

GOD AND ISRAEL

**THE CHOSEN PEOPLE, THE HOLY NATION,
AND THE PROMISED LAND**

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PROLOGUE

Viewpoints on the people, the nation, and the land of Israel have long been diverse and, in many cases, bitterly contested. On the one hand, outright revulsion, loathing, contempt, and antipathy for Israel have characterized virtually all the antisemites of history, who have considered the people of Israel to be essentially a subhuman species, the nation of Israel to be a complete illegitimacy, and the land of Israel to be an utterly inconsequential piece of worthless real estate. Then, on the other hand, admiration, esteem, adoration, and even veneration for Israel have been representative of many who have championed the promises of Holy Scripture regarding the Jews, their nation, and their land, despite the fact that many romanticized views about Israel, particularly about the nation and the land,¹ have been based on constantly shifting eschatological scenarios.² In the middle ground between the extremes, those who have not known what to think about the Chosen People, their nation, and their land, or simply have not cared about either, have best been distinguished by bewilderment, confusion, and ambivalence.

Why does such tension and disputation about the people, the nation, and the land of Israel exist? Why does such vitriol exist on the one hand and such veneration on the other? Why has a tiny sliver of the world population—18

¹ H. G. Kippenberg, "Reading Religious Violence in Terms of Theories of Social Action," in *Control of Violence: Historical and International Perspectives on Violence in Modern Societies*, Wilhelm Heitmeyer, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, and Stefan Malthaner, eds. (New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 2011), p. 155.

² Thomas S. Kidd, *American Christians and Islam: Evangelical Culture and Muslims from the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 93. Kidd says that non-dispensationalist theologians have lamented the fact that many eschatological views relate the "anti-Christ . . . to the political powers of the day." Kidd's observation that "as the news changed, so did the eschatological scenarios" has been all too true, as endless successions of world leaders have been assigned to specific roles in such scenarios, making some of them seem like true phantasmagorias. Sadly, when the dramas that such speculators have predicted have not come to pass, their creators have merely moved on to find another cast of characters to serve in their interests.

million today³—been so controversial for so long? Why does such a small nation of only 7.125 million people continue to be such a cause célèbre—for some a pariah, for others a luminary?⁴ Why has such a minuscule land mass of less than 11,000 square miles—a mere scintilla of the surface of Planet Earth⁵—continued to be a focal point of world controversy, century after century, decade after decade, year after year, day after day? Why, indeed, do the most ancient of historical observations about the people, the nation, and the land of Israel still echo in the unending news and commentary reported by today’s print and electronic media? Amazingly, the same things that were spoken and written about Israel centuries ago will doubtlessly reverberate in tomorrow’s headlines, breaking news bulletins and editorials!

The Delegitimization of Israel

For millennia, concerted efforts have been made to marginalize the Jews and to delegitimize their right to exist as a people or a nation—and in their own land. The very first record of an orchestrated attempt at the genocide of the Jewish people⁶ focused on just such delegitimization: “There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the king’s laws; and it is not in Your Majesty’s interest to tolerate them.”⁷ This was the advice of Haman, the prime minister of Persia, to his king, Xerxes. In expressing his personal animus for the Jews in that realm, however, Haman was actually demonstrating his hatred for the God of the Jews. The contempt that seethed in his heart and the political machinations that his anger produced have become hallmarks for countless anti-semites across the pages of history who have also sought to delegitimize and destroy the Jews. This people has been singled out for marginalization, persecution, violence, mayhem, and murder simply because they have been “different.” And their primary difference from others has been manifest in their belief sys-

³ All the Jewish people in the world today (18.4374 million) represent only .25877% of the global population (7.125 billion).

⁴ The Jewish citizens of Israel (6 million) represent only .08421% of the world population. The total citizenship of Israel (8.59 million) comprises only .12056% of the world population (7.125 billion).

⁵ The present land mass of Israel (10,750 square miles) is .043623% of the inhabitable land mass of the earth (24,642,757 square miles) or .018659% of the total land mass of the earth (57,308,738 square miles).

⁶ It could be argued that Pharaoh’s order for the murder of the Israelite male infants was the first attempt at Jewish genocide; however, Pharaoh’s order was designed for population control, not genocide.

⁷ Esther 3:8, TNK, emphasis added.

tem, for they have worshipped the one and only God, and they have refused to syncretize their faith with that of their neighbors or their conquerors.

