

ISRAEL

Over 1,800 years following the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the modern state of Israel was proposed by Austrian journalist Theodor Herzl. In 1896, Herzl published a pamphlet entitled “Der Judenstaat”, German for “The Jewish State”. A year later, the modern Zionist movement began in earnest with the first congress of the Zionist Organization led by Herzl. It quickly gained ground both with Jews as well as European government officials. On November 2, 1917, British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour wrote a letter which evolved into an official public statement known as the “Balfour Declaration.” The statement announced Britain’s support for “a national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine. At the time, Palestine was ruled by the mighty Ottoman Empire that spanned from Europe to Asia and Africa from the 1300s until its collapse during World War I.



On July 24, 1922, the League of Nations authorized the fledgling Jewish State in the form of a British Mandate prompting the migration of

thousands of persecuted Jews from Germany, Russia, and Eastern Europe. On May 14, 1948, following the withdrawal of the British, David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, officially declared Israel’s statehood beneath a large portrait of Theodor Herzl. The very next day, Israel was invaded from all sides by forces from Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq.



Conflicts, disputes, violence, wars, partitions, segregations, persecutions, and mass immigration have shaped both the borders as well as the composition of Israel since the early 20th century. Arab Palestinians rejected the 1947 United Nations proposal for a partitioned state and civil war erupted under the pressures of decades of British colonial policy and a million Jewish immigrants fleeing the holocaust. Both Jews and Arabs have suffered under leaders that have failed to secure peace. An estimated 700,000 Palestinian Arabs (85% of the population) were displaced from their homes during the 1948 Palestine War, and their suffering has continued since then; while at the same time Jewish Israelis have endured almost ceaseless conflict and insecurity at the hands of Arab states across the region during the entire period from the end of the second world war to the present day.



Today, Israel hosts a diverse population of over 10 million people comprised of Jews from the diaspora (73.2%), Arabs (21.1%), and immigrants from countless countries and ethnicities (5.7%). The country of Israel is located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea in the Southern Lavant of the Middle East and lies east of Egypt, west of Jordan, southwest of Syria and south of Lebanon. Arab Palestinians control the 25-mile-long Gaza strip along the southwest shore of the Mediterranean Sea which is home to some 2.1 million



Gazans. The West Bank, situated west of the Jordan River, is the second of two Arab territories with 2.7 million Arabs and 670,000 Jewish settlers. Politically, Israel is a unitary parliamentary republic whose legislature is known as the Knesset. Currently President Isaac Herzog is head of state and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is the head of government along with 120 Knesset members. As of 2022, Arab-led parties filled 10% of Knesset seats.

Economically, Israel is widely considered the most advanced country in western Asia and in 2020 exports topped \$114 billion. The country generally has a 5-day work week from Sunday to Thursday or Friday. Shabbat is observed from a few minutes before sunset on Friday until “the appearance of three stars in the sky” (1-hour) after sundown on Saturday. The ethnic diversity means that Israel is also culturally diverse, and while modern Hebrew is the national language, many other languages including English are spoken.

Israel is deeply divided spiritually. As of 2022 estimates include 73.5% Jewish, 18.1% Muslim, 1.9% Christian, 1.6% Druze, and 4.9% other religions. As of 2016 Pew Research reported that of the Jews, 49% self-identify as Hiloni (secular), 29% as Masorti (traditional), 13% as Dati (religious) and 9% as Haredi (ultra-Orthodox). Christians are primarily of Arab and Aramean descent but also post-Soviet immigrants, foreign labourers, and Messianic Jews. There are an estimated 20,000 Christians in some 200 congregations. At least three Reformed Baptist Churches are present in Israel, and Reformed Presbyterians have a limited presence as well. An association of Baptist Churches is located throughout Israel including several in the city of Nazareth, a centre of Christian pilgrimage since late antiquity.

Pray that the risen Christ would raise up biblically qualified elders to restore the Old Paths (Jer 6:16). Pray for peace in Israel, both politically and spiritually. Pray that the Gospel of Jesus Christ would be proclaimed boldly and without hindrance, that many Jews will recognize Him as their longed-for Messiah. As the Apostle Paul, himself a believing Jewish man, wrote: “If their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” (Romans 11:15)

