

ישראל

Israel

***Israel's purpose from its
beginning to the present***

A 2025 commentary

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Introduction

This booklet will show in brief form the essential details of God's plan and purpose in creating the nation of Israel, and sustaining it as a people for the subsequent 3,800 years until the present day.

The history of Israel and the Jewish people has been long with many savage and bitter times, but culminating in our time with the restoration of the nation Israel, home to a united gathering of Jewish (Hebrew) people from all over the world.

This has all been part of God's singular and determined plan to bless the whole world. The Messiah himself arose from among the Jewish people, and their continued presence is an assurance to us that we serve the God who will never betray His promises!

This is a testimony to the greatness of God and is clear from the vast number of prophecies in the Bible foretelling exactly this.

Throughout this booklet prophecies will be interpreted in a straightforward way following a plain reading of scriptures.

At the time of writing it is far from clear how the present time of warfare on many fronts concerning Israel will be resolved, but the Bible tells us plainly that we should know that times like these are coming, and they are signs of the "end of the age".

We therefore need to "lift our heads", looking for the return of the Messiah foretold in scripture, Jesus Christ, as the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, the Saviour of the World.

Israel – the beginning, God’s promises

The story of Israel begins with Abraham. God gave him a set of promises at the time he was in Haran, modern Urfa, in what is now southeastern Turkey, north of the river Euphrates:

¹ Now the LORD had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you.

² I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.

³ I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Genesis 12:1-3

The Land - Defined

The land God promised to Abraham is defined twice. The first time Abraham is at on high ground overlooking the Jordan Valley to the west of the Dead Sea, from where he can see far across the Jordan to the east.

¹⁴. And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: “Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are— northward, southward, eastward, and westward; ¹⁵. for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. ¹⁶. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, *then* your descendants also could be numbered. ¹⁷. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you.”

Genesis 13:14-17

The second definition is given to Abraham in a vision, where God defines the land in two ways, first by natural boundaries (the

river of Egypt to the Euphrates), then by the territories of ten nations.

¹⁸. On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: “To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates— ¹⁹. the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, ²⁰. the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, ²¹. the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”

Genesis 15:18-21

The “River of Egypt” could be an eastern branch of the Nile, or the Wadi el Arish, further along the coast to the east. Whichever is chosen, the land between the two points includes most of modern Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan with parts of Iraq and possibly Saudi Arabia. The territories of the ten tribes listed also covers much of that territory. Moses supplies the east-west boundary axis:

I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River *Euphrates*; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you. Exodus 23:31

In Ezekiel 47:13-21 another description is given, which supports those earlier large areas, but this follows the description of a new temple (Ezekiel 40-45) which has never yet been built. This in turn follows a major war involving many nations against Israel (Ezekiel 38-39) which also has not happened yet.

At its greatest extent, the territory of Israel either in ancient or modern times has only covered maybe two thirds of the area promised to Abraham(see map below) .



Fig. 1 The territory of Israel at the time of King Solomon
 (courtesy, knowingthebible.net/bible-maps)

Who inherited the promises to Abraham?

Abraham had eight sons in all, first Ishmael by Hagar the Egyptian servant girl, then Isaac by Sarah, and then six more by Keturah, the wife he married after Sarah died (Genesis 25:1-2). Only Isaac inherited the promise God made to Abraham, even though Ishmael was to become the father of many nations. The land promised to Abraham was confirmed to Isaac:

³Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. ⁴And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed;” Genesis 26:3-4

Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. Jacob was the one who became heir to God’s promises to Abraham. When Isaac sent him to his uncle Laban to find a wife, he blessed him with the blessing he himself had received:

³“May God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful and multiply you, That you may be an assembly of peoples; ⁴And give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham.” Genesis 28:3-4

As Jacob travelled to Laban’s home, he had a dream at Bethel in which God spoke to him, affirming this blessing, and promising the restoration to the land promised to Abraham:

¹³And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: “I *am* the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. ¹⁴Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be

blessed. ¹⁵ Behold, I *am* with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.” Genesis 28:13-15

On Jacob’s return to Canaan, he met and wrestled with a being he called God, and received the name Israel (Genesis 32:24-30). This was re-affirmed to him after the death of Rachel:

¹⁰ And God said to him, “Your name *is* Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name.” So He called his name Israel. ¹¹ Also God said to him: “I *am* God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. ¹² The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land.” Genesis 35:10-12

The three promises

Three specific promises were made to Abraham, and then affirmed to Isaac and Jacob:

1. **The land.** A specific territory is promised, greater than the territory of the original nation Israel in its days as a united kingdom under David and Solomon.
2. **A great nation.** For a brief period under Solomon, Israel was powerful enough to withstand the great empires to North and South, but for most of the time since then it has been at the mercy of more powerful empires. Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Greece and Rome, which led to the Byzantine Empire. They were followed by Saladin and the Islamic Empire, which became the Ottoman empire before the Ottomans were defeated by the British Empire in World War 1. Today, however, even though it has a small population compared to most of its neighbours, and one of the smallest land areas too, it has both military and economic power out of all proportion to its size.

3. Blessing and Cursing for friends and enemies. There is a long record to show that people and nations who bless the Jewish people and in the past century the nation of Israel all prosper. Conversely, those who harm the Jewish people and Israel all come to grief.

The nation of Israel currently occupies only a small area of the territory promised to Abraham and his heirs.