The same dynamic that manifest itself in Xerxes' court also confronted the prophet Daniel as he encountered political intrigue that unfolded in the court of Darius the Mede: "The administrators and satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so . . . [for] he was neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, 'We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.'"⁸ And so they proceeded to draft a plan that would discredit Daniel by attacking his God,⁹ a plan in which they identified the uniqueness of the prophet's faith and devised means for discrediting it within their traditions.

At bottom, then, efforts to delegitimize Israel as a people, a nation, and a land are anchored, either consciously or subconsciously, in a desire to delegitimize the God of the Jews. Antisemitism—hatred of the Jews—is rooted in hatred of the God of the Jews. "Strictly speaking, anti-Semitism is not reducible to Jew hatred, although that is where it finds its most immediate and most venomous expression. Anti-Semitism is God hatred and human hatred."¹⁰ Antisemitism, therefore, is an attempt at deicide. As David Patterson has said, "Killing the God of Abraham requires killing the children of Abraham."¹¹ This is why Pharaoh said, "It is not only against the Jews whom this war is directed. It is against their God Himself!"¹² Richard Rubenstein was right when he spoke of the reason for God-hatred in the pagan mind: "Had we but the power, we would murder God, for we will never cease to be tempted by Ivan Karamazov's demonic fantasy that if God were dead, all things would be permitted."¹³ Immanuel Kant went so far as to suggest that "the euthanasia of Judaism [produces] the pure moral religion freed from all ancient statutory teachings,"¹⁴ and thereby answers the Jewish Question.¹⁵

⁸ Daniel 6:4–5, NIV.

⁹ Daniel 6:7–24. The jealous satraps attacked Daniel's faithfulness to the hours of prayer in Jewish tradition.

¹⁰ David Patterson, *Anti-Semitism and Its Metaphysical Origins* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 24.

¹¹ David Patterson, *Anti-Semitism*, p. 17.

¹² *Midrash HaGadol* 14, in Moshe Weissman, ed., *The Midrash Says* (Brooklyn, NY: Bnay Yakov Publications, 1980), vol. 2, p. 121.

¹³ Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: History, Theology, and Contemporary Judaism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 23.

¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1981), p. 30.

¹⁵ Steven B. Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 185.

This is why antisemitism differs from all other forms of hatred. Robert Wistrich identifies the core issue: “The sacral, quasi-metaphysical quality of anti-Semitism is singularly absent in other cases.”¹⁶ Thomas Torrance said it well: “The story of Israel reveals a people hated by other nations because Israel’s life bore witness to divine prohibitions among the Gentiles.”¹⁷ The apostle Paul summed up this phenomenon when he said, “The mindset of the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so.”¹⁸ Whether it is humanist, secularist, or pagan, the heart of godless man despises God. And because it does, it also hates Israel—the one people, the one nation, and the one land that stands for and bears witness to the one and only true God. The absolute ethics that God demands in Scripture and through his Chosen People are an affront to the “freedom” and “self-actualization” of the postmodern humanist today just as they have been for the pagans and secularists of the past. Like it or not, Israel as a whole represents God, and the Scriptures of Israel still speak for God, even when the Jewish people may not faithfully follow the instructions of the Torah.

Despite the record and witness of history and the truth that the Hebrew Scriptures confirm, many scholars—among them Christians, Jews, Muslims, and secularists—openly question the historicity of the people, the nation, and the land of Israel.¹⁹ Nothing about the Jews, it seems, can be accorded a modicum of legitimacy. Though stories about the “perfidious Jews” have long endured,²⁰ they have for centuries consistently been

¹⁶ Robert Wistrich, *A Lethal Obsession: Anti-Semitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad* (New York: Random House, 2010), p. 588.

¹⁷ Thomas Forsyth Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), pp. 7ff.

¹⁸ Romans 8:7.

¹⁹ The effort to delegitimize the history of Israel as a people began with the Enlightenment and became a feature of eighteenth and nineteenth-century German scholarship, including Christian scholarship.

²⁰ For centuries, during the Good Friday services of the Western Church, prayer was offered for “the perfidious Jews.” The Latin word *perfidetes*, from which the term *perfidious* was derived, actually means “unfaithful” or “half-believers,” as contrasted with the *fideles*, “believers.” Eugene Fisher and Dennis McManus point out, however, that “the theological polemics of Christian teaching against Judaism gradually drew out of the Latin word *perfidii* its modern connotations of treachery,” constantly reinforcing the notion that the Jewish people were inherently evil. See Eugene J. Fisher and Dennis D. McManus, “Good Friday Prayer for the Perfidious Jews,” in *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn, eds. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 171. For expansive insight into the extremes to which the idea of the “Perfidious Jews” was taken in history, see Mary C. Boys, *Redeeming Our Sacred Story: The Death of Jesus and Relations between Jews and Christians* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2013).

