

The Twice-Promise

by Dorcas and Noel Gordon



In Study 1, we presented an introduction to the history of the land of Palestine. This study will continue that introduction by going into greater detail about the events from 1918 through to the present. It may be helpful to have in front of you the timeline set out in Study 1.

Opening Prayer:

God of peace and opportunity, our Creator and Redeemer, we come to you to pray for your mercy, forgiveness, and a new start. Instead of overcoming evil with good, we have stood by while goodness has been affronted. We ask for your help to give peace a new chance to thrive in our world. Amen. (Excerpt from the Prayer of the 9th International Conference of the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre.¹)

Scripture:

Read Genesis 12:1–9; 17:1–8; 21:8–21; 25:7–10

Genesis chapters 12 through 25, contains a lengthy family saga at the end of which Isaac is blessed and Ishmael exits the story of the Hebrew people. What, however, we often fail to notice is the blessing God gives to all of Abraham's offspring, particularly Ishmael, Abraham's son through Hagar and the first-born of his eight sons (Gen.25:1–2). Genesis 21:8–21 recounts the details of this promise. It is clear from the story as it unfolds that God blessed both Ishmael and Isaac promising to make each a great nation protecting

This is the second of four studies on the Land of Palestine. The first study can be found in the November/December 2017 *Glad Tidings*.

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each one from sure and certain death. God stopped Abraham's knife from offering his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice. God also provided water to Hagar and Ishmael saving them in the desert. They are brothers, sons of Abraham, members of the same family. It is from Isaac that Jews trace their lineage while the Arabs trace theirs from Ishmael. It is for this reason that Thomas Waskow, a Jewish theologian, has called Palestine the "twice promised land."²

The History of a Twice-Promised Land:

In the Versailles Treaty of 1919, Britain was given a temporary mandate for the administration of Palestine with the understanding that it would work in the best interest of its Jewish and Arab inhabitants. A 1921 census indicates that Muslims were 590,000, Christian were 89,000 and 84,000 were Jewish. "All were called 'Palestinian' and all lived together...the small Palestinian Jewish community shared the fortunes and predicaments of all Palestinians, the joys and sorrows of a generally depressed community living under the occupation of the Ottoman Turkish Empire."³ In the years after World War 1, Jewish immigration



Abrahamic Mosque



to Palestine increased dramatically and Britain delayed making a decision to implement self-determination for Palestine.

In 1946, ownership of the land in Palestine was roughly 7% Jewish and 93% Palestinian. [Map 1] However, that changed dramatically when in 1947 the United Nations (UN) Partition Plan allocated 53% of the land to the Jewish state and 47% of the land to a Palestinian state. [Map 2]

The United Nations Partition plan was brought before the UN on 29th November 1947. The UN General Assembly resolution recommended the creation of independent Arab and Jewish states and a Special International Regime for the city of Jerusalem. A four-part document was attached, which included among other things a process for the termination of the British Mandate, and the delineation of boundaries between the two States and Jerusalem.⁴

Realizing that the promise of self-determination, given by the British as part

Understanding (IMEU) is a non-profit organization that offers journalists facts, analysis, experts, and digital resources about Palestine and Palestinians. Some additional facts from the IMEU about the Nakba:

Approximately 7.1 million : The number of Palestinian refugees and displaced persons as of 2009, including Nakba survivors and their descendants. They are located mostly in the occupied West Bank and neighboring Arab countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria, denied their internationally-recognized legal right to return to their homeland by Israel, simply because they are not Jewish. Approximately 150,000 : The number of Palestinians who remained inside what became Israel's borders in 1948, many of them internally displaced. These Palestinians (sometimes called "Israeli

Photo: One of the more than 400 villages destroyed during the Nakba.



of the war effort against the Ottomans, was false, the Palestinians refused to agree to the terms of the UN resolution. In the war that followed, called Nakba by the Palestinians, the Israeli military force, Hagana, but more particularly, extremist groups such as the Stern Gang and Irgun wracked havoc on Palestinian villages. Massacres of whole villages took place.

