

The creation of the nation of Israel—a modern miracle

Tony Benson

Along with most readers of this magazine, I cannot remember a time when there was no nation of Israel. It is sixty years this month since Israel took its place amongst the nations of the world, and this significant anniversary provides an opportunity to look, not at Israel today, as we often do, but at the remarkable circumstances which resulted in the nation coming to birth.

THE MANY PROPHECIES of a restoration of Israel prior to Christ's return are well known to us, and their fulfilment is inexplicable on any other basis than that the hand of God was actively at work amongst the nations to fulfil His purpose. The whole process of the return of the Jews to the Land, and the establishment of the State of Israel, was miraculous, and must surely have involved much activity by the angels over many years. There is a precedent in Scripture for God working in this way; in Ezra we read how the new power which had taken over the Middle East, the Medo-Persian Empire, allowed the Jews to return to Israel and rebuild the temple, whilst Daniel 10 reveals the angels at work at that time on behalf of the Jews to achieve this end.

In the compass of one article it will not be possible to look at the detail of Israel's struggle to establish itself as a nation against Arab hostility, nor to review her amazing development as a power far more significant than her size would indicate. Rather we will look at some of the remarkable circumstances that led up to the establishment of Israel as a nation, and then, more briefly, at how she survived in the initial stage.

The First World War

The movement for Jews to return to their ancient land developed during the nineteenth century, much to the excitement of our brethren and sisters of those times, but it gathered momentum with the founding of the Zionist Movement by Theodore Herzl at the end of the century, and

the calling of the First Zionist Congress in 1897. Herzl, an Austrian Jew, wrote *Der Judenstaat*, *The Jewish State*, in which he put forward his dream of a Zionist state in what was then called Palestine. Remarkably, he speculated that it would happen in fifty years, and it was fifty years after the First Zionist Congress that the United Nations passed the resolution that enabled the independent nation of Israel to come to birth.

Herzl was the man raised up by God to establish the Zionist Movement, but it required a different person to take the work forward. Herzl's early death, at a time when he was becoming enamoured of the idea of establishing a Jewish home somewhere other than Palestine, was surely providential, and enabled Chaim Weizmann to come to the fore. He became the most influential leader of the movement up to the time of Israel's independence.

Initially the big obstacle to the establishment of the State of Israel was the Ottoman Empire, which ruled the Middle East with a dead hand. From at least the middle of the seventeenth century, at which time the Ottoman Empire was at the apogee of its power, Bible students had cited the



Israeli coin minted to commemorate the First Zionist Congress at Basel in 1897. The portrait is of Theodore Herzl at Basel.

**Chaim Weizmann's house
in the grounds of the
Weizmann Institute of
Science, Rehovot, one of
the world's leading scientific
research institutes.**

Picture: Tony Benson



prophecy of the drying up of the River Euphrates (Rev. 16:12) as indicating the removal of the Turkish power to make way for the return of the Jews, and this was fulfilled in the First World War.

Towards the end of 1917, British forces succeeded in driving the Turks out of Jerusalem, and just before this the British Government issued the famous Balfour Declaration, favouring the establishment of “a Jewish national home” in Palestine. The remarkable way in which Weizmann came into a situation in which he was able to influence the British Government at a time when some of its most important members were favourable to the Jews has often been remarked on amongst us, and was the subject of recent articles in this magazine,¹ so I will not dwell on it further. Much more than this was involved in this paving of the way for the return of Jews and the establishment of the State of Israel, however, as we will see.

A key year

In his book *A History of the Jews*,² Paul Johnson refers to the circumstances that came together at this time to bring about this important step in the establishment of modern Israel. He mentions the arrival of Weizmann in Britain and the influential contacts that he made, but also refers to the following:

1 During the nineteenth century Britain propped up the ailing Ottoman Empire against Russian attempts to expand into the Middle East. Despite this, Turkey decided to take the side of Germany in the war, thereby making Britain her enemy.