denied definition as a “people.” In the middle of the third century AD, Cyprian said, “Now the peoplehood of the Jews has been canceled; the destruction of Jerusalem was a judgement upon them; the gentiles rather than the Jews inherit the kingdom.”²¹ Susan Nowak observes that from that time, “the crime of the Jewish people is so great that it annuls, repeals, rescinds the very identity of the Jewish people: to be *Klal Yisrael*, the Chosen People of God, a light to the nations sent to bring all peoples to the Covenant. Without appeal, without reconsideration, the Jews are placed *outside the norms of human relationship*.”²² As Harry Cargas has noted, this statement was “used to justify the intimidation and even slaughter of Jews for seventeen centuries.”²³ When any people group can be viewed as virtually subhuman, it becomes only a matter of time before calls for its eradication are raised.

Though historical documentation confirms the existence of the Jewish nation,²⁴ the Jews are denied recognition as a historical nation, and their claim to nationhood today is considered by many to be illegitimate.²⁵ And although there is undeniable physical and historical evidence to support the Jewish right to a land,²⁶ the “Jewish state” in Palestine is considered an aberration, an anomaly²⁷ that emerged from the evil machinations of Jews who

²¹ Cyprian, quoted in Franklin Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), pp. 27–28. For further analysis, see Leonard P. Zakim, *Confronting Anti-semitism: A Practical Guide* (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 2000), p. 97, and Padraic O’Hare, *The Enduring Covenant: The Education of Christians and the End of Antisemitism* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), p. 20.

²² See Susan Nowak, *Christianity’s Original Sin: Anti-Judaism*, posted at www.holocaustroad.org, author’s emphasis.

²³ Harry J. Cargas, *Holocaust Scholars Write to the Vatican* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1998), p. 6.

²⁴ An Egyptian stele from the thirteenth century BC reads, “. . . carried off is Askelon; seized upon is Gezer; Yanoam is made as that which does not exist; Israel is laid waste, his seed is not. . . .” Archaeological evidence, therefore, supports the fact that shortly after the biblical account of the Israelite conquest of the land of Canaan, “Israel” experienced an invasion by Egypt. See Naomi E. Pasachoff and Robert Pittman, *A Concise History of the Jewish People* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995), p. 14.

²⁵ Alan M. Dershowitz, “Countering Challenges to Israel’s Legitimacy,” in *Israel’s Rights as a Nation-State in International Diplomacy*, Alan Baker, ed. (Jerusalem, Israel: World Jewish Congress, 2011), pp. 159–167.

²⁶ Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 315–316. Also Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1988), p. 234–235; K. L. Noll, *Canaan and Israel in Antiquity: An Introduction* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), p. 312; David Biale, *Power & Powerlessness in Jewish History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), p. 11; and Gordon K. Oest, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule: Windows on Abimelech’s Rise and Demise in Judges 9* (London, UK: T & T Clark International, 2011), pp. 215–217.

²⁷ Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Arab Attitudes to Israel* (Jerusalem, Israel: Keter Publishing House, 1972), p. 72. Harkabi notes that “Israel is only an anomaly and an aberration [that] is dubbed ‘an artificial state’ or ‘an exceptional situation.’”

wished to escape their heritage as the forever-doomed wanderers of the earth²⁸ who deserved no sovereignty, no fixed dwelling place, no land of their own.²⁹ In history, therefore, the Jews were totally disenfranchised, judged unworthy of any of the basic human rights that all people require and deserve.

The Delegitimized People: Scholars, politicians, and pundits have often argued that the biblical stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and Solomon are nothing more than myths that were created by sages in Second-Temple Judea in order to establish at least a modicum of legitimacy to the Jewish claim to nationhood and to the land of Israel.³⁰ While the Jewish historian Shlomo Sand does not deny the right of modern Israelis “to live in a democratic, open, and inclusive state of Israel that belongs to all its citizens,”³¹ he argues that there was no such thing as “a Jewish people scattered across the world,” just as “five hundred years ago, there was no French people, no more than there was an Italian or Vietnamese people.”³² He even counters the argument of many scholars that the “Jewish people” actually came to exist in the second-century BC by saying that that the Hasmonean Kingdom of that time “in no way amounted to a nation, and we can seriously question whether it can be defined as a people.”³³ Sand joins a chorus of scholars who trumpet the claim that Jewish attribution of a centuries-old history to the people of

²⁸ Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2004), p. 97. Harris notes that based on Augustine’s argument, the Jews were “doomed to wander the earth bearing witness to the truth of scripture and the salvation of the gentiles. The suffering and servitude of the Jews was proof that Christ had been the messiah after all.”

