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THE BIBLICAL BASES OF ZIONIST COLONIALISM

H. S. HADDAD*

1. THEOPOLITICS OF ISRAEL

The ideals, goals, strategy, and tactics of Jewish settlement in Palestine may agree in some respects with those of settler regimes elsewhere. But there is a basic difference. Unlike other settler regimes Israel claims to be a return. According to Zionists and Israelis the Jewish state is not an entirely new venture, but the restoration of a state that was temporarily disrupted.

European colonialism and ethnic national liberation movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries no doubt stimulated feelings of nationalism among European Jews and led to the birth of organized political Zionism. But Jewish nationalism — and its nemesis, anti-Semitism — existed long before the nineteenth century and the era of European colonialism. The Jewish phrase "Next Year in Jerusalem" is a witness to the existence, throughout the centuries of the European diaspora, of this nationalism which implied, from its inception, the colonization of Palestine. The roots of Zionism, therefore, transcend both Europe and the nineteenth century. Messianic movements in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries attempted a "return" to Palestine to recreate a Jewish Commonwealth in the Promised Land. The "Return to Zion" was even the theme of the Jews in Babylon as far back as the sixth century B.C.

European nationalism and colonialism of the past century left their mark more on the methods and tactics than on the substance of Zionism. Although modern political Zionism attempted, at times, to purge traditional Jewish Messianic nationalism of its miraculous, mystical and eschatological elements by stressing mostly its political and social aspects, the fact remains that it capitalized on the romantico-religious drive among

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the Diaspora Jews to achieve its political aims. The Zionist movement remains firmly anchored on the basic principle of the exclusive right of the Jews to Palestine that is found in the Torah and in other Jewish religious literature. Zionists who are not religious, in the sense of following the ritual practices of Judaism, are still biblical in their basic convictions in, and practical application of the ancient particularism of the Torah and the other books of the Old Testament. They are biblical in putting their national goals on a level that goes beyond historical, humanistic or moral considerations.

The Bible (the Old Testament according to Christian classification) is the only record available of the ancient Jewish state, its origin and ideology as well as its prophetic and eschatological destiny. This collection of myths, legends, historical narratives, poems, prophetic and apocalyptic pronouncements is the primary reference for the beliefs, conditions and attitudes that produced Zionism and eventually led to the occupation and transformation of Palestine. We can summarize these beliefs, based on the Bible, as follows.

1. The Jews are a separate and exclusive people chosen by God to fulfil a destiny. The Jews of the twentieth century have inherited the covenant of divine election and historical destiny from the Hebrew tribes that existed more than 3000 years ago.

2. The covenant included a definite ownership of the Land of Canaan (Palestine) as patrimony of the Israelites and their descendants forever. By no name, and under no other conditions, can any other people lay a rightful claim to that land.

3. The occupation and settlement of this land is a duty placed collectively on the Jews to establish a state for the Jews. The purity of the Jewishness of the land is derived from a divine command and is thus a sacred mission.

Accordingly, settling in Palestine, in addition to its economic and political motivations, acquires a romantic and mythical character. That the Bible is at the root of Zionism is recognized by religious, secular, non-observant, and agnostic Zionists. Thus Moses Hess, who preceded Herzl and who is considered to be one of the fathers of the Zionist movement, recognized and preached the principle of interdependence of religion and nationalism in Jewish life. To him Jewish religion was, above all, Jewish nationalism.1 Ben-Gurion was often biblical in his writings and speeches, calling the Bible the “sacrosanct title-deed to Palestine” for the Jewish people “with a genealogy of

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3500 years.” Addressing an ideological conference in Jerusalem in 1953, he suggested that “all sections regard the return to Israel as a messianic movement fulfilling the mission of Israel’s Hebrew prophets.”

The Bible, which has been generally considered as a holy book whose basic tenets and whose historical contents are not commonly challenged by Christians and Jews, is usually referred to as the Jewish national record. As a “sacrosanct title-deed to Palestine,” it has caused a fossilization of history in Zionist thinking. Thus, Israel of the twentieth century is not, according to this thinking, a colonial venture similar to Rhodesia and South Africa, but the 3000-years old biblical Israel reborn. Modern Jews, accordingly, are the direct descendants of the ancient Israelites, hence the only possible citizens of the Land of Palestine.