- 2 The First World War saw Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire lined up against France, Britain and Russia. Most Jews favoured the German side because Jews had a comfortable existence there and they were persecuted in Russia. In 1917 the Russian Revolution overthrew the tsars, “thus removing the biggest single obstacle to wholehearted, world-wide Jewish support for the Allied cause”.³ Many of the Russian revolutionaries were Jews themselves.
- 3 Also in 1917, Germany began a policy of massive u-boat (submarine) attacks on shipping, including American ships. This brought America, up to that point neutral, into the war on the Allied side, thus ensuring victory for the Allies and the active involvement in Middle Eastern affairs of a nation supportive of the Jews.
- 4 Although a majority of the British cabinet ended up supportive of the Jewish cause, this was by no means the case initially. Much of this was due to Weizmann’s persuasive efforts, but these were aided by the fact that the strongly anti-Zionist war minister, Lord Kitchener, was drowned at sea in 1916 and the anti-Zionist prime minister Herbert Asquith

1. “The Balfour Declaration and the ways of providence”, Simon Collard, [Dec. 2007, p. 406](#) and [Jan. 2008, p. 462](#); “Pushing the Turks out of Jerusalem in 1917”, Nigel Bernard, [Dec. 2007, p. 423](#).

2. Phoenix Press, London, 2003.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 428.

lost the support of his colleagues due to his failings as a leader in prosecuting the war, and was replaced by the pro-Zionist David Lloyd George in December 1916. In the consequent reshuffle Weizmann's biggest supporter in the government, Arthur Balfour, became foreign secretary. The way was prepared for cabinet approval of the Balfour Declaration the following autumn.

The Balfour Declaration did not provide Weizmann with everything he had wanted, but after acknowledging this Paul Johnson says, "All the same, the Balfour Declaration was the key piece in the jigsaw, for without it the Jewish state could never have come into existence. Thanks to Herzl and Weizmann, the Jews got in just in time . . . Even twelve months later it would not have been possible. As it was, Weizmann pulled the Zionists through a brief window of opportunity".⁴ We would, of course, add to this, "with the angels working behind the scenes".

In all this, 1917 is seen to be the key year, beginning with a new pro-Zionist British cabinet and ending with the Balfour Declaration and General Allenby's capture of Jerusalem from the Turks, with the Russian Revolution and the entry of America into the war in between. A long-held interpretation of the seven times of Daniel 4 is that it represents a period of 2,520 years from Nebuchadnezzar's image dream in 602 B.C., and significantly this period expired in 1917.

Between the wars

Weizmann had hoped for a declaration making the whole of Palestine the Jewish home, with internal autonomy and unrestricted Jewish immigration. What he got was much less, a compromise in fact, for in its final form it referred merely to the establishment of a Jewish home in Palestine, with no commitment to either internal autonomy or unrestricted immigration.

Even then it proved difficult to implement. The end of the First World War was marked by an outburst of nationalism, with independent nations being established in Eastern Europe on the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires. Rather belatedly, the Arabs joined in the nationalist surge, bringing to an end the window of opportunity referred to above. They wanted to establish independent nations on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, and to allow Jews from Europe to immigrate to part of their territory was inconsistent with this and bitterly opposed. The matter was made worse by a number of other factors:



The grave of Chaim Weizmann and his wife at the Weizmann Institute.

Picture: Tony Benson

- promises made to Arab leaders during the War to encourage them to revolt against the Turks, promises that were incompatible with the Balfour Declaration
- opposition to a Jewish national home by the French, who shared control of the Middle East with Britain
- a strong pro-Arab faction in Britain's Foreign Office
- the growing significance of Arab oil
- opposition amongst many Jews to the idea of a national home in Palestine.

The result was years of intermittent conflict between Jew and Arab, with Britain, given a mandate over Palestine after the First World War, trying to keep the peace. Debate raged about the significance of the Balfour Declaration. Did it permit an independent Jewish state or preclude it? In the meantime, Jewish immigration took place in three main waves. During the period 1919–1923 35,000 Jews, mainly from Poland, entered the land; in the period 1924–1928 a further 82,000 came, mainly from Poland; then from 1932 to 1940 213,000 more came, mainly from Germany following the rise to power of Adolf Hitler. The latter group were particularly influential, bringing with them intellectual skills and capital, which were essential to the establishment of the state. The Jews developed structures that would serve them in good stead when it came to establishing the state; the Arabs remained a mainly peasant society.