“The Palestinian “Nakba” (“catastrophe” in Arabic) refers to the mass expulsion of Palestinian Arabs from British Mandate Palestine during Israel’s creation (1947–49).

The Nakba was not an unintended result of war. It was a deliberate and systematic act necessary for the creation of a Jewish majority state in historic Palestine, which was overwhelmingly Arab prior to 1948. Internally, Zionist Jewish leaders used the euphemism “transfer” when discussing plans for what today would be called ethnic cleansing.”⁵

Ilan Pappé, an Israeli historian and Senior Lecturer at the University of Haifa,

Arabs”) were granted Israeli citizenship but stripped of most of their land and placed under martial law until 1966. Today, there are approximately 1.6 million Palestinian citizens of Israel, who live as second-class citizens in their own homeland, subject to more than 50 laws that discriminate against them because they are not Jewish. More than 400 : The number of Palestinian cities and towns systematically destroyed by Israeli forces or repopulated with Jews between 1948 and 1950. Approximately 4,244,776 : The number of acres of Palestinian land expropriated by Israel during and immediately following its creation in 1948. Between 100 and 200 billion : The total estimated monetary loss of Palestinians dispossessed during Israel’s creation, in current US dollars. (I might put these additional facts into a side bar so they don’t get lost.)⁶



Iqrit, a Christian Palestinian village destroyed by the Israel army of Christmas Eve 1951

describes Israel's 1948 Plan (Plan Dalet), with its mandate to "capture, cleanse, or destroy" Palestinian villages, as ethnic cleansing. Situating his work within a definition that emerged most recently from the events in former Yugoslavia, he describes ethnic cleansing as a well-defined policy of a particular group of persons to systematically eliminate another group from a given territory on the basis of religious, ethnic or national origin. Such a policy involves violence and is very often connected with military operations. It is to be achieved by all possible means, from discrimination to extermination, and entails violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Most ethnic cleansing methods are grave breaches of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the 1977 Additional Protocols and have been declared a crime against humanity. Pappe adds the reminder that ethnic cleansing also seeks to wipe out that groups' history.⁷

In his book Pappe recounts the taking of one village, Deir Yassin on 9th April 1948, an event which the Palestinians remember as the first strike in the Nakba and the systematic attempt to remove them from the land:

Deir Yassin, a pastoral and cordial village that had reached a non-aggression pact with the Hagana in Jerusalem, but was doomed to be wiped out because it was within the areas designated in Plan Dalet to be cleansed. Because of the prior agreement they had signed with the village, the Hagana decided to send the Irgun and

Stern Gang troops, so as to absolve themselves from any official accountability....

As they burst into the village, the Jewish soldiers sprayed the houses with machine-gun fire, killing many of the inhabitants. The remaining villagers were then gathered in one place and murdered in cold blood, their bodies abused while a number of women were raped and then killed.⁸

When the Nakba ended, the State of Israel, in a Declaration of Independence, had come into existence. It held approximately 78% of the land of Palestine. [Map 3] Travelling through northern Galilee one sees planted forests of beautiful pine trees, which upon closer inspection reveal the remains of many of the destroyed Palestinian villages.

Canada's involvement in perpetuating the concealed nature of the Nakba has come to light in a park called Canada Park.¹¹ In place of three Palestinian villages, a park was created by an international Zionist organization, the Jewish National Fund [JNF], paid for with \$15 million in charitable donations from the Canadian Jewish and Christian communities. With trees planted over the hills and valleys, the fact of Arab villages in the area is almost completely obscured. According to Zochrot, an Israeli organization,¹² committed to educating Israelis and

