

Will We Ever  
Have Peace  
In the Middle  
East?

*Biblical Answers For  
The Middle East Question  
By Pastor Jim O'Keefe*

# The Source

I want to establish that the authority behind any answers I give or any opinions I offer, is the Bible. Now, the Bible's authority may come under question; it often does. How can we trust the Bible? What makes the Bible reliable? Is the Bible true & accurate? Though we don't have the time to explore and then answer the opinions of those who would be dissenters, I offer the fact of Israel's existence today as a proof of the Bible's validity. How can anyone explain how a nation, which was dispersed to the four corners of the earth for hundreds, even thousands of years, was able to gather themselves together again in their homeland and be recognized by the world as a nation? The Bible clearly speaks of it. Israel's existence as a nation today is fulfilled Bible prophecy! (See Ezekiel Chapters 36 & 37) The fact that the eyes of the world are upon Israel today and that Israel – Jerusalem in particular – is a source of international interest (and frustration), is fulfilled Bible prophecy! Two thousand six hundred years ago, God spoke through the prophet Zechariah saying, *“The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him. Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about... And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it (Jerusalem) shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it.”* (Zechariah 12:1-3)

Therefore, my point is that the Bible is authoritative and reliable, and it is the source of my answers & opinions.

# Why does the Arab/Muslim world hate Israel so much?

Let me begin my answer by pointing out that there is a difference between the Arabs and the “Muslims.” I know that most people have linked the two together, but it is important to understand that long before Islam was birthed and before there was a single “Muslim” on the face of the earth (the 7th century AD), there were hostilities between Arabs and the Jews. The Arab people of today can trace their lineage back through Ishmael – the son of Abraham by Hagar. Hagar was an Egyptian woman who was the handmaid of Abraham’s wife, Sarah. Sarah later gave birth to a son (Isaac) who was promised to her husband Abraham and her by God. By the time Sarah weaned Isaac, there was trouble between Ishmael and Isaac, and Sarah insisted that Abraham put Ishmael out! Abraham did so, reluctantly. God promised that He would make Ishmael the father of 12 princes (nations) which He did. However, He made it clear to Abraham that Isaac was to be “the seed of the promise” through whom the Messiah & Saviour of the world would ultimately come.

For nearly 3,500 years there has been strife of one sort or another between the seed, the descendants of Ishmael (Arabs), and those of Isaac (Jews). The reason for this strife, (call it anger against the Jews by the Arabs), is clearly a spiritual matter. It is something that is instigated in the unseen spiritual realm where Satan and his demons are waging war against God and the forces of righteousness. It has been occurring since the beginning of human history, following Adam’s fall into sin in the Garden of Eden. God cursed Adam for his disobedience and God cursed the serpent (Satan) for his participation in Adam’s fall. God declared that He was going to bring a “seed” through the woman that would “crush the serpent’s head” (Genesis 3:15) – meaning that He (the promised “seed” of the woman) would destroy Satan’s authority. Since that time, Satan and his minions have done all that is in their power to defeat God’s plan and to void His promise. This is the real root cause behind the first murder

in human history, where Adam's son, Cain, slew his brother Abel. The outward manifestation of this strife between these two brothers was that of envy that gave way to hatred and eventually led to murder. Regardless of what the outward appearance may have been, there was an unseen spiritual force that was behind the scene, leading Cain to slay his brother – the promised “seed” of the woman who would one day destroy Satan's authority – and that was Satan himself aka “the serpent”. At the death of Abel, the Prince of Darkness and his demons undoubtedly rejoiced. They thought they had foiled God's plan! But Eve gave birth to yet another son, Seth, whose name literally means “substitute.” God had a purpose and a plan for redeeming man from the curse of the law of sin & death... and His purposes & plans would not be and could not be thwarted! (Isaiah 14:26-27).

Now in Genesis 12 we are introduced to Abraham. Abraham was a descendant of Noah's son, Shem the father of the “Semites” (from which we derive the word semite, another name for the Jews). Abraham would one day be the father of a great nation through his son, Isaac, and Isaac's son, Jacob... whose name was later changed to “Israel” by God Himself. This is how the Semites became known as the Israelites. It is through God's chosen people that He would bring the promised “seed of the woman” who would not merely be the Jewish Messiah, but the Saviour of the world – and who would ultimately destroy Satan's authority as the “god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4) and the “prince of the power of the air.” (Ephesians 2:2)

What is the bottom line? The reason that any nation, race or kindred of people would hate Israel, is a spiritual reason. Again, it is the same “unseen force” that moved Cain to slay his brother Abel; the same “unseen force” that prompted Pharaoh (around the time of the birth of Moses) to issue an edict that every male child born to a Jewish mother was to be put to death; the same “unseen force” that moved upon the heart of King Herod (around the time of the Birth of Jesus, the Messiah) to issue a decree to put to death every Jewish male under two years of age; the same “unseen force” that moved

the hearts of the Jewish Religious Leaders to loath, to despise and to reject Jesus as the Messiah; the same “unseen force” that moved upon the heart of Pontius Pilate to turn Jesus over to be crucified. As the Bible says:

*“... we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Ephesians 6:12).*

## How do economics apply to the situation in the Middle East?

Remembering that there is an “unseen force of spiritual wickedness” behind any and everything that happens in the world, and especially in the Middle East, I will attempt to give an answer.