During the 1930s Britain made attempts to water down the Balfour Declaration, culminating in a proposal in 1939 to limit Jewish immigration for a period of five years, then stop it altogether

4. *Ibid.*, p. 430.

and work towards the establishment of an independent state of Palestine, which would have been under Arab domination as they were the biggest number. The prospects looked grim for an independent Jewish state.

The effect of the Second World War

The overwhelmingly significant feature of the Second World War as far as the Jews were concerned was, of course, Hitler's attempt to eradicate them by mass murder, usually referred to as the Holocaust. The effect of this vile massacre of about six million European Jews was to bring about the establishment of the State of Israel, as Johnson acknowledges:

"But the Jews had grasped that the civilized world, however defined, could not be trusted. The overwhelming lesson the Jews learned from the Holocaust was the imperative need to secure for themselves a permanent, self-contained and above all sovereign refuge where if necessary the whole of world Jewry could find safety from its enemies. The First World War made the Zionist state possible. The Second World War made it essential. It persuaded the overwhelming majority of Jews that such a state had to be created and made secure whatever the cost, to themselves or to anyone else".⁵

Although information about the Holocaust had seeped out of German-occupied Europe well before the War ended, it was only when Germany was finally overthrown in 1945 that the full horror of what had occurred was made known to a shocked world. It is ironic that Hitler's futile attempt to eradicate the Jews from the planet led, under God's hand, to the establishment of Israel as a nation and its development into the flourishing and prosperous nation of today. But before that could happen, opposition to the idea of independence by the ruling power, Britain, had to be overcome, and the support of the two superpowers emerging from the War, the USA and the Soviet Union, had to be obtained.

Obstacles overcome and support gained

Regarding Britain, it is at first surprising, given our belief that the hand of God was at work, that the pro-Zionist Winston Churchill should have lost an election in 1945 to the Labour party under Clement Atlee, especially as Labour policy towards Israel, led by the foreign secretary Ernest Bevin, was anti-independence. As things turned out, however, Bevin's intransigence over Israel

eventually worked in Israel's favour. In October 1945 the Jews embarked on a terrorist campaign against the occupying British forces that forced Bevin to hand over the problem to the recently formed United Nations on 2 April 1947. The indication is that extremely hard weather the previous winter, coming on top of the draining effect of the Second World War, brought Britain to the point where she felt she could no longer bear the burden of the mandate. The result of this was an investigation of the whole problem by a specially appointed committee of representatives from ten nations, seven of whom favoured the partition of Palestine into independent Jewish and Arab states. The decision was endorsed by a substantial majority by the United Nations on 29 November that year.

The Jews accepted the decision, the Arabs rejected it. Britain declined to be involved in implementing the partition, merely agreeing to stay and keep order until an agreed withdrawal date. In fact they did not even do that properly, and showed considerable bias against the Jews. It was widely expected that when British troops were withdrawn the Arabs would soon take over the areas allocated to the Jews. Instead, the Jews, forced to organise themselves before the British withdrawal, and fighting for their very existence, triumphed under God's hand, and ended up with more territory than they had been allocated, including most of Jerusalem, which was intended to be administered by the United Nations. Just as God raised up Herzl to get the Zionist movement going and Weizmann to shepherd it to the point of nationhood, so he raised up another great Jewish leader, David Ben-Gurion, to lead the nation to independence and beyond.

Regarding America, on 12 April 1945 the president who had led the nation through the War, Franklin Roosevelt, died. His thinking regarding Israel had changed shortly before his death, following a meeting with King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia. The pro-Zionist presidential assistant, David Niles, remarked later, "There are serious doubts in my mind that Israel would have come into being if Roosevelt had lived".⁶ His successor, Harry S. Truman, was more pro-Zionist, pushed for the United Nations to approve the creation of the State of Israel, and recognised it as soon as it was proclaimed. In doing so he had to fight against the State Department (the American

5. *Ibid.*, p. 517.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 524.