Stern Gang – “Zionist extremist organization in Palestine, founded in 1940 by Avraham Stern (1907–42). The group's terrorist activities extended beyond Palestine: two members assassinated Lord Moyne, British minister of state in the Middle East, at Cairo (November 1944). Later the Stern Gang attacked airfields, railway yards, and other strategic [British] installations in Palestine, usually with success, though at heavy loss in members killed or captured.”⁹

Irgun: “The Irgun was led by Menachem Begin, the future Israeli prime minister, who was a leading proponent of Revisionist Zionism, the militant branch of Zionism pioneered by Vladimir Zeev Jabotinsky, which openly despised the Arabs and sought restoration of what it called Eretz Yisrael, the ancient land of Israel. By this was meant “both sides of the Jordan,” the Irgun slogan meaning all of Palestine and Jordan was the rightful home of the Jews.”

“The Irgun was the dominant Jewish terrorist organization, both in size and the number and frequency of its attacks. Its most spectacular feat up to this time had been the July 22, 1946 blowing up of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, with the killing of 91 people—41 Arabs, 28 British and 17 Jews.”¹⁰

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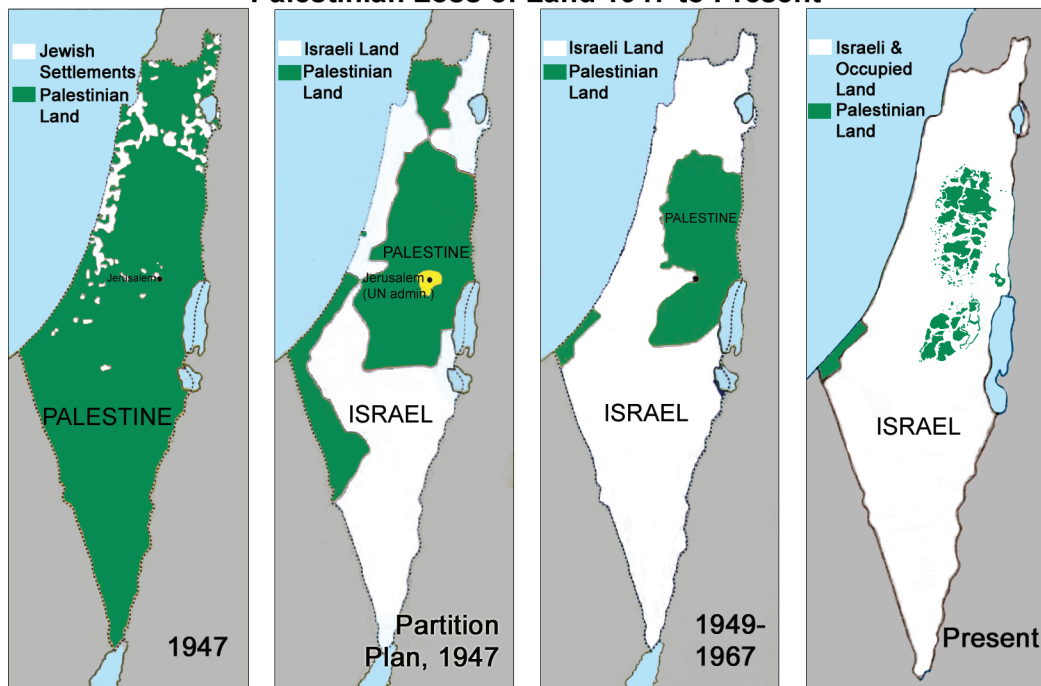
foreign visitors, 86 Palestinian villages lie buried underneath JNF parks. A further 400 destroyed villages had their lands passed on to exclusively Jewish communities. Zochrot’s several hundred activists regularly select a destroyed village, taking Palestinian refugees with them as they place a handmade sign detailing the village’s name in Arabic and Hebrew. Within days, the signs are removed.¹³

