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**The Southern Baptist Convention  
and Israel: 1945 - 1949**

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### **About the Author/Dr. David T. Crum**

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## **Introduction**

The Holocaust was one of the worst atrocities the world has ever seen. Clearly, Hitler fooled many people worldwide with his war on the Jews. In his own country, his propaganda efforts were successful, as many Germans despised the Jews. Sadly, this ideology spread from Germany to other parts of the world and affected much of Europe.

By the war's end, Jews were suffering in Europe, just looking for peace and a place to call home. It appeared that European Jews were unwelcome everywhere. The free world had the duty to step in and address this problem Jews were facing. The United Nations and the United States found themselves at the center of this Jewish controversy. Some Americans looked to their President for answers. Some influential Christians and American political leaders had an idea. For certain people, the answer was easy; the Jews needed to return home to their Promised Land. However, not everyone embraced this idea, and every day people ignored the Jews; they endured further suffering.

This article explores the predicament of the Jews after the Second World War. Specifically evaluated is the Southern Baptist Convention's position on such issues. Likewise, the United States changed as a nation connected to the creation of Israel. Today, Israel remains one of the closest allies of the U.S., which started after World War II. For several Christians, including some members of the Southern Baptist Convention, the Jews needed to return to Israel. Such logic correlated to theological matters, such as the "end of times," and the fact that many Christians viewed the Jews as God's chosen people.

## **The Jews After the War**

While the war in Europe officially ended in 1945, life for European Jews was still uncertain. By the end of the war, most soldiers serving in Europe were familiar with the treatment of the Jews. American soldiers "saw Hitler's extermination camps." The "conditions they saw stayed with them forever."<sup>1</sup> General Dwight Eisenhower "wanted as many American troops as possible to see the concentration camps first-hand."<sup>2</sup> Eisenhower "mentioned he had never seen something so evil in his life."<sup>3</sup> The general surveyed the concentration camp of "Ohrduf to ensure he was personally ready to testify against any Nazi leader standing trial."<sup>4</sup> Several Nazis later argued that their persecution of the Jews was Western propaganda.<sup>5</sup> This was not unusual throughout the war; the Nazis typically misled the world and denied the Holocaust. Eisenhower knew that every eyewitness account mattered when discussing the reality of the extermination camps.<sup>6</sup> While Hitler was gone, several high-ranking officials within the Nazi Party remained, and the allies had an obligation to hold them accountable for the massacre of the Jews.

By the end of the "Holocaust, more than nine million Jews perished."<sup>7</sup> In December 1945, "President Truman sent U.S. officials to Europe to survey the concentration camps and provide

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Fischel, *The Holocaust*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998), 117.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Fischel, *The Holocaust*, 172.

safe zones for the European Jews."<sup>8</sup> At this time, "displaced Jews suffered and died daily" due to their lack of care.<sup>9</sup> Quite a few Jews were homeless, roaming the streets of Europe while starving for food. The World Jewish Congress also "sent a team of leaders to Europe" to report on their peoples' current conditions."<sup>10</sup> While the European Jews welcomed the eyewitness accounts, this did little to help them regarding their future.

The *Jewish Post* reported, "there were still displaced Jews in Germany."<sup>11</sup> The World Jewish Congress "ordered that all Jews present in Germany must relocate immediately as they were starving and lacked appropriate housing."<sup>12</sup> Although the number of Jews present in Germany by the end of the war was small, American Jews knew their European counterparts needed relocation as soon as possible. One could only imagine how difficult it must have been to be a German Jew living in Nazi territory. By 1946, "only 4,000 Jews remained in the country."<sup>13</sup>

President Truman had an official "order that allowed 3,900 displaced people to seek refuge in the United States each month."<sup>14</sup> These refugees were granted "visas and allowed to live in the country legally."<sup>15</sup> However, this was not satisfactory for many Jews, as they knew "this meant thousands of Polish Jews were still displaced and looking for a place to call home."<sup>16</sup> Unlike the small numbers in Germany, thousands of Jews remained in Poland, looking for permanent residence.

The *Jewish Press* in Omaha, Nebraska "was on record stating that the Western world was providing false hope to European Jews."<sup>17</sup> According to this publication, "Jews were being told a specific land or territory would be created for them."<sup>18</sup> However, these American Jews did not believe this was possible and desired an official "safe haven."<sup>19</sup> They thought a certain territory based in Europe was the best place for the struggling Jews. Other Americans, including some Jews, felt the Middle East was the rightful home and destination for the people group.

In 1946, the possibility of "homeless Jews relocating to the Promised Land in Palestine was an option discussed in American politics."<sup>20</sup> Jewish-American Journalist Al Segal supported this move.<sup>21</sup> He feared "Jews relocating to the U.S. would be segregated and ultimately discriminated against."<sup>22</sup> According to Segal, returning to the Promised Land resolved the Jew problem.

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<sup>8</sup> *Jewish Post*, Indianapolis, Marion County, December 28, 1945, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>14</sup> *Jewish Post*, Indianapolis, Marion County, January 4, 1946, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> *Jewish Post*, Indianapolis, Marion County, January 4, 1946, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Al Segal, *Jewish Post*, Indianapolis, Marion County, January 18, 1946, 13.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

He stated the following:

I should like to see the freest immigration of homeless Jews into Palestine. I am a Zionist who wants Palestine to be a great and good country for our homeless. My Zionism dates far back before the time when Zionism became ambitious for a Jewish state and made politics out of being Jewish. My Zionism thinks only of fruitful land and good health and ideal social economy among Jews in Palestine; it has no idea of another nation. There are too many nations troubling the world already.<sup>23</sup>

In 1946, the proposed plan to relocate Jews back to Palestine was not new. This idea was prominent during the war, as the allies frequently discussed this topic. The nation of England was at the center of the discussion, as they had ultimate control over Palestine. This was due to their victory over the Ottoman Empire after World War I.<sup>24</sup> By 1946, the English did not appear to be so eager to allow massive amounts of Jews to enter Palestine. In fact, in 1939, England ordered this decision to be made by the Arabs within the region.<sup>25</sup> It was evident that religion and theological implications correlated with the "Jew Problem" and the future of this people group.

