

Who Are the Palestinians?

By Michael M. Kerns

The Battle for the Land of Israel

So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth (Genesis 11:8, 9).

When God dispersed people throughout the world, an ongoing pattern emerged. People settled on lands where other later migrants pushed them out of their land and inhabited it as their own land. Strong nations might push out weaker ones and rise as empires like Assyria, Greece, and Rome. A similar pattern took place in America as settlers pushed indigenous tribes out of their land. Immigrants also moved beyond settled land and established their own dominance in the newly settled land.

Palestinians claim that the Jews have pushed them out of the land of Israel, and they want it back—the Jews stand in their way. Arabs who now live or have lived in the land of Israel without any other national identity call themselves “Palestinians.” For example, those of Jordanian or Syrian heritage do not call themselves Palestinians, although they identify as Arabs and Muslims. Palestinians want this land that borders Lebanon to the north, Syria to the northeast, east and southeast by Jordan, southwest by Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea to the west. How did certain Arabs come to identify as Palestinian?

The Expulsion of the Jews from their Promised Land of Israel

After the last Jewish revolt in A.D. 132, the Roman Emperor Hadrian changed the name “Judaea,” to “Syria Palaestina.” Historians debate the reason for that change from Judea to Palestine. Some conclude that he hated the Jews and wanted to identify them with the Philistines, the ancient and pagan enemy of the Jews. [israeldiaries.com/why-did-rome-really-name-palestine-palestine/] Others argue that he wanted to change the region from a dependent kingdom to a province where a Roman governor and not a Jew ruled. [talesoftimesforgotten.com/2023/10/23/no-the-roman-emperor-hadrian-didnt-invent-palestine/]

In his attempt to Romanize Judea, Hadrian went beyond the cosmetic renaming of Judea and Jerusalem. He banned the teaching of Torah, replaced synagogues with Roman temples, enslaved Jewish war prisoners, expelled the Jews from Palestine and banned them from returning. Prominent rabbis took their lives. [britannica.com/story/what-was-hadrians-relationship-with-his-jewish-subjects] After that date, the Jews no longer controlled their land and they no longer lived in that land. Except for some eighty years (1099-1187) when the Crusaders occupied Palestine, Muslims controlled the land from A.D. 635 until 1918.

The British Control of the Land of Palestine

In 1915, the British covertly armed Sharif Hussein ibn Ali to lead his Arab followers of various tribes in Palestine to overthrow the Ottoman Empire, although both Arabs and Turks worshiped as Muslims. [nzhistory.govt.nz/war/ottoman-empire/rise-of-arab-nationalism] As the Ottoman Empire collapsed after World War I, the British Prime Minister Lloyd had already approved the Balfour Declaration on November 2, 1917. “It represented a formal pledge of the British government to the Jewish people, represented by the Zionist movement.” [Caroline B. Glick, “The Israeli Solution: A One-State Plan for Peace in the Middle East, Crown, NY, 2014, P.] Later in 1920, the League of Nations gave Great Britain a “dual mandate” and a “dual obligation” to provide for both Arabs and Jews in Palestine. [encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/british_mandate] The phrase “two state solution” soon replaced the idea of a dual obligation. This plan of the impotent League of Nations and the collapsing British Empire changed when the Zionists brought settlers to the land in 1948.

Israel Reclaims the Land of Palestine

The 20th century witnessed some remarkable events like the Great Depression, World War II, Cold War, Vietnam War, collapse of the Soviet Union, and the Civil Rights Movement. One event stands out in world politics: the arrival of the Jews in 1948 to re-establish Israel in the land. Few Jews had lived in the land of Palestine for twelve centuries. “On May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion, the head of the Jewish Agency, proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel. U.S. President Harry S. Truman recognized the new nation on the same day.” [history.com/this-day-in-history/state-of-israel-proclaimed]

As far back as September 1978, American President Carter, Egyptian President Sadat, and Israeli Prime Minister Begin signed the Camp David Accord for peace between the two nations. As a result, Israel gave up more rights and more land and Anwar el-Sadat was assassinated. For over forty-five years, seven more American presidents attempted to bring peace to the Middle East with a variety of agreements with Israel and her neighbors. The most recent one, the Abraham Accords, in 2020, sought to establish “diplomatic relations between Israel and its neighbors in the region.” [state.gov/the-abraham-accords]

Despite all these agreements, Israel has fought four major conflicts from Muslim nations in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973; it continues to face terrorism. Almost 2000 Israelis have been murdered and many more injured since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1994. [jewishvirtuallibrary.org/comprehensive-listing-of-terrorism-victims-in-israel]

The Palestinian Authority Gets the Land of the West Bank and Gaza

The Oslo Accords mandated the PA (Palestinian Authority) to “assume governing responsibilities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip over a five-year period. [history.state.gov/milestones/1993-2000/oslo] On July 1, 1994, Yasir Arafat entered Gaza as the head of the PA, the new name for the Palestinian “state.” Egyptian-born Yasir Arafat (1929-2004) began his career of terrorism toward Israel as a teenager. He led Fatah, one of many terrorist groups. Following Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, Arafat became the leader of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization), an umbrella organization for Palestinian guerrilla groups. [nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1994/Arafat/facts] The Gaza-Jericho Agreement of May 1994 (a follow-up to the Oslo Agreement) gave the PLO control of the Gaza Strip and Jericho.