**Economics** have a great deal to do with it, probably more than most would think. We, the USA, without over simplifying the situation, need the oil that lies beneath the soil of the Arab countries. They (the Arab countries) need the money that the USA provides for their oil. Israel is a “constant tension” that balances between the two. (Or as Zechariah 12:2 says, Israel is a “cup of trembling!”) The Arab nations (who are likewise Muslim nations) are clearly opposed to Israel. They would love to deny Israel’s very right to exist. In fact, the not-so-secret goal of many Arab nations is to “push Israel into the Mediterranean Sea!” ...in other words, to utterly destroy her and wipe her off the face of the earth. But they have a problem. In many ways, to antagonize Israel is to antagonize the USA. The USA supports Israel because they are the only “Democracy” in that part of the world. They (Israel) showcase a free market economy driven by capitalism...which the USA wants to defend vigorously.

Interestingly, the tiny nation of Israel has one of the strongest economies in the world. Amazingly, there are only three countries in the world that export more produce than does tiny Israel (which has a land mass approx. the size of New Jersey and has only limited areas for growing). I believe, that one of the reasons that Israel’s Arab/

Muslim neighbors hate her so much, is because she is so prosperous...while many of them are quite destitute. They are jealous & full of resentment! How can anyone explain the phenomenal success of this tiny nation, and in just 50 years? It is impossible to explain without concluding that God is the only clear and undeniable reason for it! Israel's prosperity today (among many other things) is yet another fulfilled Bible prophecy. Study the recent history of this land (75-100 years ago), and you will discover that it was considered to be uninhabitable.

Author Samuel Clemens (aka Mark Twain) visited the land in the late 1850's and declared it to be "a swamp covered, mosquito infested, good-for-nothing wasteland!" He wondered why anyone would value the land at all, or why anyone would want to live there? (It was controlled by the Ottoman Turks at the time. The British won control of the land in 1912 – but with the exception of a few ancient cities, Jerusalem being principal among them, the land was basically worthless.) What a different place that land is today! The swamps are gone and the waste places have been replaced by beautiful agricultural valleys. Many of the words of Ezekiel Ch. 36 read like the script from a travelogue that a tour guide might use today. The land cries out the faithfulness of God! He is indeed faithful to His Word and He is faithful to His compassionate nature. Israel's very existence and the beauty of the land today declare it!

**BUT, BACK TO ECONOMICS:** Israel's Arab neighbors are playing a "Chess Game" of sorts with the USA. They need our money...and we need their oil. They don't like our support of Israel, but they are willing to tolerate it for the sake of their need. We can't afford to take a position with Israel that will upset the oil producing Arab nations to the point that they won't sell us their oil...or that they would inflate the price to such a degree that it would cripple the U.S. economically.

Remember, regardless of what the outward circumstances, situations & scenarios would suggest, this is a spiritual matter! These nations hate Israel...simply because they are Israel – God's chosen people!

# If Palestine is not a country, what is Palestine?

“Palestine” comes from the Greek Word “Palestina” – the name that the Roman Emperor Adrian gave to the land of Israel (known at that time as the region of Judea) in 135 AD. He did this for no other reason than to gail the Jews, for the name Palestina was a reference to the hated Philistines. Many years later, during the “Crusader” period, the land of Israel was renamed “The Holy Land.” (It is commonly called the Holy Land still today.) Following the Bafour Declaration at the end of WWI, the British again reverted to the name Palestine. Clearly, “Palestine” is the land that the Bible refers to as Canaan, the land that God gave to Abraham and his descendants, Israel.

**WHO DOES THE LAND BELONG TO?** The Bible says that the land belongs to the Lord! (Leviticus 25:23)

Although many Jews were scattered/dispersed into the nations of the world...first by the Assyrians in 722 BC (the Northern Tribes, known as Israel) and later, by the Babylonians in 586 BC (the Southern tribes, known as Judah). Israel has had a continuous “Jewish” presence in the land for more than 3,500 years.