Abba Eban, in his popularized history of the Jews, brings out the concept of this unique history of the Chosen:

The utter singularity of the Jewish history, its rebellion against all historic laws, its total recalcitrance to any comparative system of research, have all been brought home to me at every stage.... There is no other modern nation whose motives of existence and action require such frequent reference to distant days.

Eban’s reference to distant days means the Bible. The motives of Israel’s existence as well as its action, that is, its policy of land seizure, its treatment of the Palestinians, its policy toward its neighbours, and its plans and goals are all shaped considerably by relevant biblical literature. “The awareness of the relevance of the Bible to present-day life permeates the schools of all sections in Israel and moulds their thought and expression.... The Bible represents the history and the thought of the biblical period with which modern Israel feels a close affinity.”

While Zionist thinkers also attempt to present Jewish nationalism as a modern movement based on conditions present in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the fact remains that, ideologically, ethnically and territorially this modern movement is primarily based on biblical Israel. The name “Zion” focuses on the territorial definition in the Bible. The name “Israel”

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5 Bentwich, op. cit., p. 76.
reflects the intertwining of racial and territorial considerations found in the Bible, in traditional Jewish beliefs, and in rabbinical literature. Consequently, when Zionists speak of their historic right to Palestine, they refer to a history and to a historical philosophy found in the Bible and the rabbinical literature. To deny the "historic right" of the Jews to Palestine is to challenge the scriptures. This is an article of faith to some Jews, but it also becomes a very effective public relations tool to influence the Christian world.⁶

To advocates of Jewish nationalism the books of the Bible (with the exception of the wisdom literature that forms a small part of the whole) contain the necessary references to the ethnic and territorial structure of Israel. The five books of the Torah (the Pentateuch), the most revered part of the Bible to most Jews, are concerned with the origin and conditions of the "Covenant" which establishes Israel as the "Chosen People" and the Land of Canaan as the "Promised Land." The sacralization of the state and of the people makes the conquest of Canaan a religious duty. The law in the Torah is interpreted as a sign of covenant between Jehovah and Israel. The Canaanites, being outside the covenant, could not be assimilated into the law or into Israel. As a matter of fact, the complete eviction and extermination of the Canaanites is strongly recommended, as we shall see presently.

The historical books relate the attempt of the Hebrew tribes to establish their "first commonwealth." The highest point of this ancient history, according to the biblical account, is the Kingdom of David and Solomon. It became a model and ideal of later Jewish nationalism.

The prophetic books of the Bible are primarily a response to the crisis of Israel unfulfilled. The destruction of the Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians, the impending danger to the Kingdom of Judah, and the subsequent Babylonian captivity all required an explanation as to why the covenant was not fulfilled. To deal with this question the prophets reproach Israel for being unfaithful to the covenant, primarily by "following after foreign gods." But they also offer hope that Jehovah, who is ever faithful to His promises, will one day redeem the people of Israel, will bring them back to the Promised Land, will make them a great nation, and will frustrate their enemies.

Thus the Torah sets down the divine basis of the exclusivist choice of Israel and its title-deed to Palestine. The historical books record the attempts to bring about the fulfilment of the Jewish state as ordained by divine command. The Prophets rationalized the failure of this endeavour and projected its

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fulfilment into a future date. Accordingly, the three pillars of Zionism are found in (1) the covenant of divine election and the title-deed to Palestine, (2) the historical precedents of the Jewish state, and (3) the realization and fulfilment of the prophecies. Calling Zionist colonization of Palestine aliyah ("return") is a testimony to the primacy of the Bible to Zionism and to Israel. Jewish nationalism and exclusivism are the explicit concern of a profusion of texts in the Bible. For example, from Isaiah, the greatest of Israel’s prophets, we have predictions about the future of Jerusalem and Israel which have a topical appearance today (when the Israeli economy depends upon labour from conquered Arab territories).