Paul teaches that Abraham “is the father of all who believe” (Romans 4:11-17), but that Israel remains a separate and distinct entity from the rest of the world, preserved by God despite their many failings through the centuries. Gentile believers must regard themselves as “grafted in” to the vine that is Israel, but understand that God’s promises made specifically to Israel will never fail:

²⁵ I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, ²⁶ and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written:

“The deliverer will come from Zion;
he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

²⁷ And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”

²⁸ As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, ²⁹ for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable. Romans 11:25-28

The whole world has been and is being blessed as a result of Abraham’s faith, but the nation Israel exists to show that God’s word is always sure and true.

The name Israel – *Yisrael* - ישראל

The Hebrew letters of *Yisrael* are *Yod + Sin + Resh + Aleph + Lamed*, meaning God will prevail. *Yisrael* first appears as the new name for Jacob (*Yacob*) in Genesis 32:28:

Then the man said, “Your name will no more be called Jacob, but Israel. For you have fought with God and with men, and have prevailed.”

The new name for Jacob has three parts. First, *Yod*, simply means “He”. The final part, *El (Aleph + Lamed)* means “God”. It’s the two letters in the middle, *Sin + Resh*, that are difficult. On one level, they can mean *Sar* = Prince, and this is because *Sar* can mean “turn” and *Resh* means Head, thus *Sar* = Prince, one who “Turns heads”, to direct people.

This extends into meaning Prevail. This is clear from the use in this verse of the verb *Sara* translated here as “you have fought” (or “struggled”, “wrestled”, “been strong”, “exerted”). “Have prevailed” at the end of the verse is from *Yacol*, normally meaning “been able”.

With the feminine suffix *Hei*, *Sar* becomes *Sarah*, Princess, and the name of Abraham’s wife. The full meaning given in the second part of the verse is that the new name Israel comes from him prevailing with God and men, so in any event it makes him a leader who will continue to prevail because of God’s help. Other meanings of the letters include:

Yod: the power of God sustaining the creation.

Sin/(Shin): symbolises the eternal flame as its shape resembles flames, symbolising Divine love. Alternatively, it can also stand for corruption and falsehood.

Resh: head; the choice between greatness and degradation.

Aleph: God in unity and mastery, or the Ox.

Lamed: teaching and purpose. Symbolises the King of Kings or, from its shape, an ox goad.

The word pivots on the central letter, *Resh*, giving the choice between greatness or degradation. If *Resh*, as head, points to God being the head of the nation, then *Sin* reveals the flames of his love, and the yod the mighty hand of his power.

If the choice is wickedness, however, then *Sin* represents teeth and lies, and yod the power of a man's hand. The *Aleph* and *Lamed* together make *El*, one name of God. They either reveal the unity (*Aleph*) of God and (*Lamed*) his majesty as king of kings, or *Aleph* points to the ox and *Lamed* the ox-goad. The power of the flesh (Ox) being cruelly coerced against its will.

The nation of Israel is destined for the love, power, and glory of God if it chooses him above all else, or destruction if it chooses the things of the flesh. This becomes clear from the scriptures, especially in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, where it is plain the role of Israel is to act as a witness to all the nations:.

⁹“The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. ¹⁰Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you. Deuteronomy 28:9-10

The Leviticus text shows that the road to destruction is made of five stages, and at any point the nation can turn back to gain the blessings of God.

Leviticus 26: Blessing or Punishment

Leviticus 26 begins by instructing the Israelites to obey the laws of God. It promises many practical blessings if the nation was faithful and obedient. They are given a list of 17 blessings to enjoy:

Blessings for obedience

‘If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then

1. **I will give you rain in its season,**
2. **The land shall yield its produce,** and
3. **The trees of the field shall yield their fruit.**
4. **Your threshing shall last till the time of vintage,** and
5. **The vintage shall last till the time of sowing;**
6. **You shall eat your bread to the full,** and
7. **Dwell in your land safely.**
8. **I will give peace in the land,** and you shall lie down, and
9. **None will make you afraid;**
10. **I will rid the land of evil beasts,** and
11. **The sword will not go through your land.**
12. **You will chase your enemies,** and
13. **They shall fall** by the sword before you.
14. **Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight;**
15. **Your enemies shall fall by the sword before you.** For I will look on you favourably and
16. **Make you fruitful, multiply you** and confirm My covenant with you.
17. **You shall eat the old harvest,** and clear out the old because of the new. (Leviticus 26:3-10)

Penalties for disobedience

If, on the other hand, Israel disobeys God, the nation is warned that there will be an increasingly severe set of judgments. These

fall into five cycles, but at beginning of the list of punishments the opportunity is given for Israel to repent and turn back to God, in which case they return to the promises above, and “reset” the cycles of discipline back to the start point (vv: .40-42).

Five cycles of “discipline” with typical punishments

Each cycle begins with the same warning “if you do not obey me (vv. 14, 18) or “if you walk contrary to me” (vv. 21, 23) or both together (v. 27). Things rapidly get worse if they do not repent. A sevenfold chastisement is mentioned for cycles 2-5 (vv. 18, 21, 24, 28).

Judgment Level 1 – Fear, disease, defeat by enemies

¹⁶. I also will do this to you: I will even appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. ¹⁷. I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when no one pursues you.

Judgment level 2 – Drought and famine

¹⁹. I will break the pride of your power; I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. ²⁰. And your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit.

Judgment level 3 – Wild beasts roam the land

²². I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, destroy your livestock, and make you few in number; and your highways shall be desolate.

Judgment level 4 – Plague in the cities, food shortages

²⁵. ... when you are gathered together within your cities I will send pestilence among you; and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy. ²⁶. When I have cut off your supply of bread, ten

women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall bring back your bread by weight, and you shall eat and not be satisfied.