²⁹ Sadly, in history, many of the Jews themselves came to believe that they were exiled from their land because of their sins. As Stephen Wylen says, “The nations had their own reasons for oppressing the Jews, but the Jews themselves agreed that they deserved no more than to be treated as homeless exiles.” Stephen M. Wylen, *Settings of Silver: An Introduction to Judaism* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000), p. 167.

³⁰ Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness: State, Society, and the Military* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 2001); David Ohana, *The Origins of Israeli Mythology: Neither Canaanites Nor Crusaders* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Virginia Tilley, *The One-State Solution: A Breakthrough for Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Deadlock* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2005); Raphael Patai and Jennifer Patai, *The Myth of the Jewish Race* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1975); Nachman Ben-Yehudi, *Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995); and S. Daniel Breslauer, *The Seductiveness of Jewish Myth: Challenge or Response?* (Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press, 1997).

³¹ Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Land of Israel: From Holy Land to Homeland*, tr. Jeremy Forman (London, UK: Verso Books, 2012), p.17.

³² Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People*, tr. Yale Lotan (London, UK: Verso Books, 2009) p. 316.

³³ Sand, *Invention of the Jewish People*, p. 317.

Israel is utterly illegitimate nonsense, a contrived effort to establish and maintain power in the Middle East.

The Delegitimized State: Other scholars have sought to delegitimize Jewish claims to recognition as a “Jewish state” based on their historical nationhood from the beginning of the unified Davidic Kingdom in the tenth century BC until the Roman diaspora after the Bar Kokhba revolt in the second century AD.³⁴ Niels Peter Lemche says, “The Israelite nation . . . is a highly ideological construct created by ancient scholars of Jewish tradition in order to legitimize their own religious community and its religio-political claims on land and religious exclusivity.”³⁵ Sand agrees, maintaining that Zionist “historians” in the early twentieth century created the myth that “the people of Israel . . . became a nation issuing from the seed of Abraham” and that they did so because “Zionist colonization could certainly not have been undertaken without an ideological preparation that gave rise to the blossoming and crystallization of myths.”³⁶ Sand, therefore, applauds the science of modern archaeology for debunking the historicity of an “Exodus from Egypt” and for proving that “the great, unified monarchy of David and Solomon never existed.”³⁷

Interestingly, scholars who had long endeavored to disprove biblical stories about the Israelite monarchy based on what they perceived as an absence of archaeological evidence for its existence recoiled in shock when Israeli archaeologists digging at Tel Dan near the northern border of Israel in 1993-94 uncovered a ninth-century BC stele inscribed with the Hebrew words בית דוד (*Beit David*). Since steles were tall stone monuments that were erected for commemorative purposes in the ancient world,³⁸ this discovery established unmistakable physical

³⁴ Keith Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1996); Gösta W. Ahlström, *History of Ancient Palestine* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); Thomas L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 1992); Thomas L. Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); John Van Seters, *Prologue to History* (New Haven, CT: The Yale University Press, 1992); and Philip R. Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992).

³⁵ Niels Peter Lemche, *The Israelites in History and Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), pp. 165–166.

³⁶ Sand, *Invention of the Jewish People*, p. 314.

³⁷ Sand, *Invention of the Jewish People*, p. 316. For details of this and other arguments against the historical revisionists, see Baruch Halpern, “Erasing History: The Minimalist Assault on Ancient Israel,” in V. Phillips Long, ed., *Israel’s Past in Present Research: Essays on Ancient Israelite Historiography* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, Inc., 1999), pp. 415–426.

³⁸ Steles were used in various parts of the ancient world to mark borders or for government proclamations. These monuments set aside space and established rules for conduct within territorial boundaries which they circumscribed. The word *stela* comes directly from the Greek word στήλη (*stéle*). Sometimes the Latin word *stela* is also used to describe these monuments.

evidence for the existence of a “House of David” in the ninth century BC. Immediately after this discovery, however, the coterie of minimalist³⁹ scholars who had boldly trumpeted their conclusion that the Davidic Kingdom never actually existed immediately launched themselves into extraordinary contortions in order to try to explain away this discovery. Some suggested that the stele was a forgery or that it had been “salted in the tell by some desperate biblical literalist.”⁴⁰ A disquieted Philip R. Davies even resorted to the argument that the Hebrew letters forming David’s name actually meant “uncle” or “kettle,” instead of “David” so that the stele was a celebration of the “Kettle House”!⁴¹