President Truman's Jewish friend

President Harry S. Truman's decision to recognise the newly proclaimed State of Israel was by no means a foregone conclusion. He was under great pressure from his secretary of state George Marshall, architect of victory in World War II, not to do so, on the grounds that she would not survive the onslaught of the Arabs on her own and America would not be able to support her. Truman resisted the pressure and recognised Israel, a vital step in Israel's survival, for it meant that other countries followed America's lead. A significant influence on him at this crucial time was a Jewish friend from years before.

Truman grew up in the small town of Independence, Missouri, well away from the big centres of population where Jews tended to live, and showed anti-Semitic tendencies at times in his life, typical of those from his background. When he came to power, though sympathetic to the Jewish cause because of the Holocaust, he bridled at the pressure being put on him by American Jewish leaders and pro-Zionists from his own party, the Democrats, and banned them from his office. The Jewish leaders sought a means of getting to Truman and found a man called Eddie Jacobson, who had served with Truman during the First World War and been his partner in running a shop in Kansas City afterwards. The men had remained friends even after Truman became a senator.

Jacobson, briefed about the situation in Palestine by the Jewish leaders, flew to Washington in the summer of 1947 and talked with Truman about Palestine, following up with several other talks in the ensuing months. During this period Truman supported the Jewish cause at the United Nations. In early 1948 Truman, exasperated by the whole affair, declared that he would leave the Palestine problem to the United Nations and refused to see the Jewish leader Chaim Weizmann. Proposals were in the air that the United Nations should manage Palestine when the British left rather than it being partitioned. Jacobson managed to persuade Truman to see Weizmann, who put the Jews' case in his usual persuasive manner and got the President to renew his support for partition. Jacobson continued to liaise between Weizmann and the President, who, on the evening of the day when Ben-Gurion made his historic declaration of the State of Israel, signed a document recognising the new state, leading to other countries doing the same.

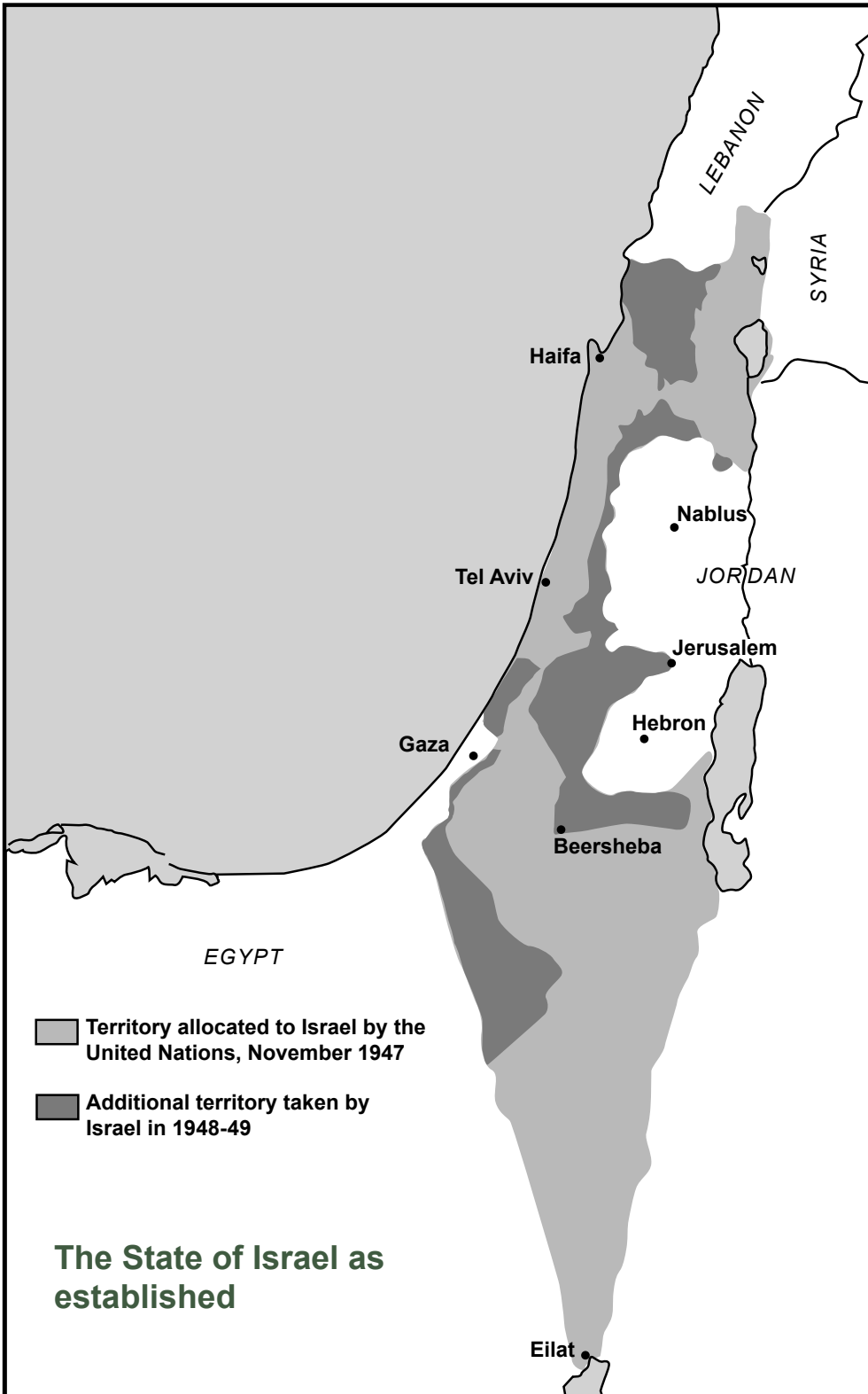
Jacobson was feted as a hero when he visited the new state in 1949, meeting both Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and Chaim Weizmann, now the state's first president. In November 1948 Truman won a narrow victory in the presidential election, despite polls widely predicting that he would lose. His support for the State of Israel was also a close-run thing. We can surely see the hand of God at work in the fact that Truman had this close Jewish friend who was there at the right time to tip the scales in favour of the Jews; and maybe it was because of his support for Israel at such a crucial time that he was unexpectedly victorious in the election.