Foreigners shall rebuild your walls and their kings shall be your servants... For the nation and kingdom which refuses to serve you shall perish ... the few shall become ten thousand, the little nation great. I am the Lord: soon, in the fullness of time, I will bring this to pass. (Isaiah 60: 10, 12, 22). Foreigners shall serve as shepherds of your flocks, and aliens shall till your land and tend your vines; but you shall be called priests of the Lord and be named ministers of our God; you shall enjoy the wealth of other nations and be furnished with their riches. (Isaiah 61: 5, 6) 7

The biblical spirit of exclusivism was well expressed by Ben Gurion when, addressing an international conference, he declared: “The Jewish vision of redemption has two aspects: the ingathering of exiles and the continuation of the Jewish people in its land as a chosen people, and as a light to the nations.” 8

This vision, of course, could only be realized by depriving the Palestinian Arabs of their right to their homeland.

Non-Zionist Jews who have spiritualized Judaism and the Bible beyond the level of ethnic nationalism have been powerless against the nationalism and exclusivism which the Bible contains. To sublimate a statement, even a biblical statement, is much more difficult a task than to believe it literally. Moreover, the poetic style of the prophets of the Bible, the most important basis of spiritualized, denationalized Judaism, is not immune from ultranationalistic exploitation, but is, in fact, a great source of Zionist enthusiasm. The nationalistic terminology of these writings lends itself readily to the nationalistic aspirations of Zionism.

7 All biblical quotations in this article are from The New English Bible (Oxford and Cambridge, 1970). Although the quotations are selective, the selection is abundantly available in the Bible.

Depoliticizing the scriptures when it comes to relating biblical material to Israel as a political entity has proved a most difficult task. American Reform rabbis, long before the establishment of the Zionist movement, decided at a conference held in Philadelphia in 1869 to take a bold step toward the spiritualization of the covenant. They declared that “the messianic aim of Israel is not the restoration of the old Jewish state under a descendant of David.” 9 Again, in 1885, they asserted: “We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community and, therefore, expect no return to Palestine.” 10

While this attitude is still prevalent among many Jews, a retreat from this position toward a more fundamentalist interpretation can be detected in American Reform Judaism. In 1937, when Zionism was capitalizing on the plight of the Jews in Nazi Germany, American Reform rabbis modified their stand on the separation between spiritual and political Israel: “We affirm the obligation of all Jews to aid in... upbuilding [of Palestine] as a Jewish homeland.” 11 A Reform rabbi, who asserted that he was non-Zionist (he objected to Ben-Gurion’s thesis that a good Jew should live only in Israel), was moved by the events of the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967 to declare: “The destiny of the household of Israel is a theopolitical matter now as it was in biblical times.” 12 He went on to describe the war that had just ended in theopolitical terms:

That Monday afternoon when the war began and no news of what was taking place came through, there was black anxiety throughout the Jewish world. The question was not military — who should win. It was theological. Would God abandon the people of Israel again and allow the citizens of the State of Israel to be slaughtered by Arab armies?... It was not, then, only the Israeli armies who were on trial that day but, in very earnest, God himself. 13

The ambivalent attitude of non-Israeli Jews stems from the intertwining, in the Bible, of the political and the spiritual in conceptualizing Israel. Thus Israel as a state is, according to this point of view, a matter of religious con-

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10 Ibid., pp. 120 ff.
13 Ibid.
cern to all Jews regardless of their place of birth or residence. The rabbi explained:

It is certain that neither of us [Jews and Israelis] realized how deeply we were still rooted in Jewish tradition until we all stood once again, so unexpectedly, before the Western Wall of the Temple in Jerusalem. Irony of ironies, it is that archaic symbol which, more than anything else, explains to agnostics and liberals, to secularists and the non-observant, who the people of Israel is. 14

Biblicism and archaism are distinguishing marks of Jewish settlement in Palestine, in spite of all the modern trappings of Israeli society, its industry and military establishment. All segments of Israeli society, and a large number of non-Israeli Jews, have fallen back upon biblicism in explaining and justifying Israel. Some extreme Israeli and Jewish thinking falls into the category of national atavism, calling for the restoration of the Temple, the adoption of the Mosaic Law in its entirety including the sacrifice, and the reestablishment of the Aaronic priesthood. The liberals, moved by humanitarian considerations, do recognize that the indigenous inhabitants of the land may have some rights. They do so, however, without relinquishing their basic belief in the exclusive historical rights of the Jews to the “Land of Israel” as defined in the Bible. Arie Eliav, considered a “liberal Zionist” because he speaks out for the rights of the Arabs in Israel, remains faithful to the biblical territorial definition of the Jewish state:

In stating [that the Arabs also have rights], I do not negate or detract one whit from the full historical rights of the Jews to the undivided Land of Israel — that is the Land of the Twelve Tribes. 15

Complete disregard for the human rights of others when it comes to the possession of the “holy land” is apparent in Ben-Gurion’s statement on the subject. The Zionist leader, in a biblical spirit, makes a distinction between human rights in general and the specific case of Zionism in claiming Palestine: “The rights to Palestine do not, as in other countries they do, belong to the existing settlers, whether they be Jews or Arabs. The crux is the Right of Return of Jewry Dispersed.” 16

This distinction between Israel and the rest of the world, between the rights of Israel and legal rights in general, is bolstered by the belief in the

14 Ibid., p. 109.
16 Ben Gurion, The Rebirth and Destiny of Israel, p. 38.
primacy of the Bible over human thinking, and the supra-rational concepts of the "Chosen People" and the "Promised Land." The Promise, the Choice, the Covenant are sacred, producing a sacred "historical right." Justice and conventional human rights are merely in the realm of the profane. The conquest of Canaan under Moses and Joshua, the attempt of Ezra and Nehemiah to establish a Jewish state within the Persian Empire, and the current Zionist colonization of Palestine, all fall in this category of supra-rational action sacralized beyond normal legal and moral considerations. Zionists may or may not be practising religious Jews, but a biblical attitude toward the state, the land and the people who should and should not live in it, has permeated their thought and action.

Abba Eban, a modern and "moderate" Zionist, in telling the history of "his people," makes no apology for the conquest of Canaan as related by the Bible. He states:

The Bible does not represent the Israelite entry into Canaan as a conquest by an alien people. The process is described as the return of a tribe who, in the distant but unforgettable past, had dwelled in the land. The people who now returned had never seen the Promised Land but they had dreamed of it for generations. This home had been vivid in their memory as the only place in which their divine mission could be fulfilled. 17

While this is a description of a biblical story that occurred more than three thousand years ago, Mr. Eban, undoubtedly, is drawing a parallel with the story of modern Israel. The Myth is legitimized as the basis of the historical and legal right of European Jews to Palestine. He is clearly making the point that Zionist Israel's occupation of Palestine is not a conquest by aliens. He alludes to the distant, but unforgettable past, to the now-returned, to the home vivid in the memory, and last but not least, to the divine mission that had to be fulfilled.

2. "The Holy Land"

On the question of land ownership, biblical literature is relatively clear. The territorial element of Zionism is the least ambiguous of all the issues that confront Jewish nationalism. While the question of peoplehood (who is a Jew?) may be open to complex biblical interpretations, and the problem of dealing with the indigenous population be subject to some moral considerations, the right to the land is so basic that it is hardly contested.

Although there are different delineations of the boundaries of the Promised Land in the Bible, the locus of Eretz Israel is clear and constant. Whether it is

17 Abba Eban, ibid., p. 17.
defined as "from Dan to Beersheba" and "from the desert to the sea," or, more often, from the Nile to the Euphrates, Jerusalem is the centre around which these circles of varying size are drawn.

Territoriality in the Bible is raised beyond political, economic, and strategic considerations. It is made a theological imperative. Abba Eban's statement, quoted above, reveals the romantico-religious basis of the conquest of Palestine, being the only place in which the divine mission of Israel can be fulfilled.

Under the influence of the Bible, Jerusalem has acquired an importance far beyond its reality. Nothing can equal the height of romantic and mystical attachment of the Jews in the "Diaspora" to a piece of real estate. Political Zionism had no alternative to Jerusalem and Palestine; no other territory proposed had the slightest chance of lasting acceptance.

