



## Israel: God's Holy Land

On May 14, 1948, Israel declared her independence to the world. Jewish sovereignty in Israel was no longer just a dream. It had been willed into existence through the blood and tears of the Jewish people.

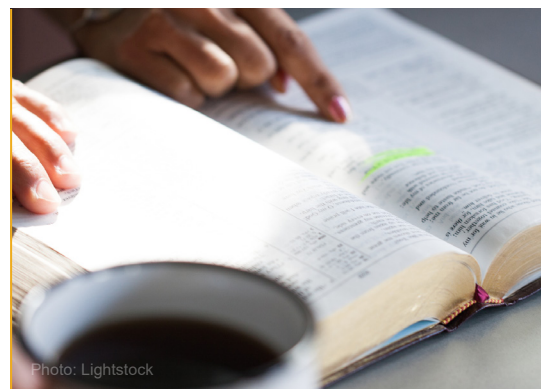
We must never forget that it is only with God, and through God and His promise, that Israel came into being and continues to exist. At the same time, we also must remember the struggles and sacrifices made by the people of Israel.

Israel is the fulfillment of the hopes of the past and the promise of future generations. The psalmist wrote: *“Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.”*

Israelis have spent much time weeping, sowing the seeds of a new country. Some of those sacrifices have come in the form of hard work in the hot sun; others have come in the form of the ultimate sacrifice — losing a loved one or one's own life. But we have borne much fruit.

Today Israel is a beautiful country with a strong military, a rich culture, and a bright future. As President John F. Kennedy once said, “Israel was not created in order to disappear — Israel will endure and flourish.”

As we rejoice in all that Israel is and has become, we must also remember and honor those who made it possible and rededicate ourselves to working on behalf of generations to come.



*Those who go out weeping,  
carrying seed to sow,  
will return with songs of joy,  
carrying sheaves with them.*

— PSALM 126:6



# Our Spiritual Homeland

In Deuteronomy 3:25, we find Moses desperately pleading with God to *"Let me go over and see the good land."* Moses wanted nothing more than to enter the land of Israel. Why was it so deeply important for him to go into the land? Moses knew that this land was unlike any other. This land was holy.

Many people call Israel the Holy Land because of the biblical events that took place there thousands of years ago. Both the *Torah* and the Christian Bible center on the land of Israel. However, Israel was holy long before Jesus walked through the hills of Galilee, before Joshua and the Israelites marched around the towering walls of Jericho, and before Abraham heeded God's call to leave his homeland and go to *"the land I will show you"* (Genesis 12:1).

In Judaism, the word "holy" means something or someone that is designated for a special purpose. The land of Israel was set aside by God at Creation to be His own special land.

We read in Deuteronomy 32:8-9: *"When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided all mankind, he set up boundaries for the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel. For the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance."*

Yet, there is more to Israel than the fact that it was given to God's people and designated as God's Holy Land where the Holy Temple would stand. There are certain qualities in the land that make it different from any other.

God is more directly involved with this land. There is only one place in the world about which it is written: *"It is a land the LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end"* (Deuteronomy 11:12)

In addition, many commandments listed in the *Torah* are either connected to the land of Israel or dependent upon it. For example, the laws about the sabbath year (*shmita* in Hebrew, Leviticus 25), bringing offerings (Leviticus 23:10; Numbers 15), and tithing (Deuteronomy 14:22-29) are tied to God's Holy Land — *"the land I am going to give you."*

Our celebration of Israel expresses more than the joy of a fledgling nation that beat the odds and serves as a beacon of light. It is the celebration of God's Word coming to fruition, the Bible coming full circle, and our world entering a new phase for all humanity, when all prophecies regarding this wondrous time and land will be fulfilled.

Israel is at the core of Jewish identity and peoplehood; the land shapes the Jews' self-image and character as a community covenanted with God. Indeed, to deny the link between the Jews and the land of Israel is to deny the Bible itself. To question the right of the Jewish people to live in Israel is to distort God's Word.



*It is a land the LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.*

— DEUTERONOMY 11:12



# An Eternal Heritage

As we celebrate the modern state of Israel, we must also recognize its greater context — the fact that while our nation is relatively young, it is also very, very old.

The first time the Bible references the Promised Land is in Genesis 12:1 when God tells Abraham (then still known as Abram) to “Go from your country...to the land I will show you.” That land is none other than Israel!

When Abraham arrived in the land then known as Canaan, God promised him “To your offspring I will give this land.” He reaffirmed this promise in Genesis 13:15, when He told Abraham, “All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.”

Interestingly, when God entered into a covenant with Abraham, He said, “To your descendants I give this land” (Genesis 15:18). In Hebrew, the word used in Scriptures for “give” is *natati*, meaning “I have given,” which is in past tense.

God had *already* given this land to Abraham’s descendants, and indeed Jewish tradition teaches that Israel was given to God’s people from the beginning of time. In other words, Jewish rights to the land were always part of the very fabric of Creation.

But who are Abraham’s descendants? After all, Ishmael was also Abraham’s son. Yet in Genesis 26:3, God confirmed that Isaac was the one through whom He would keep His covenant. God told Isaac, “For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham.”

