

THE BALFOUR DECLARATION ... ONE HUNDRED YEARS ON!

It's so easy to keep going through life and miss what is happening around us for we are living in very exciting times ... Last Tuesday was the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther nailing the 95 Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church, starting the Protestant Reformation. Today (2nd November) is the centenary of the Balfour Declaration which paved the way for the re-establishment of the nation of Israel. Arthur James Balfour was the Foreign Secretary who wrote to Lord Rothschild, the Head of the British Zionist Organisation, "Dear Lord Rothschild, I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet. His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object."

It led to the Jews returning to their land in May 1948 ... the land which had been theirs prior to King Nebuchadnezzar taking them into exile in 586 BC. ... Since 586, it has had to endure great opposition, both politically and militarily, at the hands of invading nations. Today, it is despised by all its neighbours, aided by many in the West. ... What is the true story, though? ... To whom does the land really belong? ... Even one hundred years after the Balfour Declaration, why do some celebrate it, while others despise what it introduced?

In the Bible, the people and the land are the focus of the Lord's attention, therefore, I believe they ought to be our focus too. The land has a history with which no other country is privileged. Out of all the countries in the world, it was where God sent His Son to dwell.

You will find the land referred to as 'Palestine' four times in the Bible,

1. **Ex. 15:14** The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina.
2. **Is. 14:29** Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina
3. **Is. 14:31** Howl, O gate; cry, O city; thou, whole Palestina, art dissolved
4. **Joel 3:4** Yea, and what have ye to do with me, O Tyre, and Zidon, and all the coasts of Palestine?

The name 'Palestine' originates with Herodotus, an ancient Greek historian who lived during the fifth century before Christ. He described the area from Sinai in the south to the mountains of Lebanon in the north and from the Mediterranean Sea on the west to the Arabian Peninsula on the east as 'Palestina'.

The area had been inhabited by people who had come from the surrounding countries and nations, especially from Cyprus, and particularly Crete, - they first *invaded* the land, as God explains, [Amos 9:7](#) *Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt? and the Philistines from Caphtor [Crete]?*

Then, shortly after 2,000 B.C. a migrating people from Mesopotamia, under the leadership of Abraham, - a people known as the Hebrews, - began to enter the country of Canaan, as Palestine was then called. These descendants of Abraham remained in the land until famine forced them, - under Jacob, - to migrate to Egypt. ... After 1,200 B.C. the Hebrews, - led by Moses and Joshua, - returned from bondage in Egypt to conquer much of the area held by the local Philistine tribes in Canaan. After they had settled, and following the period of the Judges, the people of Israel wanted a king and the Kingdom consisting of the twelve tribes of Israel was established under Saul, c. 1,000 B.C. Under their second king, David, Jerusalem became the capital and the Temple was built during Solomon's reign, - that's 3000 years ago. ... Very few people have such a long claim to land as the Israelites do! ... They called their country *Israel*, after the father of the twelve tribes.

However, after 600 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians invaded the region and ruled the area, they were followed by the Medo-Persians and then the Greeks. From 63 B.C. to c. 630 A.D. Palestine was part of the Roman Empire, in particular, the Byzantine Empire. The most important development in the earlier days of this period was the birth and spread of Christianity.

Great changes followed shortly after 630 A.D. when the invading armies of Islam swept through the region, conquered the land and its capital. Jerusalem was ruled by Muslims. As a result, from 630 A.D. to the present day most of the people in the region are Arab and Muslim. (Note, not all Arabs are Muslim. Some Arabs are Christian). ... This Muslim influence was facilitated by the Muslim Ottoman Empire which was founded in Turkey in 1299, but dissolved 1st November 1922.

Throughout this long period though, even when the land was being ruled by foreign nations, many Jews believed God would one day restore it to them. Then, in the late 19th century a movement known as 'aliyah' began which advocated the Jews should return to the land. This progressed into the early 20th century, and was further inspired by the Balfour Declaration. At last, the Jewish aspiration for their homeland to be restored to them was in sight. Yes, there was

opposition from the intransigent Arabs who rejected a compromise policy which would have allowed them to share the land with the Jews, but nothing less than everything was acceptable to the Arabs ... and the talks about an alliance fell.

Their case was further damaged when the Ottoman Empire sided with Germany during World War I. After its defeat, most of its territories were divided, and from the end of World War I until after World War II, the British ruled Palestine, - the area which is now Israel and Jordan, - under a mandate from the League of Nations. This mandate concluded with the British relinquishing the land, and on May 14th, 1948, the Jewish state of Israel was re-established. Almost immediately it was invaded by armies of neighbouring Arab countries (the first Arab-Israeli war). Much to the consternation of the Arabs, when fighting ended in 1949 Israel had not only successfully defended itself, but had won additional territory. There continued to be Arab-Israeli wars in 1956, 1967 and 1973. During the 1967 Six-Day War Israel occupied the West Bank, including the Old City of Jerusalem. ... What right do they have to be there? ... Let's examine it from the Bible's perspective, from God's point of view.

