?

Palestinians — Muslims, Christians, Jews, Druze, and others — were undeniably good stewards of the land through the centuries, even with their traditional methods of agriculture. In the words of Archbishop Chacour, “One of the Zionist myths is that Palestine



was a wasteland when the state of Israel was established. The Palestinian farming techniques were not modern ones, of course, but they were tailored to the land. Beautiful terracing with hand-built stone walls surrounded the hills, utilizing and protecting the land. The olive, fig, and almond trees were carefully tended, the fields lovingly cultivated.”[\[30\]](#)

All of this changed beginning in 1948. As journalist Jo Roberts observes, “For most Palestinians, living in permanent refugee camps in Jordan or Lebanon, memories of their homeland, and their homes, took on the quality of a profound nostalgia...The land they had left was already changing. It wasn’t just the villages themselves that disappeared, it was an entire way of life. ‘In just two years, Palestine’s traditional Middle-Eastern rural landscape was transformed into a Jewish-Europeanized landscape formed according to modernist and socialist conceptions,’ writes geographer Arnon Golan. Farming methods that had been practised for centuries with little change were swept away as backward and primitive. The terraced slopes of the hilly Galilee region were left to return to wilderness, their small plots rendered obsolete by the demands of modern agricultural progress. The new Jewish kibbutzes focused their labour on land reclamation and intensive cultivation in the plains. Tens of thousands of dunams [unit of measurement equal to about one quarter of an acre] of olive trees were uprooted and thousands more were left in neglect. The olive had been the signature tree of Arab Palestine: the root of its economy and the source of its chief exports, soap and oil. The Israeli planners saw the careful stewarding of olive groves as too labour-intensive for the relatively meagre profit...‘Most of all,’ says Golan, ‘the olive groves, which were uncommon among Jewish settlements, signified the ‘otherness’ of the Arab: the alien, the enemy.’”[\[31\]](#)

The hallmark phrase of the early Zionists, “We will make the desert bloom,” has come true, but only at the expense of the Palestinians. However, the romantic dream of Israeli kibbutzim exporting to the world has been quietly set aside over the years in favor of more lucrative and less labor-intensive commodities. Currently, over 80% of [Israel’s exports](#) are in gems, precious metals, electronic equipment, pharmaceuticals, and other high-tech commodities. Agriculture, so critical to the traditional Palestinian economy, now comprises only 2.4% of the Israeli gross domestic product (GDP).[\[32\]](#) Meanwhile, the occupied territories have become a captive market for many Jewish-controlled goods and services. As for the olive tree, it remains a recurring casualty of the vandalism of Israeli settlers in the West Bank even today.[\[33\]](#)

### **...And the Gaza Strip**

Israel’s conquest of more territory in 1967 — East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and the Gaza Strip — allowed more opportunities to “redeem land” and create facts

on the ground. The Israeli performance in the “Six Day War” was militarily superb and was proclaimed a “miraculous” victory by ardent Christian Zionists and atheistic Jews alike. A more realistic assessment had been [provided by the CIA](#) to President Lyndon Johnson two weeks in advance, 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.” Each of the four territories above deserves separate treatment, but we will address here only the Gaza Strip (the title of our article), which has been widely termed the largest outdoor prison in the world.[\[34\]](#)

The [Gaza Strip](#) was created in the 1949 armistice agreement between Israel and Egypt as part of the line of separation between their two armed forces along the Mediterranean coast. Two-hundred thousand Palestinian refugees had fled there during the hostilities of 1948 and remained under Egyptian administration until 1967. Its area is only 139 square miles and its population is now 1.8 million Palestinians (over half refugees) with the phenomenal density of 13,000 persons per square mile. Shortly after the 1967 war, Israel began permitting Jewish settlers to move into Gaza, eventually overseeing and subsidizing the creation of 21 settlements. In compliance with the Oslo Accords of the early 1990s, Israel forcibly evicted its, by then, 9,000 Jewish settlers from Gaza in 2005.