The return to the land becomes, in the Bible, the ultimate sign of God's compassion toward the Jews, and the herald of the coming of the Golden Age:

When these things have befallen you, the blessing and the curse... if you turn back to Him... then the Lord will show you compassion and restore your fortune. He will gather you again from all the countries to which he has scattered you. Even though He were to banish you to the four corners of the world, the Lord God will gather you from there, from there he will bring you into the land which your forefathers occupied and you will occupy it again.... (Deut. 30: 1-3)

"God will not come to the heavenly Jerusalem," goes a rabbinical saying, "till Israel has come to the earthly Jerusalem." Without the land, the covenant will have no earthly basis and an important part of the Torah and the Prophets will become meaningless. Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, chief executive officer of the International Association of Conservative Rabbis, commenting on a

18 Judges 20:1; 2 Samuel 3:10; 1 Kings 4:25; 2 Chronicles 30:5.
19 Examples: Genesis 15:18; Deuteronomy 1:7; Numbers 34: 1-16, etc.
20 Jerusalem’s theopolitical place in Jewish lore is well documented in rabbinical writings. Rabbi Johannan said: “The Holy One, blessed be He, declared: ‘I shall not enter the Jerusalem which is above, until I enter the Jerusalem which is below’” (Taanit, 5a). A similar statement is found in the Zohar (Zohar iii, 15b). The Talmud expects a great and mighty Jerusalem in the future, both in spiritual and political terms. Jerusalem as such is a symbol of the restoration, and fulfilment of the dreams of greatness: “In the future the gates of Jerusalem will reach to Damascus" (Sifre Debarim, 1). Another statement goes to the ultimate: “Jerusalem in the future will become the capital of the world" (Shemot Rabbah, 23, 10). More precisely, another prediction states that “In the future Jerusalem will cover all Eretz Yisrael, and Eretz Yisrael will cover the entire world” (Yalkut to Isaiah, sec. 503). For more Talmudic and legendary material on Jerusalem, see: Louis I. Newman, ed., The Talmudic Anthology (New York: Behrman House, 1945), and Louis Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1910-39), passim.
proposed Vatican document concerning Judaism, welcomed in particular
the document's "recognition of the reality of the State of Israel," its assertion
that Jewish fidelity to the Old Covenant between God and the people of
Israel is "linked to the gift of land, which, in the Jewish soul, has endured as
the object of aspiration that Christians should strive to understand and re-
spect." In view of this attitude toward the land of Palestine, settlement in
it becomes an act of piety, of righteousness, of religious fulfilment, placed
above legal and humanistic considerations. Rabbi Nissim, Chief Rabbi of
Israel in 1968, made the following statement:

The Land of Israel was, with its borders, defined for us by Divine Prov-
dence. Thou shalt be, says the Almighty, and there it is; no power
on earth can alter that which was created by Him. In this connection
it is not a question of law or logic; neither is it a matter of human treatment
or that sort of thing. 22

According to the Bible, the promise of land to Israel is an irrevocable act
of God, not subject to abrogation for eternity. Even the heavy sins of the
people of Israel do not disqualify that claim.

It is not because of your merit or your integrity that you are entering the
land to occupy it; it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the
Lord God is driving them out before you and to fulfil the promise which
the Lord made to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Know then
that it is not because of any merit of yours that the Lord your God is
giving you this rich land to occupy; indeed you are a stubborn people
(Deut. 9: 5,6).

The supposed wickedness of the Canaanites, the original inhabitants of the
land, disqualified them from ownership.

Another text makes the land the property of Jehovah, which puts a re-
striction on its sale to "foreigners."

No land shall be sold outright, because the land is mine (says the Lord),
and you are coming into it as aliens and settlers (Lev. 25: 23). 23

This text is the basis of the mandate of the Jewish National Fund, which
is to purchase, develop, and settle lands as the "inalienable property of the
whole Jewish people," with restrictive covenants on the purchases so that

22 Reported in the Israeli daily Hayom, June 7, 1968.
23 Leviticus 25:23.
BIBLICAL BASES OF ZIONIST COLONIALISM

Arabs may not buy or rent them; and the acquisition of land in Palestine and prohibition of its resale has been Zionist policy ever since. As Ben-Gurion, in 1937, declared: "No Zionist can forego the smallest portion of the Land of Israel." 25

Israel's policy towards the Arab territories occupied in 1967 has reflected this outlook. It adheres very closely to the ancient biblical injunction against dispensing with property within the "Promised Land" or pulling out of any territory conquered by force of arms within the designated boundaries of Eretz Israel in conformity with a direct order from Jehovah: "Every place where you set foot is yours. I have given it to you, as I promised Moses" (Josh. 1: 3; 14: 9).