Judgment level 5 – Cannibalism destruction and scattering

²⁹. You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters (see note below). ³⁰. I will destroy your high places, cut down your incense altars, and cast your carcasses on the lifeless forms of your idols; and My soul shall abhor you. ³¹. I will lay your cities waste and bring your sanctuaries to desolation, and I will not smell the fragrance of your sweet aromas. ³². I will bring the land to desolation, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it. ³³. I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste.

Note: Cannibalism is recorded in the Bible on two occasions: 2 Kings 6:24-30 (Siege of Samaria ca. 900BC); Lamentations 2:20, 4:10 (Siege of Jerusalem 586BC). Josephus records that it also happened during the siege of Jerusalem in 70AD.

Aftermath – Scattered, fearful, for many centuries

Leviticus 26:34-35 makes it clear that time out of “the land” will relate to the sabbaths that were not “kept”, while Leviticus 26:36-39 describes the condition of fearfulness and persecution while they are scattered among the lands of their enemies.

The Promise that Israel will never be completely abandoned by God

The chapter concludes with a statement that God will ultimately “remember his covenant”, meaning all the promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob:

⁴⁰. *‘But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, and that they also have walked contrary to Me, ...*

⁴⁵. But for their sake I will remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I *am* the LORD.’ ”
Leviticus 26:40, 45

This message is reaffirmed much later in time:

if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. 2 Chronicles 7:14

The Importance of the Sabbath Laws:

- Leviticus 25 says that every seventh year the land is not to be worked, this is a sabbath year. Every 50th year (jubilee) the same applies, but also the land is to be restored to its rightful owners and bond servants are to be released.
- Jeremiah 25 says that the exile to Babylon will last 70 years because of the disobedience of the people of Judah. This corresponds to 70 sabbath years not being kept, a period of 490 years.

The history of Israel and Judah recorded in the books of Judges, Kings and Chronicles reveals the process of the five cycles unfolding again and again, continuing through ancient and modern history up until 1948 when the nation was finally restored. The condition given by God of repentance and turning back does not require the whole nation to once more be “righteous” any more than would have applied in the past, but we can expect this to happen in the future.

In the meantime, the 17 blessings we considered earlier can perhaps be seen as an indicator of progress being made by the nation. Blessings 7-10 do not seem to apply at the present time (especially if by “wild animals” you can include terrorist gunmen and bombers).

The final regathering of Israel

There are dozens of prophecies, including by Moses, King David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah and Zechariah, foretelling the regathering of the Jews. It is one of the most extensive themes in the Bible, and is also referred to in the New Testament including the Gospels, Romans and Revelation. Many say specifically there will be a time, after the Jewish people have been scattered over all the earth, and the land and cities of Israel have been desolated, that they will be restored to their land and the united nation Israel will be revived. This theme is developed first in Deuteronomy before the children of Israel have entered the land for a first time:

He will bring you back to the land that belonged to your fathers, and you will take possession of it.

Deuteronomy 30:5

900 years after Moses Jeremiah says:

“In those days, at that time,” declares the LORD, “the people of Israel and the people of Judah together will go in tears to seek the LORD their God. They will ask the way to Zion and turn their faces towards it.” Jeremiah 50:4-5

It will be a united group of people, no longer the divided Hebrew nations. There have been three main exiles of the Hebrew nations: from Israel in 721 BC, from Judah in 586 BC and 70 AD. The only significant return before the 20th century was a small group of exiles of Judah, after 538 BC (as reported in Ezra and Nehemiah), and they rebuilt the temple and repaired Jerusalem. This is a long way short of what is described in several places:

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. They will say, “This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of

Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited.” Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the LORD have spoken and will do it. Ezekiel 36:33-36

I will strengthen the house of Judah and save the house of Joseph. I will restore them because I have compassion on them. They will be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the LORD their God and I will answer them. ... Though I scatter them among the peoples, yet in distant time they will remember me: They and their children will survive, and they will return. I will bring them back from Egypt and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon, and there will not be room enough for them. Zechariah 10:6,9,10

The Zechariah passage refers to the first and third exiles (Assyria 721 BC, Egypt 70 AD), from which there was no return (unlike the exile to Babylon). It also says there will not be enough space for all of them, which speaks of the current situation in Israel should all known Jewish people decide or be compelled to return.

Modern Restoration Timeline

1897 the first Zionist congress, declared a hope for Jewish people to be able to migrate to their ancient territory of Israel, then within the Ottoman Empire, whose rulers were hostile to Jewish migration.

1917 the Balfour declaration, in which the British government declared its intention to permit Jewish migration to the Holy Land after the conclusion of WW1 in which the Ottomans had already been defeated. At that time most senior people in the British government imagined it would only lead to a small migration. God had a different agenda!

1921 The League of Nations mandate declares that the British, in control of the whole of the territory now named Palestine, were to permit Jewish migration and settlement in the land between

the Mediterranean Sea and the river Jordan, but not east of the Jordan. (Mandate territories of Transjordan and Iraq).

1947 The United Nations declared that Israel should be recognised as a new nation, on part of the British mandate territory of Palestine between the Mediterranean and the Jordan.

1948 (14th May) Israel is declared, at midnight Tel Aviv time. In the past nations were normally established over long periods of time, but Isaiah says:

Who has ever heard of such a thing? Who has ever seen such things? Can a country be born in a day or a nation brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in labour than she gives birth to her children. Isaiah 66:7-8

1948 On 15 May, the combined armies of Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq launched an invasion across all the land frontiers of the new nation. Heavily outnumbered, Israel survived the first of many attacks aimed at her total destruction. But many prophecies emphasised that the Jews would migrate from all over the earth, which had not happened before 1948:

In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea. He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth. Isaiah 11:11-12

I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth. Isaiah 43:5-6

This appears to refer to the behaviour of the Soviet and Russian government in 'holding back' Jews, and 'give them up' to the

negotiations for release of Jews from Ethiopia and some of the Arab countries.