During the Babylonian captivity of Judah, Solomon’s Temple, was destroyed. Archeological excavations have uncovered some of the original stones from the wall surrounding the Temple mount. They are setting upon the bedrock of Mount Moriah in precisely the place that Solomon’s workmen placed them 3,000 years ago! This is something very damaging to the Muslims, who want to insist the Jews never had any presence or any sort of an interest in Jerusalem. There has always been a Jewish Remnant in the land. God has seen to that!

**WHO THEN/WHAT THEN, IS A PALESTINIAN?** The simple truth is, there are none. They are Arabs who were living in

the territories of what is now Israel. Most were Bedouins that began to settle in some of the areas that were remnants of Crusader Cities. Others settled around cities like Bethlehem, Hebron & Nazareth. Some of these Arabs were Christians, others were Muslims. Most of them were living peacefully among their Jewish neighbors when Israel gained her independence in May of 1948. It is what happened next that set the stage for what we have today, 54 years later. Shortly after (days after) Israel was recognized as a sovereign nation by the UN (on May 14th, 1948) many of the Arab nations that surrounded her declared war on her. Interestingly, the Arabs who were preparing to attack Israel sent a message to the Arabs living inside Israel, to flee...promising them that they would be able to return to their homes in short order, and “spoil” what was left of the Jews. 700,000 of them left...most crossing the border into what was then “Trans-Jordan” ruled by King Abdullah. Much to the surprise of the World (and the shock of the Arabs), Israel won the war (with the clear help of Almighty God). Unfortunately, they were not able to gain control of Jerusalem before a cease-fire agreement was reached, and Jerusalem fell into the hands of King Abdullah. At that time, the “West Bank” was established, ostensibly extending the territory of “Trans-Jordan” into the land of Israel. The anger of the Arabs (many of them Muslims) over King Abdullah’s agreement with the Israeli’s, led to his assassination. His successor was Jordan’s King Hussein. Interestingly, King Hussein did NOTHING about the THOUSANDS of Arabs who immigrated across the border during the 1948 war. Even though he/Jordan controlled the “West Bank” for the next 17 years, they did nothing to re-settle the people. They were the ones who put them in the camps, the same “refugee” camps that still exist today.

In June of 1967, many of these same nations made war with Israel once again...attacking from three of her borders - North (Syria), East (Jordan) and South (Egypt). This war lasted six days... and again, Israel was victorious, securing control of the Golan Heights. In addition, they regained control of Jerusalem. Since that day they have allowed Muslims and Christians unrestricted access to the areas of the city most important to them (and continue to do so today).

In October of 1973, on Yom Kippur - the holiest & most sober day of the year for Jews - these same enemies launched a sneak attack... when they knew that the entire nation would be most vulnerable. It took the IDF (Israeli Defense Force) three days to mobilize their forces...but before they could really rally themselves, God again gave them a great & decisive victory!

In the continued hostilities since then, Israel has NEVER been the aggressor! They have simply responded to and have answered attacks against them. They have never sought to take the lives of innocent men, women or children... nor have they killed people indiscriminately. They have used their intelligence - second to none in the world - and have retaliated against those responsible. The only times they taken the offensive has been in pre-emptive strikes, which have undoubtedly saved countless hundreds, perhaps thousands of innocent lives. It was just such Israeli intelligence that led to the recent seizure of a ship in the Red Sea. This ship was under the command of an official of Yasser Arafat's PLO and was loaded with tons of weapons...intended for the death and destruction of innocent Jewish lives.

You may not realize that there are literally tens of thousands of Arabs who live in Jewish cities all over the country who are citizens of Israel. They vote. They are elected members of the Knesset (Israeli Parliament). They serve in the military. They live peaceably with their Jewish neighbors. They are on record that Yasser Arafat and the PLO do not represent them.

They enjoy the benefits & blessings of living in that country - without threat or harassment from anyone, particularly Jews.

# What about the question of an Independent Palestinian State?

Many people today – from world leaders to the average man on the street – believe that the solution to the Israeli/Palestinian problem is the creation of an Independent Palestinian State. Tremendous pressure has been placed upon Israel to this end...and the pressure increases all the time. An overwhelming percentage of the Jewish population in Israel wants peace... almost at any cost. They (foolishly) favor the creation of a “Palestinian State” if it would bring about peace, and with it, assurances that terrorist attacks within Israel would cease. The problem is, however, the Jews are beginning to understand that the “Palestinians” really don’t want peace. They want to destroy Israel.

## **WILL THERE BE A PEACEFUL SOLUTION TO THIS**

**PROBLEM?** Yes...at least a pseudo-peace. The Bible speaks of it. If you study the Old Testament prophecies carefully and connect all the dots, a clear picture emerges of what the future holds for Israel... and even more so, who holds Israel’s future!