Apparently it is easier for some scholars to argue from the *absence* of archaeological evidence than it is to accept the *presence* of archaeological evidence! Fortunately for the science of biblical studies, the ranks of scholars who recognize and affirm archaeological support for biblical narratives regarding the people, the nation, and the land of Israel is growing,⁴² despite the fact that their findings are not without controversy. As more and more of the land of Israel is subjected to archaeological excavation, ancient mysteries continue to be unearthed, and evidence mounts for the historical accuracy of biblical narratives concerning the lives of patriarchs, kings, and prophets.⁴³

³⁹ Megan Bishop Moore and Brad E. Kelle, *Biblical History and Israel's Past: The Changing Study of the Bible and History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011), p. 33. Biblical minimalism is a label given to a trend that was developed in the 1990s by scholars Niels Peter Lemche and Thomas L. Thompson from Denmark’s Copenhagen University who made arguments on biblical history based on their view that the biblical record is not reliable evidence for what actually happened in ancient Israel and that it is very problematic to consider Israel for historical study. Other scholars who shared this perspective included Philip R. Davies and Keith Whitelam. See Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives* (London: T & T Clark, 2002) and John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (Brattleboro, VT: Echo Point Books & Media, 2014). For a comparison of minimalism and maximalism, see Christopher D. Stanley, *The Hebrew Bible: A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), pp. 120–125.

⁴⁰ F. H. Creyer, “On the Recently Discovered ‘House of David’ Inscription,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 8 (1994), pp. 14–15, referenced by Halpern in Long, p. 415.

⁴¹ Philip R. Davies, “‘House of David’ Built on Sand,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, July/August, 1994.

⁴² For more balanced perspectives on archaeology and biblical studies, see Megan Bishop Moore and Brad E. Kelle, *Biblical History and Israel's Past: The Changing Study of the Bible and History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011); Israel Finkelstein and Amihai Mazar, *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel* (Atlanta, GA: The Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2007); and Neil Asher Silberman and Israel Finkelstein, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Touchstone Publications, 2001). Perhaps the most objective study of biblical archaeology is David M. Rohl, *Pharaohs and Kings: A Biblical Quest* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1995). Rohl’s work is especially balanced and pragmatic, lacking ideological and theological agendas.

⁴³ James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible's Sacred Kings and the Roots of the Western Tradition* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006); John H. Sailhamer, *Biblical Archaeology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1998).

The Illegitimate Land: Numerous scholars have also questioned the validity of the Jewish claims to the land of Israel based on the historical entitlement to or control of the land by their ancestors.⁴⁴ The most strident of these are the producers or distributors of Arab propaganda who claim that the Jewish people have no right to any of the land of Israel because there is “no evidence” that their ancestors ever lived there. Unfortunately, there are many Christian scholars who have joined the ranks of the Arab propagandists either out of sympathy for the “plight” of the “Palestinian” people⁴⁵ or out of their own personal animus for the Jewish people in general and Zionists in particular. Others have simply followed the positions established by centuries of scholars who have smugly “proven” to their own satisfaction that the people described in the Hebrew Scriptures simply never existed and that the events chronicled therein never occurred. They argue that both the characters and the events recorded in the sacred texts were part of an elaborate myth created by later people in an effort to legitimize their claims to the land and the power associated with it.

Davies has taken the lead in some circles, arguing against the notion that “Israel was the natural or rightful owner of this piece of land.”⁴⁶ He blames the “sad state of affairs” of the Jewish state in the land of “Palestine” on the influence of the Bible in the West where “inherited Christian culture supports the notion that the territory west of the Jordan is and has always been somehow essentially ‘the land of Israel.’”⁴⁷ Davies laments the fact that “biblical scholarship inevitably focuses on the Israelite identity of a land that has actually been non-Jewish in terms of its indigenous population for the larger part of its recorded history.”⁴⁸ Such Christian scholarship joins with and adds strength to the pervasive secularist view regarding the land of Israel, which maintains that any Jewish

⁴⁴ Uri Davis, *Apartheid Israel: Possibilities for the Struggle Within* (London, UK: Zed Books, 2003), p. 65. Davis takes arguments beyond the disputed “West Bank” by asserting that “Israeli claims to West Jerusalem, Safad or Jaffa, occupied in 1948–49, are as thoroughly invalid as Israeli claims to East Jerusalem, Hebron or Gaza, occupied in 1967.” Davis believes that Jewish claim to any part of the land of Israel (Palestine) is illegitimate.