1967 5-11th June, the six-day war, where Israel defeats the armies of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, capturing the territory known as the “West Bank” from Jordan, with east Jerusalem, the original area of the city, the Gaza strip and Sinai from Egypt, and the Golan Heights from Syria (formerly French mandate territory) .

1973 The Yom Kippur War, where Syria and Egypt launch a surprise attack into Sinai and the Golan. They are defeated and driven back.

1979 Peace agreement with Egypt, where the Sinai is returned to Egypt.

Fishers and Hunters

While this was happening, a man named Gustav Scheller living in England believed God was telling him to help in the work of bringing the Jewish people home to Israel. He founded the Ebenezer Emergency Fund, and they started mercy flights and then (because passengers could carry very little luggage with them on these flights) a series of sailings from Odessa in the Black Sea to Haifa. By the end of 2006, the Ebenezer Fund had helped around 120,000 Jewish people from the lands of the former Soviet Union to resettle in Israel. Following the break-up of the Soviet Union, around 700,000 emigrated in total.

People linked to the Ebenezer Fund have travelled the length and breadth of countries such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Moldova, Belarus, Armenia, Ukraine, Georgia, Atchara and Russian territories such as Siberia as far as Kamchatka searching for Jewish communities. God said he would send out fishers and hunters to find them and bring them home, particularly from the “land of the north”:

but, ‘The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the **land of the north** and from all the lands where He had driven them.’ For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to

their fathers. “Behold, I will send for many **fishermen**,” says the LORD, “and they shall fish them; and afterward I will send for many **hunters**, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks.

Jeremiah 16:15-16

Often, they found them where people said there were no Jews, and the work of helping them emigrate has involved dealing with every kind of bureaucratic obstruction and corruption imaginable (“Do not hold back!”).

Who are the migrants?

Until the 20th century, there had been no major combined return of Jewish people, although Jewish communities had survived in the Holy Land throughout the time from the Roman Empire onwards.

While the great majority of Jews migrating to Israel during the 20th and 21st centuries have been descendants of the Judean people (essentially, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin) it has been accepted that three groups of migrants are from tribes of the northern kingdom (Israel). These are the Beta Israel (House of Israel), originally known as the Falashas, from Ethiopia; the Bnei Menashe (Sons of Manasseh) from the region of eastern India, Bangladesh, and Burma; and the Bukharan Jews from Central Asia.

The Beta Israel have a tradition that they are from the tribe of Dan. The Bukharan Jews believe that they are descendants of the tribes of Issachar and Naphtali. Some Ethiopian groups are believed to be descended from Jewish people who migrated to southern Egypt and Ethiopia at the time of Jeremiah (ca. 590 BC) or even earlier.

During the past fifty years, Jewish people have migrated from China, the far east of Siberia, Argentina and just about every land in between. For the first time in history it can truly be said that

Jewish people have returned to Israel from the most distant lands of the earth.

The 'Operation Exodus' project of the Ebenezer Fund was only one of many such projects during the 20th century aimed at bringing Jewish people to Israel. In 1900 the Jewish population of "The Holy Land" was 50,000. By 1948, with the massive migration following the end of World War 2, involving mainly Holocaust survivors, it reached 650,000. By 1991, at the time of the First Gulf War, it had risen to 4 million. In 2024, the total population of Israel is 9.3 million, of whom 7.2 million are Jewish. There are estimated to be 15.7 million Jewish people worldwide today.

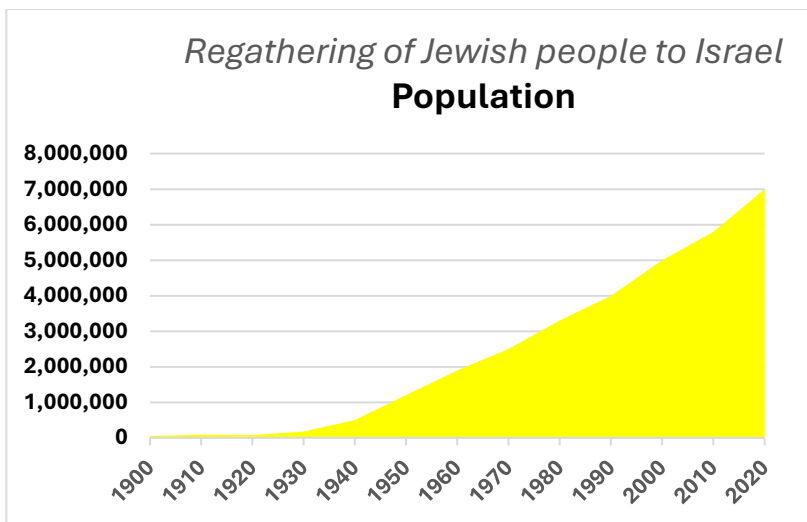


Fig. 2 The Jewish population of Israel 1900-2020

There is now one undivided Hebrew nation, named Israel, all descendants of Jacob.

How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him. The LORD builds up Jerusalem, he gathers the exiles of Israel. Psalm 147:1-2

There are still more Jewish people living outside Israel than are in Israel at present. The prophecies indicate that many more will yet go to Israel, possibly most of the Jewish people on earth. The return of the Jewish people in the past century is powerful fulfilment of many ancient prophecies. Now there are there, they will stay.

“I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them” Says the LORD your God.
Amos 9:15

Palestine?

It is currently normal to speak about “Palestine” as if it should be a state within this territory, even though its leading advocates all plan the destruction of Israel. The biblical record suggests that this position is unstable, and these things will not happen.