It is against this biblical background that one can see why Israel is quite categorical about not withdrawing from Jerusalem, and highly intrinsigent on the West Bank and the Golan Heights (they both fall within the biblical boundaries of the Promised Land), although it may reluctantly pull out partially, or even totally if forced, from Sinai which is not clearly included in the biblical promise. Certainly the great resistance of the Israeli government to pressures, even after the October War and disengagement with Egypt and Syria, to pull out of the occupied Arab lands cannot be explained in terms of strategic considerations and security alone. 26

On the geographical extent of the Promised Land, the Bible presents many versions, of which the most concise and least extensive is "from Dan to Beersheba." This corresponds roughly to the extent of Palestine carved from geographical Syria under the British Mandate. However, this definition of the land exists only in the historical books of the Bible, and is never expressed as a goal for the greater Israel as defined by the Covenant in the Torah. "From Dan to Beersheba" is rather a factual description of the extent of the settlement of the Israelite tribes during the time of the Judges (see Jud. 20: 1; 2 Sam. 3: 10; 17: 11; 24: 2; 1 Kings 4: 25; 1 Chr. 21: 2; 2 Chr. 30: 5). 27

The Deuteronomic ambitions for Israel are much more grandiose. The land to be occupied, according to the Torah, is so designated by direct orders from Yahweh:

25 Ben-Gurion, speech at the 20th Zionist Congress, Zurich, August 15, 1937.
26 See, e.g., the arguments of an Israeli military expert, Matityahu Peled, quoted in Journal of Palestine Studies, III, 3 (Spring, 1974), pp. 179-81.
The Lord our God spoke to us at Horeb and said, “You have stayed on this mountain long enough; go now, make for the hill country of the Amorites, and pass on to all their neighbours in the Negeb, and on the coast, in short, all Canaan and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the Euphrates. I have laid the land open before you; the land which the Lord swore to give to your forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and to their descendants after them” (Deut. 1: 6-8). Every place where you set the soles of your feet shall be yours. Your borders shall run from the wilderness to the Lebanon and from the River, the River Euphrates, to the Western Sea. (Deut. 11: 24)

The Deuteronomic plan of greater Israel came close to realization during the reign of David and Solomon, according to the biblical books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. The Kingdom of David and Solomon thus represents the golden age of Israel as a political entity for extreme Jewish nationalists. This was true of Ezra and Nehemiah in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. and finds expression in some Zionist plans in the twentieth century.

Herzl's idea of the geographical extent of the Jewish state was derived from the biblical romance of the Davidic Kingdom. It was a Christian Zionist, a fundamentalist minister, Rev. Hechler, Chaplain to the British Embassy in Vienna, who gave Herzl the biblical definitions of the boundaries of the prospective state. Herzl writes in his diaries:

Hechler unfolded his Palestine map in our [train] compartment and instructed me by the hour. The northern frontier is to be the mountains facing Cappadocia, the southern, the Suez Canal. Our slogan shall be: “The Palestine of David and Solomon.”

This is a liberal reading of the biblical text. It does, however, illustrate to what extent Zionist expansionism can use biblical material to establish extended claims. The Bible, in this case, can accommodate the ambitions of a militarily strong Israel to lay claim to all geographical Syria.

A recent Israeli best-seller, Eretz Gedolah L'Am Gadol (A Great Country for a Great People), written by labour leader Zvi Shiloach, contains aspirations for future Israeli expansion and domination which mirror the ancient biblical geopolitical plan.