While deemed by some a “courageous” act by Israel, others saw the Israelis as simply “cutting their losses,” as the expenses in security and logistics to support a few thousand settlers in the midst of over a million Palestinians were extraordinary indeed. (By comparison, Jewish expansion in [East Jerusalem](#) and the [West Bank](#) has increased by 750,000 since 1967 and continues to grow rapidly. Gaza, which was only marginally a part of historic Israel, was an easy loss).

In September 2005, Israel formally declared an end to its occupation of the Gaza Strip. However, the Oslo Accords gave Israel full control over Gaza’s airspace and its coastal waters. In addition, Israel has continued to control all the land movement of persons and commodities in and out of the Gaza Strip, even supervising the one crossing point into Egypt. The Israeli government has thus been able to claim that it no longer “occupies” the Gaza Strip, even though it has total control of movement in and out of it. The European Union and Human Rights Watch, on the other hand, are among those who consider Gaza to still be “occupied.” With a poverty rate of over 70% and per capita income estimated at 164th in the world (2009 numbers), Gaza has become an [economic basket case](#). Virtually no Palestinian products are allowed to be exported outside Gaza, while Israel maintains even today a [blockade](#) on imports, having at various times denied such basic commodities as light bulbs, candles, books, coffee, spices, toys and baby formula, among dozens of others.

One of the few times that this draconian Israeli policy received any American press

coverage was during a 2009 visit to Gaza by then-Senator John Kerry. When the senator asked why trucks loaded with pasta were [denied entry to Gaza](#), he was informed that “Israel does not define pasta as part of humanitarian aid — only rice shipments.” A personal plea by Kerry to the Israeli defense minister was able to get the pasta policy reversed, to no apparent harm to Israeli security.

Harvard scholar Sara Roy, who has studied the Gaza Strip for nearly three decades, has coined the term “de-development” to describe Gaza’s steady economic regression under Israeli control. During the 2014 violence, which started just weeks after Pope Francis’s visit to Israel (mentioned in [Part One](#) of this article), Roy [wrote](#) for the Boston Globe: “Gaza’s deterioration ... was not accidental or inadvertent. To the contrary, the devastation of Gaza’s economy (and environment) was deliberate and planned by Israel, imposed through separation and isolation and through a destructive economic blockade.... Israel is deliberately targeting and bombing civilian infrastructure with the aim of ensuring Gaza’s continued decay.” Among Gaza’s other critical problems is the deterioration in [sanitation and public health](#). They range from [intermittent electricity](#) and uncontrolled wastewater to chronic malnutrition and anemia in its children.

Veteran Israeli journalist Gideon Levy documented his experiences covering the previous (2008) round of violence in Gaza. “It was a war that was no war, in which Israel met virtually no resistance, no counterattack worth speaking of. It was just a wild onslaught upon the most helpless population in the world, besieged and jailed, with nowhere to run, not even into the sea.... Hundreds of innocents were killed for no reason other than they were Gazans. The people of Gaza, many of them born to 1948’s refugees, who had already suffered one tragedy by Israel’s hand, now faced the next chapter in the tragic saga of their lives: an aimless, futile, criminal, superfluous offensive.”[\[35\]](#)

By any measure, Gaza’s civil society and infrastructure are now failing. Men are desperate to find work, women anxious to provide for their families, and children, recognizing the lack of basic security and stability at an early age, suffer psychological problems. Tragically, the most attractive option for many is to resort to terrorism. The Gaza Strip is now occupied by a people with no dignity and no hope. They are not even able to claim a national citizenship. (The passports issued by the Palestinian Authority are not always recognized internationally and are, in any event, subject to Israeli approval for any travel.) This is the bitter fruit of the “closed utopia” of Zionism.