Fig. 3 The Levant in 1900

(showing Ottoman district boundaries - Wikimedia commons)

The map at Fig. 3 shows the situation in 1900, when the area now covered by Israel fell into three different districts of the Ottoman Empire, none of which was named “Palestine”.

The Ottoman Empire fell at the end of World War 1, and its territories in the Levant were divided between the British and French Empires, as shown in Fig. 4.



Fig. 4 British Mandate Territories 1920-1948

(Jewish Wikipedia)

The territory now known as Israel had generally been described in western literature as “The Holy Land”, for many centuries. The British Government, possibly because they saw themselves as

imperial heirs to the Romans, chose to use the name “Palestine”, the name first assigned to that land in 136 AD by the Roman Emperor Hadrian. Hadrian intended this as a deliberate insult to the Judean people, as it meant “Philistine”, their ancient enemies. Hadrian had attempted to destroy all Jewish people, and issued coins showing the ploughing of the city, the complete destruction of Jerusalem, which he ordered to be renamed Aelia Capitolina in 135 AD. Even this event had been specifically prophesied nearly 800 years earlier by Micah!

⁹ Now hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity,

¹⁰ Who build up Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with iniquity:

¹¹ Her heads judge for a bribe, her priests teach for pay, and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD, and say, “Is not the LORD among us? No harm can come upon us.”

¹² Therefore because of you Zion shall be ploughed *like* a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the temple like the bare hills of the forest.

Micah 3: 9-12.

Hadrian, who had caused the only fulfilment of this prophecy, died soon afterwards in 138 AD.

In June 1967 Israel fought Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, capturing the Sinai and Gaza strip from Egypt, the area now known as the West Bank from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria (see Fig. 5). Prior to this war the residents of Gaza were Egyptian nationals and the residents of the West Bank were Jordanian nationals. It is only since this time that they have adopted the description “Palestinians”. In any event, only the Gaza strip lies within ancient Philistia, and the people living there now are not known to have any connection with the Philistines of old.

All Jews, on the other hand, are indeed descendants of the ancient Israelites.

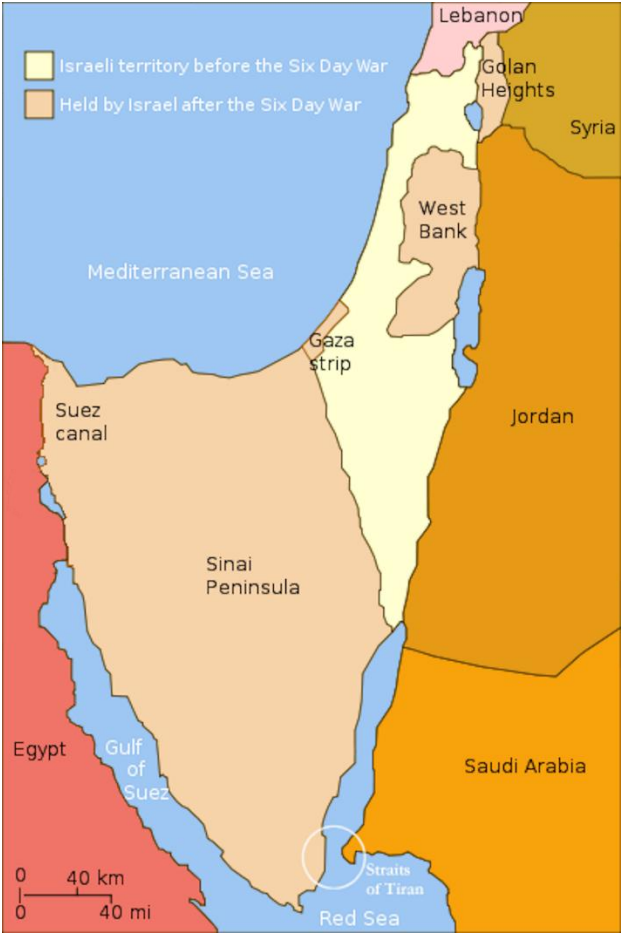


Fig. 5 Map showing Israel with territory captured in 1967
(Wikimedia commons)

The End Times have begun

The regathering of Israel is a definitive sign that we are now in “the latter days”, or the end times before the return of Jesus:

For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or *sacred* pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness **in the latter days**. Hosea 3:4-5

This regathering is a staged process, first coming back into the land, then “cleansing” them, then giving them a soft heart, then giving them the Holy Spirit, finally confirming them in their original role, as the true prototype people of God.

²⁴. For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. ²⁵. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*. ²⁸. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. Ezekiel 36:24-28

Jesus, speaking in 30 AD prophesies the fall of Jerusalem (70 AD) and the dispersion of the Jewish people until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled!

²⁰. “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. ²¹. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. ²². For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. ²³. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. ²⁴. And they

will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles **until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled**. Luke 21:20-24

The early Christians in Jerusalem trusted this prophecy and left Jerusalem after the Roman army came and built siege works against the city, in 66 AD. The Romans went away for three years, but returned and destroyed Jerusalem in 70AD. Jerusalem has been under Jewish control since 1967, and in 2017 was declared the capital of Israel by the USA (the most powerful nation on earth). The “times of the Gentiles” are certainly over in Jerusalem now. Then Jesus says what will happen next:

²⁵. “And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; ²⁶. men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.”

Luke 21:25-28

Operation “Peace for Galilee” June 1982

To illustrate where we are on the timeline of the end of the age, we can study an event from 1982 which tells us that the “clock is ticking”. This was called “Operation Peace for Galilee”, against the PLO, and was in fact a Philistine war, just like the ones fought by King David.