A renewed covenant between the nation Israel and the Land of Israel can again become the source of enthusiasm, inspiration and self-sacrifice to the high ideals of Zionism.... Zionism always believed in a great Jewish

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29 Text quoted in a letter by Moshe Menuhin, in Middle East Perspective, August 1973, p. 6.
nation and in a great Jewish country.... Today the Jewish nation is considered a small nation, and only a part of it finds itself in our Fatherland. But who says that it is ordained for the Jews to be forever a small and poor nation.... The Jewish nation is really one of the great nations of the world.... Once a real peace treaty is signed in Baghdad, it will put an end to the idea of a United Arab Nation... Egypt will become a true African nation and strictly an African nation, and the Jewish nation, in returning to its homeland, will develop together with the northern Arab nation and the interests of the Middle East.

This kind of talk might have been considered a chauvinist’s ranting but for its conformity to biblical precedents. The covenant between the people and the land is close to literal biblicism. The territorial ambitions of this text conform to the formula of “From the Euphrates to the Nile” and to the slogan of Hechler and Herzl. The expected peace treaty will be signed in Baghdad which is outside, not in Damascus which is within, the territorial claims of Greater Israel.

3. The Curse of Canaan

In comparing Zionist and South African racial policies, Erskine Childers quotes Patrick Keatley: “One cannot help feeling... that in their heart of hearts, the white Rhodesians bear a wordless wish... that the Africans would disappear.”

Childers implies that Zionists have a similar “wordless” wish to see the Palestinians disappear. No such assertion could be made about the Israelites who settled in the land of Canaan, as the biblical material on the subject shows. These texts provide ample words for that particular wish. Thousands of words express the wish to see the Canaanites disappear, and thousands of words recommend their complete annihilation.

The greatest measure of biblical wrath and fury is directed, not against those who enslaved, captured, or exiled the Jews, but against the original inhabitants of the “Promised Land,” be they Canaanites, Jebusites, Hittites, or any other people dwelling on the land. The Bible argues not only that the political structure of the “Chosen People” could possibly be threatened by the existence of the Canaanites, but the cultural and religious character of Israel would be undermined by their continued presence.


31 Ezra 9: 1-2. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are devoted to the problem of aliyah and the purity of the race.
I.F. Stone has recognized the relevance of this to the plight of the Palestinian refugees at the hands of the modern Israelis. Following the war in 1967, he wrote about the conflict:

The Bible is still the best guide to it. Nowhere else can one find a parallel for its ethnocentric fury. Nowhere that I know of is there a word of pity in the Bible for the Canaanites whom the Hebrews slaughtered in taking possession.32

The biblical plan for “the final solution of the Canaanite question” was complete annihilation. Failing that, the Israelites were admonished to completely boycott the Canaanites economically, socially, and culturally. Canaanite civic, cultural, and religious institutions were to be condemned and destroyed. The example of the conquest of Jericho, as we read in the book of Joshua, reveals a cruelty that was to be a recommended policy in dealing with the conquered towns of Canaan: “Everything in it belongs to the Lord, no one is to be spared.” The Israelites thus destroyed everything in the city; they put everyone to the sword, men, women, young and old, and also cattle, sheep, and asses (Josh. 6: 17, 18, 21). The Torah and the historical books contain scores of examples of such cruelty, too many to recount here.

In case total destruction was not possible, total boycott was recommended as a religious duty. Joshua’s directives to the leaders of Israel on this subject are explicit:

Be on your guard then, love the Lord your God, for if you do turn away and attach yourselves to the peoples that still remain among you, and intermarry with them and associate with them and they with you, then be sure that the Lord will not continue to drive those people out to make room for you (Josh. 23: 11-13).

This text leaves no doubt about the religious nature of the abuse of the Canaanites. Loving the Lord and hating the Canaanites are closely linked. If narrowly interpreted, such texts in the Bible make racial prejudice almost an article of faith.

The origins of this policy are to be found in the Torah as direct commands of Jehovah given through Moses. The rationale of such a policy was that the worship of the only true God demanded that no foreign worship be allowed to contaminate it, that the “holy race” in a “holy land” should be free from the “abominations of the Canaanites.” Moses, giving his instructions to the Israelites ready to go into the “Promised Land,” says:

You must drive out all its inhabitants as you advance.... If you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land as you advance, any whom you leave in possession will become like a barbed hook in your eye and a thorn in your side. They shall continually dispute your possession of the land, and what I meant to do to them I will do to you” (Num. 33: 52, 53).