Now that Israel is back in their land – the land that God promised to Abraham and his descendants – and is once again recognized as a nation (after an absence of nearly 2,000 years), the stage is set for the beginning of the final days of human history as we know them. An overwhelming majority of the people in Israel today want peace... at almost any cost. Without realizing it, they have unwittingly set themselves up to embrace the Anti-christ... which, the Bible says, is exactly what they will do. And they will do it in exchange for the promise of peace, and for the ability to begin offering daily sacrifices upon the Temple Mount once again. The Prophet Daniel tells us (Daniel 9:26) that a man, a “Prince,” shall emerge from among/out of the midst of the re-established Roman Empire (the European Union) and shall broker a “covenant” between Israel and “many nations” that will enable her (among other things) to begin offering the Daily Sacrifice again. Elsewhere we read, most notably the

Prophet Ezekiel (Chapters 40-46), that a Temple will also be built, and I believe it will be a part of the same agreement that the Anti-christ will broker between Israel and her neighbors. We know that this will happen, because the Bible has prophesied it in great detail. How will this “Prince” succeed in bringing about a solution to the problem of Israel’s peaceful existence in the land, when so many others have failed? After much careful Bible study, I believe that Ezekiel Chapters 38 & 39 give us great detail about a military conflict which is about to occur in Israel. It will involve a multi-national invading force, featuring Russia and including Persia (Modern day Iran), Ethiopia, and Libya... among others. According to Ezekiel, God Himself will intervene in the battle... destroying 5/6th of the invading army and leaving no doubt that there is a God in Israel (Ezekiel 38:23; Ezekiel 39:7)! Think about the effect such a military victory will have upon the nations of the world. I believe this will be the catalyst that will propel the coming Anti-christ on to the international scene, at which time he will make a covenant between Israel and many nations. It seems that a part of this “treaty” with Israel will involve the establishment of a memorial cemetery where the Russian dead will be buried. Listen to Ezekiel 39:11 – *“It will come to pass in that day that I will give Gog (Russia) a burial place there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the Sea; and it will block the way of travelers, because there they will bury Gog and all his multitude. Therefore they will call it the Valley of Hamon Gog. (‘Hamon Gog’ literally translates ‘The Multitude of Gog.’) For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them, in order to cleanse the land.”*

## **BACK TO THE ANTI-CHRIST AND HIS COVENANT**

**WITH ISRAEL:** For the first 3 ½ years of this covenant, Israel will dwell in virtual peace. But at the mid point of the Tribulation, the Anti-christ will set up an image of himself in the Holy of Holies of the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem, and will demand to be worshipped as God!

Israel will realize that they have been had... and all that can will head into the desert to seek a refuge. Many believe (and I agree) that they will head for the ancient underground city of Petra, located in modern day Jordan.

According to Daniel 12:11, from the day that the Anti-christ sets up his image in the Temple, until the return of Jesus Christ to the earth to establish HIS Kingdom... it will be exactly 1,290 days!

After that, there will be peace in Israel...and throughout the whole earth!

*“Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, And faithfulness the belt about His waist. And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the kid, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze; Their young will lie down together; And the lion will eat straw like the ox. And the nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper’s den. They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.*

*Then it will come about in that day that the nations will resort to the root of Jesse, Who will stand as a signal for the peoples; And His rest will be glorious. Then it will happen on that day that the Lord will again recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people, who will remain, from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, And from the islands of the sea. And He will lift up a standard for the nations, And will assemble the banished ones of Israel, And will gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.” (Isaiah 11:5-12)*

# CONCLUSION

Let me conclude where I began. If the Bible is not true or reliable; if it is not the Word of God, explain Israel's existence today. Why are the Jews even in that land today? Where did they come from? Having been scattered to the "four winds" for hundreds and hundreds of years as history testifies, how were they able to hold on to their nationality - as sons and daughters of Abraham... who believe they have a "destiny" to live in the land that God promised to their fathers? How is it that they - of all ancient peoples - have been able to rise from their obscurity and dispersion, to become a recognized race of people and become a nation again? You'll have a most difficult time answering these questions or explaining those answers... apart from the Bible. I can tell you all about Israel - her past, her present & her future from the pages of the Bible. The truth of the matter is, Israel - her very existence today - is the strongest evidence of the truth, the accuracy and the reliability of the Bible that anyone can offer.

And if the Bible is true and accurate about Israel - her past, present & future...isn't it safe to assume that it is also true and accurate about our past, present and future? It certainly is! Study His Word. Live your life in accord with it. You'll never regret it for a moment...for all eternity.