

THE HISTORY AND IMPORTANCE OF ISRAEL

Back in the 1700's, about 200 years after Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg, Frederick the Great of Prussia challenged Count Nikolaus von Zizendorf, who was a Moravian Christian, in a legal court of law to defend the fact that the Bible was the inspired word of God. The Count replied two words: "**the Jew**" (John Phillips, *Exploring the World of the Jew*, p. 9).

Back in the mid 1900's, Dr. H. A. Ironside was on the west coast preaching and a skeptic in the audience challenged him to prove the Bible was the inspired word of God. Dr. Ironside said I can prove the Bible is the inspired word of God with one word. **The one word that proves the Bible is the inspired word of God is Israel.**

When anyone honestly reads the Bible, both the Old Testament and the New Testament, it is objectively clear **that one nation is very unique and very special to God and that one nation is Israel**. It is not an Arab nation, or a European nation or an Asian nation or the United States; it is Israel. Truth is, in complete fulfillment of the promises of God, Israel has affected every continent in the world—North America, South America, Africa, Europe, Asia and Antarctica. **In Genesis 22:18 God says to Abraham, "in your seed, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."**

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer calculated that if you total the pages of a Bible, almost 85% of the Bible pertains to Israel and when the Bible deals with those who are not Jewish, it deals with "the Gentile...in the light of his relation to Israel" (*Dispensationalism*, 1951, p. 10).

The plain fact is, as F. F. Bruce said, there is something about Israel that is "unparalleled in the surrounding world" (*Israel and the Nations*, p. 11). **The History of Israel is a documented history of the only nation in the world that came into existence because of a covenant of God (Genesis 15:18).**

We are living in a time when Israel is being demeaned and dishonored by many leaders, nations and religions, including those who call themselves Christians. We have leaders in Congress who hate Israel and are trying to influence others to hate Israel and not support her. There are religions who seek to destroy Israel. Just a week ago, Prime Minister Netanyahu had to be rushed away from an event in Gaza because Hamas (Islamic religious fanatics) fired missiles. Even some churches, who call themselves Christian Churches, are demeaning Israel by inventing a doctrinal heresy called "replacement theology." They actually try to convince people at church that the church has replaced Israel. This is not only degrading and dishonoring, it is devilish.

What most don't realize is that their attitude, actions and words toward Israel are being carefully and fully monitored by God. His blessings or cursings are directly connected to this very issue. **As this study will show, if you tamper with Israel, you are tampering with God and there will be serious, negative consequences that will come directly from the hand of God.** Demean Israel and there is a high price to pay. Honor Israel and God will richly bless. That is not my opinion; that is precisely what the Bible says.

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In the next studies we would like to show you this. We would like to carefully study and explore the history and importance of Israel. We will tackle this in question answer form.

Observe that our first question is not “Why this study on the history and importance of Israel?” John Bright summed it up well when he said it is totally unnecessary to justify a study of the history of Israel because knowledge of Israel is essential to understanding the Bible (*A History of Israel*, p. 17).

It is impossible to rightly understand and rightly interpret the Bible without understanding the truth about Israel.

QUESTION #1 – What is the source of our information about Israel?

There are three main sources of information we have pertaining to Israel:

Source #1 - The primary source for information about Israel is the Old Testament.

Israel is a key theme of the entire Old Testament.

This is by far the greatest and most authoritative source for information concerning the history and importance of Israel. Starting with Genesis 11 through the rest of the entire Old Testament and into the New Testament, Israel is preeminent.

Although the Bible is not a history book per se, it contains more history about Israel than any other book in existence. In fact, there is more precise historical information about Israel over time in the Bible than any other historical book concerning any other country in the world.

Not only does the Bible give us accurate history concerning the historical actions and words connected to Israel, but it also gives reasons for the acts and words. **What is profound about the Old Testament and Israel is that a key purpose is to show God’s interest, protection, care, direction and redemption of Israel.** There is nothing like it.