⁴⁵ Many Evangelical Christians have also been recently swayed by inaccurate portrayals of the “suffering” of Palestinian Christians under Israeli “oppression.” David Brog, “The End of Evangelical Support for Israel?” *The Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2014, Vol. 21: No. 2, posted at meforum.org. Also Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road Map to Armageddon* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 23.

⁴⁶ Philip R. Davies, “Minimalism, ‘Ancient Israel,’ and Anti-Semitism,” in Diane Nunn Banks, *Writing the History of Israel* (London, UK: T & T Clark International, 2006), p. 217. Davies says that suggesting Israel’s land ownership claim is “inflammatory” and has no present analog in departments of history.

⁴⁷ Davies in Banks, p. 217.

⁴⁸ Davies in Banks, p. 217.

claim to the historical existence and, therefore, authenticity of such a land is utterly supposititious and is worthy of general repudiation.⁴⁹

Such pretensions and fabrications are patently false, for, despite all of the Gentile conquests, captivities, and diasporas, direct descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have continued to live in the Promised Land in an unbroken chain from the time of Abraham to the present. Though nobles and aristocrats were taken into captivity and though invading armies imported and imposed their own citizens upon the land, still not all of the Israelites/Jews were ever removed. As Joan Peters says, “The Jewish presence in “The Holy Land”—at times tenuous—persisted through its bloody history. . . . Buried beneath the propaganda—which has it that Jews ‘returned’ to the Holy Land after two thousand years of separation, where they found crowds of ‘indigenous Palestinian Arabs’—is the bald fact that the Jews are indigenous people on that land who never left, but who have continuously stayed on their ‘Holy Land.’”⁵⁰ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said it well: “There is a Jewish people here, it has been here for close to 4,000 years; we recognize this people, we recognize their historic bond with this land and this city.”⁵¹

Why All the Vitriol?

In the postmodern world, the odds have been stacked against the establishment of a legitimate people called Israel, a legitimate nation identified as Israel, and a legitimate land named Israel. A world that increasingly has no absolutes, no moral standards, and no ethics, a world that is driven solely by glorified self-interest and, ultimately, by utter selfishness has no place for a people, a nation, and a land that rests on absolutes and particularity, especially those granted by the only sovereign of the universe: the God of Scripture. “What makes the Jewish people such a controversial element in the history of the world?” asks

⁴⁹ A prime example of the secularist animus toward Israel was seen when mega-publisher HarperCollins created a “Middle East Atlas” in which the word *Israel* was purposefully omitted from a map of the Middle East while the words *Gaza* and *West Bank* were clearly identified. This was more than a Freudian slip. It was representative of the liberal secularist view that Israel should be “wiped off the map.” Terrence McCoy, “HarperCollins Omits Israel from Maps for Mideast Schools, Citing ‘Local Preferences,’” *The Washington Post*, January 2, 2015, posted at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/01/02/harpercollins-omits-israel-from-maps-for-mideast-schools-citing-local-preferences/>.

⁵⁰ Joan Peters, *From Time Immemorial: The Origins of the Arab-Jewish Conflict Over Palestine* (Michael Joseph Publishers, 1985), p. 83.

⁵¹ Benjamin Netanyahu, quoted Jerome R. Verlin and Lee S. Bender, *Pressing Israel: Media Bias Exposed from A–Z* (Philadelphia, PA: Pavilion Press, 2012), p. 148.

Isaac Rottenberg, “Could it be that their very survival and presence in our midst remind us of the God of Israel, the Great Disturber of our pagan souls?” he rightly wonders, with an answer that is all too obvious.⁵² What is the reason for this disruption in the pagan heart? “The God of Israel refuses to be absorbed into a pantheon of gods.”⁵³ Jacob Neusner has it right: “Those who hate Israel hate God, [and] those who hate God hate Israel.”⁵⁴ It is the God of Israel who demands a conclusion that the pagan heart cannot endure: “Choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the river or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living, but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”⁵⁵ As Neusner says, “The nations hate Israel because of their remaining loyal to the Torah.”⁵⁶ David Patterson argues further that “the anti-Semitic determination to erase the People of the Book from the face of the planet is a determination to erase the Book itself; without the People there is no Book; and without the Book there is no People.”⁵⁷ Without the book, there is also no condemnation of the perversity of the pagan heart!