Who were the PLO?

A large number of residents of the former British mandate territory of “Palestine” left their homes in 1948 when the state of Israel was formed. These were added to after the 6-day war of 1967 at which time they first became known as “Palestinians”. Many of them moved to Jordan, and the Palestine Liberation

Organisation (PLO) formed in 1964 became active there. In 1970 the PLO attempted to overthrow King Hussein of Jordan, and battles were fought in and around Amman. The activist groups were thrown out of Jordan, and made their bases in Lebanon.

By the summer of 1982, the PLO was the the largest and most aggressive group in Lebanon. The PLO had mounted several terrorist attacks against Jewish people around the world, including on 3rd June 1982 an attempt to assassinate the Israeli Ambassador in London. Many attacks were launched against northern Israel from Lebanon by PLO groups, who had become very well equipped. They had around 20,000 troops, with tanks and artillery, which was used for shelling Israeli towns and villages in northern Israel. There were around 300,000 Palestinians living in Lebanon at that time.

What happened in the 1982 war?

On 6th June 1982, the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) launched a full-scale invasion of Southern Lebanon. Despite being met with a strong opposition by both the Palestinian militia and the Syrian armed forces, the IDF swept through to Beirut, capturing the cities of Tyre and Sidon on their way.

They took captive 14,000 PLO fighters. In December 1982 Israel agreed to trade these 14,000 for the return of 12 captured Israeli soldiers. Many ended up being transferred later to Yemen. These events were prophesied by Joel:

1. "In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, ²⁻ I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land. ³⁻ They cast lots for my people and traded boys for prostitutes; they sold girls for wine that they might drink.
- ⁴⁻ Now what have you against me, O Tyre and Sidon and all you

regions of Philistia? Are you repaying me for something I have done? If you are paying me back, I will swiftly and speedily return on your heads what you have done. ⁵ For you took my silver and my gold and carried off my finest treasures to your temples. ⁶ You sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, that you might send them far from their homeland.”
Joel 3:1-6

When was Joel written?

The traditional date of the book of Joel is before 800 BC. Liberal scholarship tries to place it as much as 400 years later, but without much evidential support.

When were these prophecies fulfilled?

The first fulfilment was of verses 3-6 which describe events that only took place following the sack of Judea and Jerusalem by the army of Titus in 70AD. This was when so many Jewish people were captured and taken into slavery that the price of slaves fell practically to nothing. Josephus reports as historical fact what is prophesied in Joel, and the main bulk of slaves were shipped to Alexandria, a Greek city, by the Romans (who were classed as “Greeks” in those days).

Verse 4 accuses Tyre and Sidon and the people of Philistia of their collaboration. There are no historical records available at present to show this, but the probability is that they would at least have been involved in supplying shipping from the coast of “Palestine” to Alexandria, and it was also the Roman army’s normal practice to raise local “levies” to augment their troops when necessary. Most troops in the armies of Rome were natives of the various countries where the Imperial armies were based.

Background fulfilment – begins in 20th Century

Verse 1 says that the Jewish people will be brought back, but because of verses 3-6 this must follow the restoration of the

Jewish people after the events of 70 AD to the land, which did not happen until the 20th Century.

Historical Reality

- The overall prophecy specifically concerns Judah and Jerusalem (not Israel or Samaria). The people being restored are universally known as Jews, which mean people of Judah.
- Verses 3-6 describe events around the fall of Jerusalem to the army of Titus in 70 AD, including the collapse of the market for slaves following the capture and enslavement of vast numbers of Jews.
- Time gap from date of writing to first fulfilment is over 800 years.

Tyre and Sidon have been cities for over 3,000 years and kept their original names throughout. The first time an Israeli army ever conquered them was in 1982. And that was in the context of a war against the Palestinians – Philistines, to use the original form of the word. The area known today as the “Gaza Strip” is part of ancient Philistia from 3,000 years ago.

Joel 3: 7-8

⁷ See, I am going to raise them out of the places to which you sold them, and I will return on your heads what you have done.

Fulfilment: Regathering of Jews from 1900 onwards, accelerating since 1948

⁸ I will sell your sons and your daughters to the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, a nation far away.” The Lord has spoken.

Fulfilment: 1912 years after 70AD:

1. Disposal of captives: 14,000 PLO insurgents exchanged for 12 Israeli soldiers “a derisory price” as indicated in verse 3.
2. PLO military command moved from Tunis to Yemen 1986, where many of the PLO insurgents ended up, in the ancient kingdom of Sheba, or Saba (the “Sabeans”).

The timeline is over 800 years from the writing of the prophecy to the event that God promises to address (the sack of Jerusalem in 70 AD), and then a further 1,912 years to the precise fulfilment in 1982 making over 2,700 years overall.

Trouble to follow?

I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land.” Joel 3:2

The part of this prophecy that could now be beginning is the judgement of the nations in verse 2. In 1982 the Israeli Defence Forces found deep underground tunnels and cellars, containing vast quantities of up-to-date Russian (Soviet Union) weaponry. This amounted to sufficient ammunition, armoured vehicles, small arms, artillery, communications and special forces equipment to equip some 50-80,000 soldiers. This equipment was far superior to that used by the PLO, and was apparently pre-positioned for a full-scale invasion of Israel and neighbouring countries by the Russians. The most startling aspect of these discoveries was that the tunnels had been dug and the weapons brought in with such complete secrecy that the Israeli intelligence agencies had no idea it had been done.