F. F. Bruce said concerning the Hebrew Bible and Israel’s history, “Yet, while these books have come down to us as Holy Scripture, they are historical source-documents of first rate worth” (*Ibid.*, p. 11).

We will carefully analyze much from the Old Testament because it is the primary source of information about Israel.

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Source #2 - The secondary source for information about Israel is archeological discovery.

Archaeological excavators have gone to Israel's land for years and they continue to uncover more and more discoveries that verify the historicity and the validity of the truth of Israel.

Just recently, for example, archeologists believe they have discovered the town of Emmaus, where Jesus appeared to two of His disciples after His resurrection. According to Luke, the town was located seven miles from Jerusalem (**Luke 24:13**). Tel Aviv University archeologist Israel Finkelstein and Thomas Romer, said the city they uncovered is exactly that distance. They said, "Geographically I think that the distance to Jerusalem fits well, so I do think that *this* could have been the Emmaus of the New Testament" (Samuel Smith, *Archeologists May Have Found Biblical Town Emmaus, where Christ appeared after His Resurrection*, p. 3). This discovery has just recently occurred in the last few weeks.

Archeological discoveries have systematically uncovered much concerning Israel's past and land. It is a tremendous source of historical data. In fact, nearly 4 million tourists travel to Israel every year to see these artifacts and places.

The Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs states: "Above all archeological research clearly reveals the historical link between the Jewish people, the Bible and the Land of Israel, uncovering the remains of the cultural heritage of the Jewish people in its homeland. These visible remains, buried in the soil, constitute the physical link between the past, the present and the future of the Jewish people in this country. The unbroken chain of history can be observed at sites all over the country. Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, has been the focus of extensive archeological activity and remains of 5000 years of history have been revealed" (*Facts About Israel: History*, p. 3).

In 1998, a Jewish political commentator who died in 2018, Charles Krauthammer, wrote: "Israel is the very embodiment of Jewish continuity. It is the only nation on earth that inhabits the same land, bears the same name, speaks the same language, and worships the same God that it did 3000 years ago. You dig the soil and you find pottery from Davidic times, coins from Bar Kokhba (*AD 132-136*), and 2000 year old scrolls written in script remarkably like the one that today advertises ice cream at the corner candy store" (Dr. Israel Hanukoglu, *Israel: A Brief History of Israel and the Jewish People*, p. 1).

Leon Wood said that "Evidence from archaeological research has caused numerous liberal scholars to change in their respect for the historical accuracy in the Old Testament." Dr. Wood goes on to say, "The evidence which has prompted this new respect is extensive" (*A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 27). Archeology is truly a rich source of data pertaining to Israel.

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Source #3 - The third source for information about Israel is secular historical writings and inscriptions.

There are many preserved historical documents that exist outside of the Bible that clearly support historical truth about Israel. For example, Josephus (A.D. 37- A.D. 100) was a secular Jewish historian who researched and wrote on the history of Israel. It is true that much of his data is derived from the O.T., but he does bring out other historical data not found in the Old Testament. For example, Josephus is the historian who gives the only accurate historical description of what happened at Masada. His history makes a tremendous contribution to Jewish history.

There is also data pertaining to Israel found in Egyptian writings and other ancient writings and in various inscriptions. There is enough historical information in these things that enables us to trace Israel through history from Abraham until now. In fact, there is an ancient clay tablet dated about 1950 B.C. that actually names Abraham.

As far as the nation Israel is concerned, F. F. Bruce said, "The earliest reference to the Israelites in any record outside the Old Testament occurs in an inscription on a pillar set up about 1220 B.C. by Merneptah, king of Egypt (1224 B.C.-1214 B.C.), to celebrate several victories won in the course of his reign." In that inscription, he boasts "Israel is desolate; it has no seed left" (*Ibid.*, p. 13). Since the late 1800's to early 1900's, there are at least ten major inscription discoveries:

- 1) Beni Hassan - pictures in a tomb of some Israelites in Egypt. Dated 2000 B.C.
- 2) Code of Hammurabi - Contains list of Babylonian law similar to Mosaic laws. Dated 1755 B.C.
- 3) Merneptah Stela - Military accomplishments of Merneptah. This is the only Egyptian inscription that mentions Israel. Dated 1220 B.C.
- 4) Gezer Calendar - A school calendar that contains the Hebrew Language. Dated 1000 B.C.
- 5) Sheshonk Inscription - Military accomplishments of Sheshonk (Shishak) in Palestine. He was the Pharaoh of Egypt from 945 B.C. - 924 B.C.. It describes a raid against Rehoboam and lists many Biblical cities. Dated 920 B.C.
- 6) Moabite Stone - Military accomplishments of Moab. Mentions by name Omri and Ahab. Dated 850 B.C.
- 7) Black Stela - military accomplishments of Shalmaneser III. He was the King of Assyria from 859 B.C.-824 B.C.. Two monuments dedicated to him contain a drawing of Jehu paying taxes and mentions Ahab (II Kings 17:3; 18:9). Dated 850 B.C.
- 8) Siloam Inscription - notes completion of conduit of Hezekiah. It contains the Hebrew language and also length of cubit. Dated 701 B.C.
- 9) Taylor Cylinder - military accomplishments of Sennacherib. He was king of Assyria from 705 B.C.-681 B.C.. He is mentioned in II Kings, II Chronicles and Isaiah. It describes the attack of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. Dated 686 B.C.
- 10) Lachish Ostraca - 21 letters from captain of Lachish. Hebrew language and Hebrew names. Dated 588 B.C..

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More recently, in 2017, excavators in Jerusalem discovered the only stone in existence from the Second Temple in Jerusalem. It was found and contained the full and complete spelling of “Jerusalem.” This is irrefutable evidence that shows the significance of Israel since the days of Abraham, both inside and outside the Promised Land.

Also there are eight major tablets that have been discovered that have great Old Testament significance:

- 1) Mari - Mari was Syrian king and he mentions Nahor and shows conditions during time of Abraham. Dated 1800 B.C.
- 2) Enuma Elish - is a writing that gives a polytheistic mythological theory of creation. In it, there are parallels to Genesis account. Dated 700 B.C.
- 3) Gilgamesh Epic - is a written tablet written, found in Nineveh. with the subject of eternal life. In it there are parallels to Genesis account. Dated 700 B.C.
- 4) Boghaz-Koy Tablets - document of Hittite empire describes Hittite culture. Dated 1600 B.C.
- 5) Nuzi tablets - a series of private documents lists customs, birthright, servant heir. Date 1500 B.C.
- 6) Ras Shamra tablets - a book of religious poetry describes Canaanite religion. Date 1500 B.C.
- 7) Amarna Letters - a series of letters from Palestinian kings written to request help from Egyptians. They describe conditions in Palestine. Dated 1400 B.C.
- 8) Chaldean Chronicles - These are court records of the Babylonian Empire and they record initial capture of Jerusalem in 597 B.C.. Dated 626-594 B.C.

Each one of these tablets adds to our knowledge of Israel in ancient times.

(John H. Walton, *Chronological Charts of the Old Testament*, pp. 20-21).

So although the primary source of historical information about Israel comes from the Old Testament, there are archeological discoveries and secular writings in existence that also give accurate collaborating evidence concerning this remarkable nation.

QUESTION #2 – How important is Israel as she relates to God?

Israel is actually a small nation compared to other countries. It is 262 miles long and 70 miles wide. By car you can drive from the west Mediterranean to the east Dead Sea in 90 minutes. You can drive from the southern tip to the northern tip in 8-9 hours. **The total land of Israel is 8,630 square miles.** This is about the size of the state of New Jersey which is 8,721 square miles.

To put this in some perspective, the United States is 3.8 million square miles; China is 3.7 million square miles. Egypt is 390,000 square miles. Syria is 17,500 square miles. Jordan is 34,400 square miles. So as you can see, 8,630 square miles makes Israel a small nation.