## Conclusion

No look at Zionism would be complete without addressing the role of its Western sponsors. We have already noted that the state of Israel would almost certainly not exist had it not

been for the agency of England, the superpower of the late 19th century. British imperial muscle and a naive Anglican empathy for the Jews were the essential ingredients behind the Balfour Declaration (1917) and the establishment of the mandate for Palestine. Britain's linkage with the Zionists faded dramatically in the 1940s, to be replaced almost seamlessly by the United States in 1948. Indeed, President Truman gave diplomatic recognition to Israel the same day its independence was declared by David Ben-Gurion. Truman was no Zionist; in fact, his [personal diary](#) reflects what some would call an anti-Semitic strain. However, he clearly saw the benefit of Jewish support in the upcoming November 1948 elections, then just six months away. From the very day of its birth, Israel's relationship with the United States has been inseparable from domestic American politics.

Today it is American power — military, economic, diplomatic, and ideological — which protects and sustains Israel. Meanwhile, the very active and vocal pro-Zionist strain in American Christianity ensures that the full range of American support continues without question. Any challenge to the “special” relationship is usually deemed to be “anti-Semitic” and/or coming from the “lunatic fringe” (both far left and far right seem to be guilty). The same government officials and Christian leaders who roundly condemn (as they should) the persecution of Christians by Islamic regimes or organizations are notably silent when it comes to similar Israeli actions against Palestinians, including fellow Christians. As Fr. Michael Prior says in *Zionism and the State of Israel*, “the consistency with which the State of Israel is excused from having to conform to decent behavior is one of the great eccentricities of twentieth-century political ethics. Most alarmingly from a moral perspective, the injustice to the indigenous population is passed over in most Western discourse, including biblical and theological scholarship, and in some religious circles is even clothed in the garment of piety.”[\[36\]](#) Indeed, it has frequently been observed that a far more open debate about Israeli policies can be found in the Knesset than in the United States Congress.

At the same time, there is an encouraging number of patriotic Israeli Jews who recognize the hypocrisy of Zionism and its systemic violations of human rights, especially concerning the land. They include the various Israeli academics, journalists, and others cited here, as well as courageous Israeli humanitarian organizations such as B'Tselem, Gush Shalom, and the Israeli Committee Against Housing Demolitions, all of whom maintain English language websites. However, despite their valiant efforts, the occupation continues and Arabs' homes in the West Bank are demolished as often as weekly, while the Palestinians of Gaza remain in their outdoor prison of isolation and despair.

On March 3 [2015], Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [addressed the U.S. Congress](#) (his third such appearance) about the potential nuclear threat to Israel from Iran.



He took the occasion to quote from Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy as follows: “Be strong and resolute, neither fear nor dread them.” (Deut. 31:6).

He would have done better to have quoted Deuteronomy 10:18-19: “[The Lord your God]...loves the foreigners who live with our people, and gives them food and clothes. So then, show love for those foreigners, because you were once foreigners in Egypt.” As for Israel’s treatment of the land, Netanyahu might have noted Micah 2:1-3: “How terrible it will be for those who lie awake and plan evil! When morning comes, as soon as they have the chance, they do the evil they planned. When they want fields, they seize them; when they want houses, they take them. No man’s family or property is safe. And so the Lord says, ‘I am planning to bring disaster on you, and you will not be able to escape it. You are going to find yourselves in trouble, and then you will not walk so proudly anymore.’”

It seems not to have occurred to Netanyahu that Israel’s security — at both the natural and supernatural level — is best preserved, not by pressuring the United States or resorting to force, but by heeding the warnings of Moses and the prophets and treating the Palestinian people as brothers on the same land. From the Biblical perspective, both Old and New Covenant, one thing is certain: Netanyahu’s Israel, with its current ideology and policies, cannot endure. Who will be today’s Micah, or Ezekiel, or Elijah, or St. John the Baptist — or Ahad Ha’am — to warn the people of Israel before it is too late?

See [here](#) for Part I and [here](#) for Part II of this three-part series.

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