The specific and detailed prophecies, which foretell an invasion of Israel by a great army led by Russia, are in Ezekiel 38 and 39, while in Joel 2 what looks like the same event describes a great northern army. The IDF discoveries in Lebanon indicate that the time where these prophecies will be fulfilled could be soon.

What followed 1982?

Iraqi attack January-February 1991

During the course of the 1991 Gulf War, in which Israel took no part, Saddam Hussein nevertheless ordered Scud missile attacks

on Israel, and some 42 were fired, aimed mainly at Tel Aviv and Haifa. There was damage (to 4,100 buildings, 28 destroyed) but minimal casualties (2 direct, up to 74 from associated causes). These attacks were intended to provoke a response by Israel and thus disrupt the coalition formed against Iraq. After this, the Israeli government re-energised efforts to build a lasting peace.

Oslo Peace Accords 1993-95

Oslo I Accord 1993: This agreement was signed in Washington, D.C., and marked the start of the Oslo process. Key outcomes of the Oslo I Accord included:

1. The PLO recognized Israel, and Israel recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people.
2. The creation of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), responsible for limited self-governance in parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
3. Bilateral negotiations began on issues like Israeli settlements, Jerusalem's status, security control, and the Palestinian right of return.

Oslo II Accord 1995: This agreement was signed in Taba, Egypt. It furthered the Oslo process and addressed issues related to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Oslo II Accord outlined:

1. It divided the West Bank into Areas A, B, and C, with varying levels of Palestinian control.
2. Israel maintained security control in Area C.
3. Both sides agreed on economic cooperation, civil affairs, and other matters.

The Oslo II Accord aimed to pave the way for permanent-status negotiations. In summary, the Oslo Accords established a framework for dialogue and cooperation between Israel and the PLO, but they did not define an independent Palestinian state.

The Second Intifada

The term "First Intifada" was used to describe a time of unrest including protests and violence in Gaza with occasional terrorist

acts following 1987. The Second Intifada, a major uprising by the Palestinian population against Israel, started concurrently with the breakdown of July 2000 Camp David talks between Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Yasser Arafat died in November 2004 and Israel withdrew from the Gaza strip in 2005

Violence reduced to relatively low levels during 2005. The death toll, including both military personnel and civilians, of the entire conflict in 2000–2004 is estimated to be 3,223 Palestinians and 950 Israelis. Members of the PLO claimed responsibility for a number of attacks against Israelis during the Second Intifada. Israel forced all 9,000 Jewish residents of the Gaza Strip to leave, and removed all Israeli government and military installations, in order to demonstrate good faith and a desire for peace.

2006 - The rise of Hamas

In 2006, Hamas won the Palestinian legislative elections and assumed administrative control of Gaza Strip and West Bank. In 2007, Hamas fought a civil war against Fatah, which they won. Hamas then began brutally exterminating Fatah leaders and activists. Hamas gained control of Gaza, with Fatah remaining in partial control of the West Bank.

Following Hamas attacks on Israel, major hostilities took place between between Israel and Hamas in 2008–2009, 2012, 2014, and 2021. Hamas' tactics included tunnel warfare and firing rockets into Israeli territory. Israel generally responded by conducting airstrikes in Gaza. Since 2004, tens of thousands of rockets and mortar bombs were launched into Israel from Gaza. These weapons were initially crude and short-range, mainly affecting communities bordering the Gaza Strip. In 2006, more sophisticated rockets began reaching the larger coastal city of Ashkelon, and by early 2009 major cities Ashdod and Beersheba. In 2012, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv were targeted with locally made

and Iranian rockets, and in July 2014, the northern city of Haifa was targeted for the first time.

2006 Lebanon War – Hezbollah

2006 marked the active intervention by Iran in the war against Israel, with its proxy group Hezbollah. They, like Hamas, were backed by Iran, and began taking control of Lebanon from 2006 onwards. Iran also established Sunni militia groups in Syria and Iraq.

On 12 July 2006, Hezbollah fighters fired rockets at Israeli border towns and then ambushed a patrol on the Israeli side of the border fence, killing three Israeli soldiers and capturing two others. Five more were killed in Lebanon, in a failed rescue attempt. Hezbollah demanded the release of Lebanese prisoners held by Israel in exchange for the release of the abducted soldiers. Israel refused and responded with airstrikes and artillery fire on targets in Lebanon. Israel attacked and invaded Southern Lebanon. Up to 1,300 people in Lebanon and 165 Israelis died.

October 7th, 2023

On 7th October 2023 a Hamas-led raid into Israel from the Gaza strip killed over 1,200 people and another 253 were taken hostage. This began a new phase in the war against Israel, with attacks on seven fronts (from Gaza, Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, Syria, the “West Bank”, and Iran) all supported and equipped by Iran.

Israel responded first by attacking Hamas in Gaza, resulting in massive damage to Hamas militias, destroying their weapons, bases, and command and control. This also caused extensive damage to civilian infrastructure because Hamas had hidden their defences and weapons using schools, hospitals, and civilian homes. After 12 months, 60% of buildings in the Gaza strip were destroyed or damaged by both sides (Many Hamas rockets failed or fell short in their own territory). Tens of thousands were dead.

Hezbollah had only launched occasional attacks into Israel since 2006. They began a sporadic rocket bombardment of Israel on 8th October 2023, which escalated in April 2024, after which they launched hundreds of rockets into northern Israel.

In September 2024 the IDF launched a new series of attacks on Hezbollah in Lebanon, leading to a ground assault in October 2024. This was aimed firstly at destroying the command and control of the organisation, and then its fighting capabilities on the ground. The attack on Hezbollah senior staff and commanders by using exploding pagers on 17th September 2024 killed or incapacitated hundreds of key people, and is one of the most remarkable events in the history of warfare.