Palestinian Leaders Act to Destroy Israel

Arafat and many others in the PA continue to act to destroy Israel. Since 1964, the name “Palestine” has been associated with the Palestine Liberation Organization, whose charter claims, in Article 23, the right “to liberate Palestine in accordance with the fundamental law of this Organization.” For the PLO, all the Land of Israel is Palestine. [jpost.com/opinion/article-752532] The Palestinians intend to rewrite history, to deny the Jews their Biblical claim to the land as given to them by God Himself over 4000 years ago. During the Camp David Summit, Arafat told President Clinton that no Jewish Temple ever existed in Jerusalem. [Caroline B. Glick, “The Israeli Solution: A One-State Plan for Peace in the Middle East, Crown, NY, 2014, P. 181] At this point in time, the international community outside of the Mid-East opposes the terrorist acts of Arafat’s successors like Mahmoud Abbas, disputed President of the PA.

Israel faces many individual terrorists but two organized groups of Palestinians who want to eliminate the Jews and regain the land take prominence: Hamas and Hezbollah. “Hamas is an Islamist militant movement and one of the Palestinian territories’ two major political parties. It governs more than two million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip...” [cfr.org/backgrounder/what-hamas] It acts as the terrorist arm of the Muslim Brotherhood. Hezbollah (Party of God) in Lebanon has developed into a “heavily non-state actor.” “Fostered by Iran, it emerged after Israel’s 1982 invasion and amid the chaos of the Lebanese civil war, which broke out in 1975.” [wilsoncenter.org/article/hezbollahs-record-war-politics] Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) arms, trains and funds the terrorist group. [washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/hezbollah-finances-funding-party-god]

Iran also boldly proclaimed its help for Palestinians when they said that “security officials helped plan Hamas’ Saturday [October 7, 2023] surprise attack on Israel and gave the green light for the assault at a meeting in Beirut last Monday, according to senior members of Hamas and Hezbollah, another Iran-backed militant group.” [wsj.com/world/middle-east/iran-israel-hamas-strike-planning-bbe07b25]

Jews, Not Palestinians, Have Rights to the Land

Israel owns the land, according to the international community. “Under international law, Israel has the strongest claim to sovereignty over the areas [of Judea and Samaria] . . . Judea and Samaria—as well as Jerusalem—are the cradle of Jewish civilization.” [Caroline B. Glick, “The Israeli Solution: A One-State Plan for Peace in the Middle East, Crown, NY, 2014, Loc 135]

Israel owns the land according to the divine decree. After the scattering of the nations from the Tower of Babel, God chose the man Abraham to receive His blessings. The Lord God gave the land to Abraham and his offspring. He restated the Abrahamic Covenant to Jacob, the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham.

And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 28:13, 14).

The Issue of the Land Masks the True Conflict

Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich defined the Palestinians as Arabs who want to continue to make war against the Jews.

I think that we’ve had an invented Palestinian people who are in fact Arabs and who were historically part of the Arab community. And they had a chance to go many places, and for a variety of political reasons we have sustained this war against Israel now since the 1940s, and it’s tragic. [theguardian.com/world/2011/dec/10/palestinians-invented-people-newt-gingrich]

Since the October 7, 2023, terrorist attack on Israel, Anti-Semite, pro-Palestinian university students have protested on campuses throughout America. They take the view and the slogan of socialists that the Jews have pushed the rightful owners out of the land. [wsj.com/world/middle-east/campus-radicals-and-leftist-groups-have-embraced-the-deadly-idea-of-settler-colonialism-b8e995be?mod=Searchresults_pos1&page=1]

Various chapters of the Democratic Socialists of America have decried “settler-colonial, Zionist apartheid” and called to “decolonize Palestine—from the river to the sea,” a slogan that, by invoking the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, calls for the elimination of the state of Israel.

Not all Palestinians want to destroy Jews. Some even claim to be Christians. “Palestinian Christians make up about 2% or less of the Palestinian population in the occupied territories, while they may comprise as much as 10% of the Palestinian people worldwide.” [palestineportal.org/learn-teach/israelpalestine-the-basics/palestinian-christians/] These Palestinian Christians and others have bought the deceptive lie that terrorism seeks to take back the land. They fail in their naivety to frame the terrorism as a war of Muslims who follow Allah against the Jews to whom God gave His Word (Romans 3:2).

Arab terrorist organizations clearly consider the war with Israel as a religious conflict. While they publicly argue that they want the land because they have a right to the land, these Palestinian Islamists want more than the land. They want to eliminate the Jews as a race. Note the quote below from a sermon

of ‘Atallah Abu Al-Subh, former Hamas minister of culture, which aired on *Al-Aqsa TV*, April 8, 2011 [adl.org/resources/news/hamas-their-own-words]:

The Jews are the most despicable and contemptible nation to crawl upon the face of the Earth because they have displayed hostility to Allah. . . . Allah will kill the Jews in the hell of the world to come, just like they killed the believers in the hell of this world.

As far back as 2000, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu commented on the Palestinian goal when Israel negotiated with Yasir Arafat. “He [Arafat] could no more make a final peace with Israel than he could fly to the moon. After all, the entire Palestinian national movement, which he had led for decades, was premised on having Israel disappear.” [Benjamin Netanyahu, “Bibi, My Story,” Threshold Books, 2022, p. 311]

The Land Will Someday Have Peace

Until Jesus, the Prince of Peace, returns, men will be at war with one another. In the meantime, as Israel defends itself, what could we do?

We could pray for peace in Israel.

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! “May they be secure who love you!
Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!” (Psalm 122:6, 7)*

We could pray for leaders in authority to bring about peace.

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way (1 Timothy 2:1, 2)

We could pray for redemption of the people of Israel.

And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins” (Romans 11:26-27)

We could pray for His return.

He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.” (Revelation 22:20).