Based on an extract from Michael Beschloss' book *Presidential Courage: Brave Leaders and How They Changed America 1789-1989*, published in *Newsweek* magazine 14/21 May, 2007.

equivalent of the Foreign Office) and the Defence Department, both of which strongly favoured a pro-Arab line, mindful of the importance of oil. (Details of a little-known Jewish influence on Truman are given in the panel, "[President Truman's Jewish friend](#)", above.)

The Soviet Union was also pro-Zionist at this crucial time. The Russian dictator, Josef Stalin, previously anti-Jewish, adopted a pro-Jewish stance from 1944 onwards, apparently seeing in the largely socialist Jewish leadership a means of gaining influence in the Middle East and thwart-

ing British interests. In May 1947 the Soviet Union gave its support to the creation of a Jewish state; at the vital United Nations meeting in November the Soviet bloc voted for partition, and, three days after the proclamation of the state, followed the USA and recognised it. Its satellite Czechoslovakia was a major manufacturer of armaments, and Stalin instructed her to supply Israel with arms. By mid-1948, however, Stalin was showing signs of a return to anti-Semitism, which later resulted in the Soviet Union becoming a supporter of the Arabs rather than Israel.



The State of Israel as established



**David Ben-Gurion
proclaiming Israel's
independence at
4.00 pm on 14 May
1948 in the Tel Aviv
Museum, with Theodore
Herzl's portrait on the
wall behind him.**

Just as there was a narrow window of opportunity for the Balfour Declaration to be made, so, says Paul Johnson, there was a narrow opportunity for the State of Israel to be approved by the United Nations. He states:

“If British evacuation had been postponed another year, the United States would have been far less anxious to see Israel created and Russia would almost certainly have been hostile . . . Israel slipped into existence through a fortuitous window in history which briefly opened for a few months in 1947-8. That too was luck; or providence”.⁷

We know which it was.

Independence at last

Warfare broke out between Jew and Arab following the United Nations resolution of 29 November 1947, and intensified when Britain announced that it would withdraw on 14 May 1948. Once Britain withdrew, the armies of the surrounding Arab nations invaded. There were 600,000 Jews in Palestine at that point, and the population of the immediately surrounding Arab nations was 25 million. The odds looked impossible, yet the infant state survived. How? It was, of course, a miracle, but there is little or no evidence of the openly miraculous. God has other ways of working in this age.