The full extent of damage and casualties in this phase of the war remain unknown, but in the first 400 days of conflict following 8th October 2023 only some 400 Israeli combat troops lost their lives, which is another astonishing detail given the the fact that fighting took place in hundreds of miles of Hamas and Hezbollah tunnels.

Houthi attacks on Israel from Yemen 2023-2024

The Houthi group who control most of Yemen (again Iranian-backed) began attacking Israel on 19th October 2023 with ballistic missiles and drones. This campaign was widened to include shipping in the Red Sea, and the USA, UK and other nations have been involved in defending shipping in that region. On 9th November 2023 this included what is considered to be the first combat in space, when the Israeli air defences intercepted a ballistic missile fired from Yemen before re-entry.

Iranian attacks on Israel 2024

On 13th April 2024 Iran launched a massive air attack on Israel, involving about 170 drones, 30 cruise missiles and 120 ballistic missiles. It was reported that more than 100 additional ballistic missiles failed to launch or crashed, making more than 400 attempted launches of weapons in all. This was clearly intended

to overwhelm the air defences. Israel was assisted in its air defence that night by Jordan, France, UK and USA.

On 1st October 2024, by which time Israel had been at war continuously for 12 months, a further attack was launched by Iran, of some 200 ballistic missiles. These missile attacks have generated a lot of video showing rockets streaking through the night skies over Israel – possible “signs in the heavens” in their own right?

These two attacks by Iran are the first occasions when such a large simultaneous barrage of ballistic missiles have been fired in warfare, and these numbers would overwhelm most nations’ air defence systems. The failure of these massive attacks to cause significant damage or casualties is widely regarded as miraculous.

Joel 3: 9-13

⁹ Proclaim this among the nations: “Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, Let all the men of war draw near, Let them come up. ¹⁰ Beat your ploughshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; Let the weak say, ‘I am strong.’” ¹¹ Assemble and come, all you nations, and gather together all around. Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O LORD. ¹² “Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; For there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. ¹³ Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow— For their wickedness *is* great.”

Verse 9 describes the continued failures to make peace and continuing warfare ever since 1982 in the region around Israel. We must note also that attacks on Israel have come all the way from Yemen and Iran, as well as from the neighbouring territories.

Verse 10 describes everyday tools being turned into weapons. Hamas has made tens of thousands of rockets out of steel water pipes, and on October 7th 2023 used civilian hang gliders as

invasion weapons. They also declared they would destroy the whole of Israel. “The weak” saying they were “strong”?

This passage indicates that things will only get worse. The number of nations involved in the conflict is already considerable, and points again towards the events of Ezekiel 38 and 39, in which Iran is an ally of Russia. Even though peace may come at the end of the present conflict, this will not last.

Two other prophecies may be relevant in the present time, first Zephaniah 2:3-7 which describes the destruction of Gaza and Philistia, and secondly Isaiah 17:1-3 describing the destruction of Damascus (another rare city which has stood continuously for about 4,000 years) and Syria.

While some may say that wars have always been happening in the Middle East, what is unique in the present day is that Israel is a nation, Tyre and Sidon were taken in 1982, and the nations of the Ezekiel war are aligning with each other.

World sentiment is turning against Israel (as evident from the many UN resolutions singling out Israel for condemnation over the years) so the Messiah is going to need to fight for Israel. This points us to Zechariah 14, when Jesus returns as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, finally bringing peace to the Earth.

Jesus told us to watch and pray, because these events will be a difficult time for all mankind. They will take us by surprise, and we will not be able to predict when they will happen:

³² “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. Mark 13:32-33

Conclusions

We have seen that the desire to destroy Israel and the Jewish people is not a new thing in history, and Hadrian came closer to achieving it than anyone. But it is beyond dispute that Israel has been rebuilt as a nation in the 20th century, as a home for Jewish people.

Just as Micah's prophecy about the ploughing of Jerusalem was fulfilled only once in 135 AD, we have also seen that Joel's prophecy about an Israeli army capturing Tyre and Sidon in the context of a "Philistine" war has happened only once in 1982.

While some ancient prophecies may allow for multiple fulfilments, we are only considering prophecies that have a single fulfilment.

At the time of Jesus, Jerusalem was under the control of foreigners (the expression "tread on" or "walk about on" signified ownership of land, e.g. Job 1:7), and remained so until the Jordanians were driven out in 1967.

Jesus said that the end times would begin after Jerusalem stopped being "trodden down" by the Gentile nations (Luke 21:24), but he told us we should not be afraid of the things we can now see happening in the world:

And Jesus, answering them, began to say: "Take heed that no one deceives you. ⁶For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am *He*,' and will deceive many. ⁷But when you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be troubled; for *such things* must happen, but the end is not yet. ⁸For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These *are* the beginnings of sorrows.. Mark 13:5-8

In our day we are clearly seeing the reversal of the curses in Leviticus 26, as happened in 1948, 1967, and 1973. God's promise to fight for Israel is being delivered:

“When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots *and* people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God *is* with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. ² So it shall be, when you are on the verge of battle, that the priest shall approach and speak to the people. ³ And he shall say to them, ‘Hear, O Israel: Today you are on the verge of battle with your enemies. Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be terrified because of them; ⁴ for the LORD your God *is* He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.’

Deuteronomy 20:1-4

We are undoubtedly witnessing the “End of the Age”. According to the prophecies we have seen, plans against Israel will fail. We cannot predict when major prophecies will be fulfilled. But since they have significant global consequences and prerequisites for these important prophecies are being fulfilled, it is time to be ready!

Christians should recognise the times, watch and pray.

“... Because your redemption draws near!”

Luke 21:28

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