

## Israel at 63 5-15-11

Modern Israel turned 63 on May 9th, a day celebrated by Jews worldwide but condemned by Palestinian Arabs as “Nakba” Day, meaning “Catastrophe” Day. Which is it? Why should Christians care?

Today, Israel is a vibrant nation of 7.7 million people, 75% of whom are Jewish and 20% Arab. There are some 150,000 Christians, up 400% from 1949. Israel is the only functioning democracy and has by far the most productive economy in the Middle East apart from oil revenues found in the Arab states. Remarkably, geologists now believe Israel has one of the largest oil and gas reserves in the world, on a par with Arab states, promising to make Israel very rich indeed in the coming years.

Meanwhile, the so-called “Arab Spring”—the rash of uprisings against entrenched Arab dictators that has spread like wildfire across Arab nations—has begun releasing new anti-Israel passions in the nations bordering on Israel. This very Sunday (May 15th), Syrian Arabs broke through border fences along the Golan Heights, while Gazans marched in violent protest. Israelis feel more threatened now than they have since the 1970s.

There are at least three spiritually important reasons why Christians should care about what happens in modern Israel:

- **Modern Israel is a testimony to God's Word and proof that He is who He says He is.** The formation of modern Israel is totally unique in world history, fulfilling God's word that He would bring His Chosen People back to the Holy Land (*Jeremiah 30:3, Amos 9:14-15*).
- **Israel remains God's litmus test for truth and the ultimate establishment of peace on earth.** Until Israel exists securely, without threat, in peace, the entire world will not know peace. (*Jeremiah 30, Zechariah 12-14, Joel 3:1-8, Matthew 25:31-32*)
- **What happens in Israel portends what will happen elsewhere, including here at home.** If powers of deception succeed in defeating God's truths in Israel, they will succeed here, because Israel is the apple of God's eye (*Zechariah 2:8*).

The *Talmud*, the definitive collection of traditional Jewish religious teachings, says that “The Messianic era begins when prophecies begin unfolding” (*B'rachot 34b*). This means that the coming of King Messiah—i.e., the Second Coming of Christ—is in sight when major world events prophesied in the Bible begin unfolding. The formation of modern Israel in 1948 marked the beginning of this period in modern history.

The Lord told Israel through Moses that He would exile Israel from the Holy Land twice. The first exile occurred with the invasion of Babylon (597-582 BC). The second took place at the hands of Rome, culminating with the Roman defeat of Simon bar Kochba in 135 AD. *Deuteronomy 28* offers details about the second exile: Israel would be “scattered among all peoples from one end of the earth to the other”; Jews would become “an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations”; and they would have no assurance of their lives. Still, God would bring them back to the home He promised them one day!

Remarkably, Moses also prophesied that the Holy Land would become a parched and desolate desert where no green thing would grow (*Deut 28:23, Lev 26:19-20*). During Moses' own lifetime Israel was a Land of Milk and Honey, verdant and fruitful. But after bar Kochba's defeat, it became a famous desolation. Not even Israel's enemies could live there. The Ottoman Turks tried settling as recently as the 16th through 19th centuries without success. Locust plagues and earthquakes, in addition to the extended drought, simply prevented any viable agriculture or other productive civilization—that is, until Jews began returning to Palestine in the late 1800s. Remarkably, the rains returned to Israel in the twentieth century, after 18 centuries of drought, and modern Israel is now a net exporter of fruit and other crops. In other words, God, Himself, ensured that no other nation would succeed in Israel until He brought His special people back home.

God promised he would reverse the exile and bring Jews back to Israel to live forever (*Amos 9:14-15, Jeremiah 31:12*). For this reason, we support Israel, even though modern Israel is controlled by secular and religious Jews who do not recognize Jesus as Lord. One thing we believe: when Jesus returns, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God. (*Romans 14:11, Philipians 2:10*) Why should we pray for the peace of Jerusalem? First, because God's word tells us to (*Psalms 122.6*). Finally, listen to these compelling words from the Apostle Paul, paraphrased in *The Message*:

They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Messiah, who is God over all, blessed for ever. Amen. (*Romans 9:4-5*)