Israel’s Declaration of Independence, dated 14th May, 1948, one day before the British Mandate ended, concluded in this way: “We call upon the Jewish people throughout the Diaspora to join forces with us in immigration and construction and to be at our right hand in the great endeavor to fulfill the age-old longing for the redemption of Israel.” This call for support from the international Jewish community was very successful. Statistics show that in 1972, such international support paid for 63 percent of Israel’s health and welfare services, 21 percent of primary and secondary education, and 87 percent of higher education.¹⁴

At the time of the formation of the state of Israel, the western nations, trying to come to terms with the horrific nature of the holocaust and their silence in the face of genocide, endorsed Israel. Particularly, this has meant ongoing committed support from the government of the United States, which more recently provided funds for the 443 mile long separation wall built primarily on Palestinian lands, and funding for the militarization of Israel so that, even though one of the smallest countries, it is seventh largest military power in the world.¹⁵

After the Nakba the UN continued to try to work on a peace process by spearheading a number of initiatives, including the Lausanne conference of 1949. This proposed path to peace centred around the right of refugees to return to Palestine, and a commitment to a two-state solution with the country divided equally. All sides were in agreement, including Israel’s foreign minister. However, it was vetoed by Israel’s prime minister and the King of Jordan, who had a plan to divide what was left of Palestine between them.¹⁶ The Oslo Peace Process (1991–2000), is but another more recent example of multiple failed

Palestinian Loss of Land 1947 to Present



The four maps above were originally produced by the Palestine Israel Action Group. They state, "PIAG has produced Educational Resources and Tools for Activists that can be used by religious and secular organizations locally, nationally, and internationally. We invite readers to adapt these materials for use in their own communities."

endeavors.¹⁷ While this peace process was being negotiated, Israel continued to take more land and to build more settlements in the West Bank. One of the major peace brokers over the past two decades has been the United States, itself morally challenging, since it is the primary arms supplier to the Israeli military.

The focus of the UN on Israel/Palestine has continued, resulting in numerous resolutions critical of Israel. Aside from the core issues—refugees, Jerusalem, borders—the major themes reflected in the U.N. resolutions against Israel are its unlawful attacks on its neighbors (Resolutions 111, 171, 228, 248 etc.); its violations of the human rights of the Palestinians, including deportations (Resolutions 636, 641, 681, 694, 726, 799), demolitions of homes and other collective punishments (Resolutions 592, 605, 672, 904, 1322, 1405); its confiscation of Palestinian land; its establishment of illegal settlements (Resolutions 446, 456, 465); and its refusal to abide by the U.N. Charter and the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Resolutions 446, 471, 607).¹⁸

**“We ask for your help to give peace a new chance
to thrive in our world.”**

Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre

From 1967 to the Present

In the years following the 1967 war, Israel, now fully in control of the land of historic Palestine with more than 400,000 settlers living illegally according to international law on Palestinian land, intensified its efforts to control the lives of Palestinians. The land presently is so cut up by Jewish settlements, Israeli only roads and lands confiscated by the Israeli military that a two-state solution is virtually impossible. The settlements form a choker-like necklace around each Palestinian town and city.¹⁹ No one can visit family or get medical attention in other parts of the West Bank without going through at least one, and usually more, of the over 522 dehumanizing Israeli checkpoints. Gaza is the largest open air prison in the world, its inhabitants surrounded on the sea, on land and in the air by an Israeli military blockade. “Because the Zionists [Christian and Jew] wanted the land without the people who inhabited it, the major policies and laws of the state of Israel were designed to strip Palestinians of their land”²⁰ bringing to reality a Zionist slogan, “a land without people for a people without a land.” [Map 4]

In December 1987, the first Palestinian Intifada [Uprising] took place. For the most part a non-violent protest, it was met with a brutal response. Mitri Raheb indicates that this was the moment that began to change international attitudes to the 1967 war that saw Israel as tiny David defeating Goliath. Seen on TV screens worldwide, one of the prominent pictures of the Palestinian uprising showed “a young Palestinian boy with a stone in his hand facing the latest model of Israeli military tank.”²¹

The intifada was an intelligence surprise for the Israelis, and even when it persisted, Israeli security personnel and decision makers failed to grasp its significance. “Contrary to the claim by the government of Yitzhak Shamir—that the PLO initiated the intifada – it was a spontaneous outburst caused by economic, social and national factors alike.