Chaim Schloss takes the argument even further by saying that “the world’s hatred of the Jews came down from Mount Sinai together with the Torah.”⁵⁸ The people of Israel are hated—and their destruction is sought—because, in the words of Emmanuel Lévinas, the faith of the Jews “stems from the religion which modern political life supplants,”⁵⁹ the religion that David Patterson calls the religion “of creation and covenant, of revelation and redemption.”⁶⁰ Because “the Torah determines the covenantal relation to the land,” postmodernism seeks to obliterate “the voice of the Torah—and with the Torah, God and Israel as well,” including the Torah’s focus “on the

⁵² Isaac C. Rottenberg, *Judaism, Christianity, Paganism: A Judeo-Christian Worldview and Its Cultural Implications* (Atlanta, GA: Hebraic Heritage Press, 2007), p. 101.

⁵³ Rottenberg, p. 101.

⁵⁴ Jacob Neusner, *The Theology of the Halakhah* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2001), p. 243.

⁵⁵ Joshua 24:15.

⁵⁶ Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash: Lamentations Rabbah* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2011), pp. 120–121.

⁵⁷ David Patterson, *Anti-Semitism*, p. 200. “The Book referred to here is, of course, the Torah,” says Patterson.

⁵⁸ Chaim Schloss, *2000 Years of Jewish History: From the Destruction of the Second Bais HaMikdash until the Twentieth Century* (Jerusalem, Israel: Feldheim Publishers, 2002), p. 254. Schloss appeals to a rabbinic *midrash* which suggests that the word *Sinai* is derived from the word *sinah*, which means “hatred.” He maintains that “even if the Jews themselves try to forget their origins, Hashem sends the Gentiles to remind them of the truth” by means of outbreaks of antisemitism, the outright hatred and persecution of the Jewish people.

⁵⁹ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, tr. Sean Hand (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 12.

⁶⁰ David Patterson, *Anti-Semitism*, p. 101.

land itself.”⁶¹ Because of this underlying agenda of hatred for God, Torah, and Israel, “the Jewish presence in Israel far transcends any political agenda.”⁶² The Israelis’ struggle for their very survival, therefore, is far more than a mere sociological problem, and it amounts to something more than a simple power struggle for control of a land mass.⁶³ When someone suggested that the logical solution to antisemitism in the world would be for the Jewish people to have their own nation, Derek Prince made this astute observation: “If the problem of anti-Semitism is primarily sociological, you are correct. The state of Israel will solve this problem. But if the primary cause of anti-Semitism is spiritual, then the existence of the State of Israel will bring the greatest onslaught of anti-Semitism that the world has ever seen.”⁶⁴ The postmodern secularists’ efforts toward the elimination of the nation and land of Israel, therefore, are merely visible symbols of their determination to eradicate the God of the Jews and his demands. It is part and parcel of a secularist agenda for decide.

The Vindication of God and His People

For centuries after the destruction of the temple in AD 70, Israel—the people, the nation, and the land—hovered between life and death, often nearer to death than to life. The words of Josif Rabinovich poignantly encapsulate Israel’s historical condition: “Nation of Israel! . . . In only one portion of your heart is it still possible to notice now and then a small throbbing, your limbs shudder, and the traits of your face attest that it is not yet possible to place you on the list of nations that have expired. Yes, you are still alive, the name *Israel* still flutters above you.”⁶⁵ In spite of centuries of efforts to secure the utter destruction of the Jews through various forms of ethnic cleansing that reached its nadir in the Final Solution of the Nazi *Judenrein*⁶⁶ program, Israel has continued to exist as a people—indeed, *the* Chosen People. And finally, after centuries of unrelenting hatred, persecution, violence, mayhem, and murder against them individually and corporately, the Jews have come together against all odds as the people of Israel to form the nation

⁶¹ David Patterson, *Anti-Semitism*, pp. 200–201.

⁶² David Patterson, *Anti-Semitism*, p. 201.

⁶³ David Patterson, *Anti-Semitism*, p. 201.

⁶⁴ Derek Prince, quoted in Daniel C. Juster, “Anti-Semitism Again,” in *Jewish Voice Today Magazine*, July/August/September 2015, p. 7.

⁶⁵ Josef Rabinovich, quoted in V. S. Soloviev, *Freedom, Faith, and Dogma: Essays by V. S. Soloviev on Christianity and Judaism* (Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press, 2008), p. 91.

⁶⁶ *Judenrein* is the German term for “clean of Jews.” A similar word, *Judenfrei*, meant “free of Jews.”

of Israel, and they have done so in the land of Israel! This was *the* miracle of the twentieth century. No other event could have approached comparison with what emerged from the utterly chaotic world of this the twentieth century. The resurrection of Israel had to be an act of God!