A generation later, when Jacob, Isaac’s son, had his famous dream about angels ascending and descending a ladder spanning heaven and earth, God told him, “I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying” (Genesis 28:13). That land was the Holy Land. Later on, Jacob’s name was changed to Israel (Genesis 32:28), and his descendants became appropriately known as “the children of Israel.”

When the children of Israel were enslaved in Egypt, God commanded Moses to tell the nation that He would take them out of Egypt, and that “I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession” (Exodus 6:8).

Ultimately, Joshua led the children of Israel into the Promised Land and helped them to conquer and settle the land. King David established Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, and his son Solomon built the first Holy Temple there. Eventually, the nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms, both of which were conquered and the Jewish people exiled.

The Jewish Bible leads through the return of a remnant of the Jewish people, but the Bible also warned of a second exile. That occurred in 70 C.E., when the Second Temple was destroyed and the Romans threw out the Jewish people from their land, resulting in a painful, 2,000-year exile.

The Jewish people never stopped yearning for their homeland. God’s promise to Abraham created an unbreakable bond between the Jewish people and Israel. The fulfillment of God’s promises came in the miracle of the Jewish return to their land and a restoration of the nation of Israel.



*The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.*

— GENESIS 12:7

# A Modern Miracle

After WWII ended, the Jewish people stood in the ashes of the Holocaust. Over six million Jews had been murdered — two million of them children — just for the “crime” of being Jews. It was the worst devastation that the Jewish people had suffered in their nearly two thousand years of exile, persecution, expulsion, humiliation, and assimilation.

More than one-third of the world’s Jewish population was murdered during the Holocaust. Like the prophet Ezekiel, we looked down in the valley of death, *Sheol*, weary and weak, and asked, “*Can these bones live?*” (Ezekiel 37:3).

And behold a miracle! God breathed life into those dry bones and they came together, bone to bone, sinew to sinew. They took on flesh and spirit, and the nation lived again!

As God said through the prophet, “...these bones are the people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off’...My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel’ ” (Ezekiel 37:11-12).

Just years after the Holocaust, the modern nation of Israel was born. On November 29, 1947, in nothing less than a miracle, the United Nations voted to support the creation of the modern state of Israel. However, it wasn't until May 14, 1948, that a group of Jewish leaders gathered in Tel Aviv to sign the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel.

We endured those first years after declaring independence when we were outnumbered and outgunned. We didn’t give up when challenged in war after war, terror, and bloodshed. Despite being surrounded on all sides by enemies intent on our destruction, the nation of Israel not only survived, but thrived.

The land itself, which had been barren for thousands of years, began to give forth its fruit once again as prophesied: “*The LORD will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the LORD*” (Isaiah 51:3). Hebrew, a language all but forgotten, was resurrected and spoken by the average Jew in the street once again.

We witnessed the miracle of *aliyah*, immigration to Israel, a miracle that many of you support through The Fellowship, with Jews pouring into the country from all four corners of the earth. While there had always been a persistent, continuous Jewish presence in the land, never before had so many and such a diverse group of Jews come home.

As the prophet Isaiah wrote: “*In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the Mediterranean*” (Isaiah 11:11). Prophecy upon prophecy, miracle upon miracle — the words of the Bible have come to life in the Jewish state.

Today, Israel is a light unto the nations (Isaiah 42:6) as the only democracy in the Middle East. Israel is on the cutting edge of technology and medical breakthroughs, giving the world ways to make life better, safer, and healthier. Throngs of people visit Israel each year for the inspiration and connection to God that the Holy Land has to offer.



*the LORD has done this,  
and it is marvelous in our eyes.*

— PSALM 118:23



# Think About It

1. **Through God, the Jewish people beat the odds and defied normal reality by returning to their homeland twice.** Be inspired by Israel and imagine what God can do for you in your own life.
2. **Israel is an example of one generation working on behalf of the next.** What fruits have you enjoyed from the labor of those before you? What seeds might you sow for future generations?
3. **In 1867, Mark Twain visited the Holy Land. This is what he saw: "...A desolate country... given overwholly to weeds...a silent mournful expanse...a desolation..."** Just a century later when the Jewish people returned to Israel the land gave forth its fruit once again, just as the prophets said it would. How does this fact deepen your faith?
4. **If you could go back to any time in the Holy Land, which time period in history would you choose and why?** What questions would you want to ask the people who lived in that time?
5. **What is one thing about Israel that you are grateful for?** How might you express your gratitude to God for Israel?
6. **History, especially in Israel, is unfolding before our very eyes.** How might you be a part of it?



# Apply It

1. **Learn about Israel.** [Educate yourself about God's people and His special connection to the land of Israel.](#) (Psalm 32:8; John 16:13)
2. **Bless Israel.** In Genesis 12:3 God tells us: *"I will bless those who bless you."* Those who bless Israel are blessed by God. Consider being a blessing to Israel by contributing your prayers, abilities, or resources. (Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:8)
3. **Speak up for Israel.** Counter the lies and misconceptions about Israel by spreading the truth about what you have learned about Israel and her history. (Isaiah 62:1; Ephesians 4:25)
4. **Pray for Israel.** We can never underestimate the power of prayer. Make prayer for Israel part of your daily routine. (Psalm 122:6; James 5:16)
5. **Recognize God's Miracles.** Whether in your own life or in world events, including events unfolding in Israel, recognize God's hand and His providence. (Psalm 118:23; Hebrews 2:4)