In Gen. 12, *He* called Abram from out of Ur of the Chaldees, beside the Tigris and the Euphrates, to a country God would give to him and his offspring (12:7). God brought Abram to Canaan, but, because of famine Abram went to Egypt, where he became the master of a slave girl, Hagar. They had a son called Ishmael, who became the father of the Arab people. ... Abraham then had a son with Sarah, - the son God had previously promised, - and he became the father of the Israelites, the Jews ... And it was Isaac's descendants who were the people, - the nation, - God had separated from all others to institute His covenants, one of which was to possess the land of Canaan, which would be later renamed Israel. ... That was God's promise to Abraham's seed.

This giving of the land took place during Joshua's leadership, following the children of Israel's crossing of the River Jordan, from the Sinai Desert. They took the land (Joshua 3:13ff.), - the land God had promised them, - and it was apportioned as described in Joshua 13-22.

Then, after having been ruled by Judges, the people wanted a king like the other nations. God allowed it, and Saul was crowned. After Saul's death, David became king, and he established his hold on the land by constantly defeating the Philistines. ... God made it very clear the Israelites were defending their own country, in which He had settled them.

As the monarchy descended into apostasy and unfaithfulness towards God, the prophets were sent to warn the people of impending judgment if they did not repent. They would not repent, so He judged them by having them carried into captivity, and being scattered across the nations. However, because of His covenant with Abraham, God did not abandon Israel but promised He would ultimately return them to their own country, for example, **Ezek. 20:40** For in mine holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve me: there will I accept them, and there will I require your offerings, and the firstfruits of your oblations, with all your holy things. **41** I will accept you with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen. **42** And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to your fathers. **43** And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed. **44** And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have wrought with you for my name's sake, not according to your wicked ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O ye house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel prophesied about a great ‘loathing’ of the evil they have done against God, in other words, they will repent ... and God will have the glory when the nations witness their repentance, **Zeph. 3:20** At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the Lord.

And what Zechariah has prophesied will happen is this, **Zech. 12:10** And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. ... Jesus the Messiah will return, and they will instantly acknowledge Him as Saviour, **Zech. 13:1** In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness ... **9** And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.

From that time, - after the land is restored to Israel completely, and the remnant of the Jews recognise Jesus as Messiah, - Isaiah (ch. 2) and Micah both are given a vision of the future and prophesy, **Micah 4:1** in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established *in the top of the mountains*, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. **2** And

many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ³ And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. ⁴ But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it.

God has a plan He is working through, and included in that plan was the declaration initiated on 2nd November 1917 when the commitment to give the Jews back their land came to fruition on 14th May, 1948, when, - as God had promised, - a nation was brought forth, **Is. 66:8** Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children. ... **Ezek. 37:21** Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: ²² And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; ... and there is more, for God's promise includes a very special appointment which is yet to take place ... and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all. ... And when the King comes to rule over them, ²³ Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God. ²⁴ And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. ²⁵ And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever. ²⁶ Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. ²⁷ My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ²⁸ And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore. ... That is what God promises ... and everything He promises He brings to pass! He has said, **Zech. 1:14** I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. ... ¹⁶ Therefore thus saith the LORD; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it, saith the LORD of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem. ¹⁷ ... the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem.

This is only a *brief* and very sketchy overview, but I trust it outlines what God is doing today in that small portion of land He promised to His people through Abraham. ... His promises are coming true in our times! Every one of them will come to pass, as He has said. ... As for us Christians, with the Bible in our hand, we are to be like the watchmen in the tower ... and watch how He is working everything into place. Despite the direction the world is taking, God is shaping it all, **Eph. 1:5** according to the good pleasure of his will ... ⁹ ... which he hath purposed in himself.

And there is something else He calls us to do, - we have to watch, and we also have to pray, **Ps. 122:6** Pray for the peace of Jerusalem ... not a political peace which might only last for a short time, but the peace which will come when Jesus returns ... and here is a promise of blessing, **Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee**. There is a prayer, and a promise! There is coming a day when only the people of God will ascend into Jerusalem, - made out of the saved Jews and the Gentiles who have been grafted in, all saved by God's grace, - and they will be singing, **Ps. 122:1** I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD. ² Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem ... ⁴ Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the LORD. ⁵ For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David. ... The city will no longer be divided into east and west. There won't be any golden-domed mosque ... instead, sang the psalmist in great anticipation, **Ps. 146:10** The LORD shall reign for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Praise ye the LORD.