“Israel,” in fact, cannot be fully considered without each of three elements: people, nation, and land. Israel is not one or the other; it is a continuum of all three.⁶⁷ It is impossible, therefore, to delegitimize one without, at the same time, delegitimizing the others. The legitimization of either the people of Israel, the nation of Israel, or the land of Israel is not, however, derived from any human institution. Though unrelenting efforts have been made in century after century to separate the people, the nation, and the land of Israel, all three are inexorably and indissolubly connected. As Aaron Klingerman has rightly argued, “the peculiar Book, the peculiar people, and the peculiar land must always be viewed together. What God has put together let no man, be he theologian or politician, put asunder.”⁶⁸ The authentication of all three entities is derived solely from divine decree and is validated and made certain by the only eternally enduring reality that exists: divine faithfulness.

God himself established this truth in utterly explicit fashion when he declared: “I am YHWH, I change not; therefore, you, the descendants of Jacob, have not perished.”⁶⁹ As a matter of fact, as Jon D. Levenson says, “Israel exists only because of God’s choice, and apart from God, it has no existence at all.”⁷⁰ It is for this reason that “Israel has no profane history, only a sacred history, a history of redemption, of backsliding and return, punishment

⁶⁷ This is proven by the fact that from the time when the Roman Empire forcibly removed the Jewish people from their land and denied their nationhood, the corporate heart of the people—and, indeed, of every individual Jew—refused to accept the destruction of their nation and the expropriation of their land. The expectation of the full restoration of people, nation, and land continued to be central expressions of the *Amidah*, the prayer *par excellence* of every synagogue through the centuries. Three times each weekday since before the time of Jesus, Jews have prayed the fourteenth of the *Amidah*’s eighteen benedictions, the *Bo’ne Yerushalayim B’rakhah* (“Builder of Jerusalem Blessing”), imploring God with these words: “Return in compassion to your city, Jerusalem, and rest within it as you have said. Rebuild it speedily, and in our days, a structure forever. And may you establish the throne of David within Jerusalem speedily. Blessed are you, LORD, the Builder of Jerusalem.” And through century after century, this same prayer has been extended to God in synagogues around the world regardless as to where the forced dispersion of the Jewish people has taken them.

⁶⁸ Aaron Klingerman, quoted in Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 302.

⁶⁹ Malachi 3:6.

⁷⁰ Jon D. Levenson, “The Universal Horizon of Biblical Particularism,” in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, Mark G. Brett, ed. (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1996), p. 153.

and restoration.”⁷¹ As William Klein rightly observes, “Israel exists as a people because of God’s choice.”⁷² God, therefore, “proved his sovereign faithfulness to his people, preserving them in spite of their unfaithfulness.”⁷³ Indeed, “It is by God’s grace and faithfulness—not by race, language, culture or religion—that the Jews have continued to exist in the face of persecution and genocide.”⁷⁴ As Karl Barth said, they cannot be “overlooked, or banished, or destroyed—for the grace of God upholds [them].”⁷⁵

God’s “covenantal faithfulness to Israel was eternal.”⁷⁶ The perduration of Israel as people, nation, and land is not predicated on the evanescent musings or stratagems of Machiavellian tyrants and politicians. It is guaranteed by the God “who does not change like shifting shadows.”⁷⁷ This God is the one whose “plans [were] formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness.”⁷⁸ Israel’s greatness, therefore, has always been viewed solely in the context “of the greatness of her God.”⁷⁹ This is what God clearly predicted through the prophet Isaiah: “No weapon that is formed against you will prosper; and every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their vindication is from me.”⁸⁰ What was true in the ancient kingdoms of Babylon and Persia has continued to be true in the centuries since that time. God has always ensured that his Chosen People would survive even when it appeared that their enemies had them on the verge of annihilation. Despite every effort to destroy them, *Am Yisrael chai*.⁸¹

⁷¹ Levenson, “The Universal Horizon,” p. 153.

⁷² William Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1990), p. 34.

⁷³ Klein, p. 34.

⁷⁴ Mark R. Lindsay, *Barth, Israel, and Jesus: Karl Barth’s Theology of Israel* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2007), p. 79.

⁷⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, III/3: The Creator and His Creature*, G. W. Bromley, ed. (London, UK: T & T Clark International, 2000), p. 220.

⁷⁶ Glenn Stanfield Holland, *Gods in the Desert: Religions of the Ancient Near East* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), p. 252.

⁷⁷ James 1:17, NIV.

⁷⁸ Isaiah 25:1.

⁷⁹ Horst Seebass, “בַּחַר *bachar*,” in C. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), vol. 2, p. 84.

⁸⁰ Isaiah 54:17.

⁸¹ *Am Yisrael chai* means, “The People of Israel live.”