As stated above, God had raised up a man for the job. Ten years earlier David Ben-Gurion had concluded that the Jews would need to fight off the surrounding Arabs to establish an independent nation, though few agreed with him at the

time. When the Second World War drew to its conclusion he began to plan for independence, seeking promises of financial assistance from wealthy Jews, reviewing the forces available to him, procuring arms supplies on a clandestine basis and appointing capable men to organise and lead the armed forces.

When it came to the time to fight for the establishment and survival of the state, the Jews fought with great determination and heroism, spurred on by typically extravagant statements from Arab leaders, like this from the Secretary-General of the Arab League, quoted by Harry Sacher: “This war will be a war of extermination and a momentous massacre which will be spoken of like the Mongol massacres and the Crusades”.⁸ They were well organised, with a central command headed by Ben-Gurion himself. Sacher says, “The Israeli army . . . was the best educated and the most socially cohesive in the world; the most conscious in the course in which it was engaged and desperately resolved to see it through to the end”.

In contrast, the Arab countries were badly coordinated. Sacher says, “At the highest level there was lack of cohesion and unity”, arising from ancient enmities, and “There was no single

7. *Ibid.*, p. 526.

8. This and succeeding quotes from Sacher are from his book *Israel: the Establishment of a State*, Harry Sacher, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1952. I borrowed this from my local library but omitted to note page numbers.

command, no single plan, no single ambition and no single spirit among the Arabs". Unlike the Jews, the Arab residents of Palestine had no real incentive to fight. Many of them fled to neighbouring countries to get out of the way of the fighting, after assurances from the leaders of the armies that they would soon defeat the Jews and then they could return and take over all their property. On a number of occasions in Scripture it is recorded that Israel's enemies fell out among themselves, and the same will happen in the last days (Ezek. 38:21). Open miracles were

not required to give the Jews victory; it would appear that God achieved it by causing lack of unity amongst her enemies and by ensuring that the Jews were well prepared.

Thus at 4.00 pm on 14 May 1948, at a gathering of many of the leaders of the Jews in Tel Aviv museum, David Ben-Gurion stood up, with, appropriately, a portrait of Theodore Herzl on the wall behind him, and read the Declaration of the Independence of the State of Israel. It was surely the most significant moment in the modern history of the Jews.

Israel—a coming curse and a curse prevented

Nigel Bernard

After sixty years, Israel is confident and its Arab neighbours are divided. Yet, like A.D. 70, destruction is soon to come upon Israel. Some Jews will flee, as Christ had previously advised with regard to A.D. 70. Meanwhile, Elijah will be preparing the Jews scattered in Europe and elsewhere.

GOD SAID of Ishmael, "And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren" (Gen. 16:12). When the State of Israel was declared sixty years ago this month, the Arabs, who sought to strangle it at birth, manifested these characteristics prophesied by God. The lack of unity amongst the Arabs was one of the factors which hindered them. Truly, their hands were "against every man".

Sixty years later, a similar situation obtains. Shimon Peres, the President of Israel, recently commented on the possibilities for a negotiated peace in the Middle East. He identified as a problem the weakness of the Arabs because of their lack of unity. He said, "The problem is that the Palestinians are split . . . They are weak and they are getting weaker".¹ This split is primarily seen in the divide between Fatah and Hamas. Of Hamas, he said, "They don't want to talk; they want to get rid of Israel".

Since 1948, Israel has achieved several stunning victories against its enemies. Yet we know

this will not go on indefinitely. What does the future hold for Israel? In this article we will consider this question by thinking how the advice Christ gave to the Jews on how to escape the destruction of A.D. 70 can be applied to the time of the end.

Destruction

Concerning what was to happen to Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the Lord Jesus said, "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judæa flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Lk. 21:20-22). These words, when considered in the light of prophecies relating to the time of the end, although they applied to A.D. 70, provide instruction today for Jews living in Jerusalem and in Israel as a whole.

Concerning Israel at the time of Armageddon, God said through Zechariah, "And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD [Yahweh], two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will

1. Buck, T. (2008), "Peres blames 'weak' Palestinians", *Financial Times*, 15 Apr., p. 8.