To this day there is no good explanation for the intifada’s vitality and survivability in the face of the price it exacted from the Palestinians in human life and material resources. Financial aid from the Arab states to the



One of the over 500 Israeli Checkpoints

All photos have been provided by the author or The Presbyterian Church in Canada and the Women's Missionary Society. They are from previous participants of study tours to the Middle East.

Palestinians was minimal and of secondary importance. It was mainly women's organizations, workers and students who preserved the revolutionary ardor and social solidarity.

The fomenters of the intifada represented a generation that grew up in the shadow of the Israeli occupation, with all its internal contradictions: between an "enlightened occupation" and threatening Jewish settlement. Some Palestinians adopted the idea of nonviolence, which guided the uprising in its initial stage, but this approach ultimately collapsed under the weight of the violence and counter violence [from Israel].

The popular character of the intifada generated unprecedented international sympathy for the Palestinians and their struggle against the Israeli occupation. This was the Palestinians' "finest hour" and enabled them to add a creative new chapter to the epic of their national struggle."²²

A second Intifada occurred in 2000, provoked by a number of factors similar to the first uprising: "excessive use of brutal force by the occupiers, increased taxation, or religious insult", as well as the failure of the Oslo Accords to make any progress toward peace.²³ While the response of the majority of Palestinians was to throw stones at the occupying forces or to attack a soldier, armed guerilla fighters also emerged, fighters willing to die for the liberation of Palestine. It was during the second intifada that suicide bombing emerged as a response to the deaths of Palestinians at the hands of the Israeli military.

Although the Palestinian Christians diffused a movement to form an armed Christian resistance,²⁴ an increasing number of Palestinians saw suicide attacks as the only resistance available to them given the internationally well financed and superior Israeli army. While some saw the attacks as a way of responding to their suffering under occupation, others wanted to avenge the large number



of Palestinian civilian deaths at the hands of the Israeli army. At the beginning of 2005, when the Palestinian and Israeli leaders declared a ceasefire after four years of the Palestinian intifada or uprising, the leading Palestinian militant group Hamas declared it would “respect calm” - though it reserved the right to respond to Israeli attacks.

Other groups followed suit.²⁵

So much more could be said about the history of Palestine/Israel between 1947 and 2005.

Needless to say in the years that have followed it is clear that the Nakba did not end in 1949 but continues to this day in the increasing number of illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank, the ongoing destruction of Palestinian homes, the revocation of their residency rights and deportations. Study 4 will focus on the present situation and the anguished cry of Palestinian Christians to us, Christians in Canada, and to those in the rest of the world.

Additional Reflection:

Psalm 122:6–9

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: “May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers.” For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, “Peace be within you.” For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good. (NRSV)



Photo: Haifa – a city where Israelis and Arabs live together in peaceful coexistence.

Matthew 23:37–39

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you, desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”(NRSV)

1. In light of the history described discuss the scripture passages above. What do they suggest to those of us who seek to follow Christ?

2. If possible, watch the movie *The Gatekeepers*.

The Gatekeepers tells the story of the Shin Bet, perhaps the most active and certainly the most secretive of Israel’s security forces, and it tells it from the perspectives of its leaders who, more than anyone, received the trust of the country’s political elites. In a series of candid interviews, they talk openly about the major events that marked their tenures. At their most intimate, six former heads of the Shin Bet muse publicly about the morality of torture and terrorism, arrests and assassinations. The citizens they swore to protect may have been safer as a result of their actions, but was the country any closer to peace? <http://www.thegatekeepersfilm.com/the-film.html>

3. Explore further some of the websites referred to in this study. How has your understanding of the history of the land of Palestine been impacted by what you have seen and read?