The most extreme and genocidal orders are found in the book of Deuteronomy. Moses is instructing the people:

When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you are entering to occupy and drives out many natives before you — Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivvites, and Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and powerful than you — when the Lord your God delivers them into your power and you defeat them, you must put them to death. You must not make a treaty with them or spare them. You must not intermarry with them, neither giving your daughter to their sons, nor taking their daughters for your sons; if you do, they will draw your sons away from the Lord and make them worship other gods. Then the Lord will be angry with you and will destroy you quickly. But this is what you must do to them; pull down their altars, break their sacred pillars, hack down their sacred poles and destroy their idols by fire, for you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God chose you out of all nations on earth to be his special possession. (Deut. 7: 1-6).

The law of modern Israel regarding such actions as marriage between Jews and non-Jews reflects the bias of this text. Socially, politically and economically, the segregation and inequality imposed upon the Arabs in Israel today demonstrate the continuity of a spirit of biblical exclusivism.33

The laws of war that the book of Deuteronomy spells out are among the most savage in history. These laws fall into two categories: treatment of conquered cities outside the boundaries of the “Promised Land” and treatment of conquered cities within the boundaries. The former is characterized by extreme cruelty, the latter by uncompromising total destruction (Deut. 20).

In the cities of the nations whose land the Lord your God is giving you as patrimony, you shall not leave any creature alive. You shall annihilate them — Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivvites, Jebusites — as the Lord your God commanded you, so that they may not teach you to imitate all the abominable things that they have done for their gods and so cause you to sin against the Lord your God (Deut. 20: 16-18).

33 See, e.g., Sabri Jiryis, The Arabs in Israel (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1968), passim.
The fact that the land had been cultivated and built up by the Canaanites should have no bearing on the claim of exclusive right. If anything, it offered an added incentive. Deuteronomy (6:10) makes this point clear:

The Lord your God will bring you into the land which he swore to your forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that he would give you, a land of great and fine cities which you did not build, houses full of good things which you did not provide, rock-hewn cisterns which you did not hew, and vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant.

According to the Palestine Conciliation Commission of the United Nations, reporting on Palestinian Arab property in Israel in 1953, more than 80 per cent of Israel's total area and more than two-thirds of Israel's cultivable land belonged to Palestinians who were being forcibly prevented from returning to their homes. One third of Israel's Jewish population, according to the report, was then living on absentee Palestinian Arab property. Nearly all the olive groves, half the citrus groves, and ten thousand shops, businesses, and stores in Israel belonged to absentee Palestinian Arab refugees.

CONCLUSION

This selective reading of the Hebrew Bible has focused on the extreme in ethnocentrism and anti-goyism. Although coming from a distant past, these characteristics recorded in the texts bear a striking correspondence to much of the philosophy, policies, and character of modern Zionism.

By promoting and executing plans to establish the "Third Jewish Commonwealth," Zionism has established itself consciously in the biblical tradition of Deuteronomy, Ezra, and Nehemiah. It has claimed unilaterally the right of ownership to Palestine as an absolute right not subject to the historical title of the Palestinians, to international law which supports this title, or to

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34 The totally uncompromising attitude toward the Canaanites finds a mythical origin in the book of Genesis. The story goes that Canaan, father of the Canaanites, received an eternal curse upon him and his descendants, because of something his father did. Ham, Canaan's father, the legend goes, happened to see his own father, Noah, naked and drunk and made fun of him. Noah, after sobering up, delivers a curse and a blessing:

"Cursed be Canaan, slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers," and he continued: "Bless, O Lord, the tents of Shem; may Canaan be his slave."

The legend sets the stage for the conquest of the land of Canaan by the descendants of Shem, the Israelites. Ham, the one who sinned, was not cursed because, as rabbinical interpretations explain, he had already received the blessing of God bestowed on the family of Noah.

the basic humanitarianism that should have prevented the exile by Israel of the Palestinian nation. In practice it has wholly adopted the biblical blessing and the biblical curse: the blessing exclusively reserved for the "holy race," the "Chosen People," and the curse, placed in eternity on the indigenous *goyim*, be they called Canaanites or Palestinians.