¹ Naim Ateek, et al., *The Bible* p. 301. For more detail on Sabeel see footnote 1, study 1.

² Thomas Waskow, "Twice Promised Land," *Tikkun*, vol. 5, No. 5. The editor of *Tikkun* is Rabbi Michael Lerner. Its editorial policy is set out in the following way: "Tikkun has taken the view that Jewish morality and prophetic tradition require a challenge to all governments, including that of Israel, to live by the highest ethical standards. The more Israel rejects Jewish morality and the Torah's injunction to "love the stranger" in its treatment of the Palestinians, the more it loses the support of the most ethically sensitive people in the world and of many younger Jews in the diaspora. We are committed to full and complete reconciliation between Israel and the Palestinian people within the context of social justice for the Palestinians and security for Israel. Our view is that solutions to intractable conflicts begin as increasing numbers on each side can empathize with and tell the other side's story. That is an exceptionally hard thing to do in this case, given the traumas both Jews and Palestinians have suffered, but we believe it is possible." <http://www.tikkun.org/nextgen/healing-israel-palestine>.

³ Naim Stifan Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), p. 37-38⁴ Michael Prior, ed., *Speaking the Truth: Zionism, Israel and Occupation* (Northampton, Mass., Olive Branch Press, 2005), p. 193

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Partition_Plan_for_Palestine.

⁵ <https://imeu.org/article/quick-facts-the-palestinian-nakba>.

⁶ <https://imeu.org/article/quick-facts-the-palestinian-nakba>.

- ⁷ Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), p. 1-4.
- ⁸ Ilan Pappé, *Ethnic Cleansing* p. 90.
- ⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Stern-Gang>
- ¹⁰ <https://www.washingtonreport.me/2006-may-june/hamas-a-pale-image-of-the-jewish-irgun-and-lehi-gangs.html>
- ¹¹ Using money donated by the Jewish National Fund (Canada), the park almost completely obscures the fact that there ever were Arab villages in the area. In recognition of Canada's contribution, the park was named "Canada Park", and the names of many Canadian donors appear on a large monument in the park. A powerful video entitled "Canada Park; Park with No Peace" was made by the CBC's "Fifth Estate" in 1991. It can be found in the CBC Fifth Estate archives.
- ¹² Zochrot ("remembering" in Hebrew) is an Israeli NGO working since 2002 to promote acknowledgement and accountability for the ongoing injustices of the Nakba and the reconceptualization of the Return as the imperative redress of the Nakba and a chance for a better life for all the country's inhabitants. <http://zochrot.org/en/content/17>
- ¹³ Read more: <https://electronicintifada.net/content/canada-park-and-israeli-memoricide/8126>
- ¹⁴ Donald H. Akenson, *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 228.
- ¹⁵ Raheb, Faith, p. 16. One of the contributors in Prior, *Speaking*, p. 195 states that Israel is the fourth largest military power in the world.
- ¹⁶ Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006), p. 237.
- ¹⁷ For example, the Madrid Conference (1991)
- ¹⁸ Donald Neff, Former Time Magazine Bureau Chief, *Israel, Fifty Years of Israel*, Originally printed in the Washington Report in March 1993.
- ¹⁹ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/08/israeli-settlement-expansion-war-mind-160815124618735.html> - the story of one Palestinian man's struggle to keep his land.
- ²⁰ Ateek, Palestinian Christian, p. 56.
- ²¹ Raheb, Faith, p. 30.
- ²² <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/the-first-intifada-how-the-arab-israeli-conflict-was-transformed.premium-1.484677>; excerpts from an article by Prof. Avraham Sela, a senior lecturer in the Department of International Relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and a research fellow of the university's Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace.
- ²³ Raheb, Faith, p. 75.
- ²⁴ Ateek, Palestinian Christian, p. 7.
- ²⁵ Information in this paragraph is taken from: ews.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3256858.stm