Christian leaders also had their opinions, as this was a serious matter related to Jesus' chosen people. One major problem remained. Palestine was heavily populated by Muslims. Moreover, Muslims did not want the Jews to relocate to their land. It was clear that the Jew problem had no easy solution. The Southern Baptist Convention knew this issue was important, and many within the denomination sought to provide their opinion on the matter.

### **Jacob Gartenhaus: Future of Jews**

Perhaps no one in the SBC was more dedicated to the Jews than Jacob Gartenhaus. Gartenhaus, the missionary of the Jews, had a heart for this group of people and felt it was his Godly duty to serve the Jews on earth. In the years following World War II, Gartenhaus published a book titled "*What of the Jews?*" In the foreword of his book, he immediately argued that the Jews should return to Palestine. He wrote, "The author (Gartenhaus) is wholeheartedly for the return of his harassed and hunted people to Palestine as a haven of refuge, but he doubts seriously whether this is the solution to the ever-recurrent Jewish problem of Israel among the nations."<sup>26</sup>

To solve the Jew problem, Gartenhaus wrote, "There is only one solution for this world's ills, and that is for all, Jew and Gentile, to return to God."<sup>27</sup> This missionary was well aware of the "Jew problem."<sup>28</sup> For him, this issue was not new, yet it had been present for centuries.<sup>29</sup> He wrote the following: "The Jewish problem is not a product of our own civilization; it is as old as the Jew."<sup>30</sup> Gartenhaus pointed to the Bible and the history of mankind, teaching "wherever the Jews settled temporarily or permanently, division occurred."<sup>31</sup> His message was thought-provoking.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Irving Hexham, *Understanding World Religions: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 290.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Jacob Gartenhaus, *What of the Jews?*, (Atlanta: SBC Home Mission Board, 1948), 5.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

For Christians, the Bible was an important historical book. All one needed to do was examine the scriptures to learn about the lives and struggles of the Jews. Throughout history, God's chosen people often prospered, yet they also suffered judgment from the hand of God. According to some Christians, the Jews were God's chosen people, meaning they needed to be present within the Promised Land. For several Christians (especially premillennialists), this was much larger than politics, as it connected to prophecies and the ultimate return of Jesus.

Gartenhaus was aware of the proposed plan to relocate Jews to Palestine. Perhaps no other region was as important as Palestine. Palestine "was a special place for several souls on earth."<sup>32</sup> For the Jews, it was the home of the Promised Land.<sup>33</sup> However, it was just as significant "for Christians and Muslims."<sup>34</sup> Gartenhaus explained that "Palestine" was the Holy Land for the three major religions.<sup>35</sup> This is what made the Jew problem so controversial. It was evident that many political leaders simply did not understand how important the land was for people of various religions worldwide. Several Christians viewed the land as sacred, as it was the home of their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Furthermore, some believers embrace the teachings that Jesus will return to the same land in His ultimate judgment. However, being heavily populated with Arabs did not line up with Biblical prophecies for those who believed in this form of eschatology. For Christians who adhered to such teachings, the land was meant for the Jews. This aligned with the Second Coming of Christ as taught in the book of Revelation.

For the Arab Muslims, the land of Palestine was theirs.<sup>36</sup> After all, according to them, they had conquered the land from the Jews.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, in Muslim teachings, the land was just as valuable to them as it was to the Christians or Jews. Nevertheless, many Christians and Americans alike felt the Jews needed to return to Palestine.

Gartenhaus wrote that approximately six million Jews survived the war and were present in Europe.<sup>38</sup> According to these Jews, staying in Europe was dangerous, as they were persecuted by "nations who claimed Christianity."<sup>39</sup> For most Jews in Europe, the region was not a safe zone, as they had just endured years of persecution in which millions of their family members had died. Trust was a big factor, and many Jews only had faith in their own people. Gartenhaus wrote the following: "The Jews ask only that they be permitted to return to their ancestral homeland and reestablish there a commonwealth in which they can live in peace and security each man under his own vine and under his own fig tree."<sup>40</sup> The question remained whether peace could exist with the Jews returning to a land dominated by Arabs. This matter separated a multitude of souls, including Christians.

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<sup>32</sup> Gartenhaus, *What of the Jews*, 33.

<sup>33</sup> Gartenhaus, *What of the Jews*, 33.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Gartenhaus, *What of the Jews*, 41.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Gartenhaus, *What of the Jews*, 47.

Gartenhaus felt confident God would return the Jews to Israel as he thought it was a prophetic destiny. He argued, "The Jew will have Palestine with or without the help of Britain or any other nation on the earth! When and how this will come about, we do not know; but come about it will!"<sup>41</sup> Gartenhaus pointed his readers to Jeremiah 33:14 and Ezekiel 39:28. "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah," (Jeremiah 33:14). "Then, they shall know that I am the LORD their God, because I sent them into exile among the nations and then assembled them into their own land. I will leave none of them remaining among the nations anymore," (Ezekiel 39:28). For Gartenhaus, the return of the Jews to Palestine could very well mean the return of Christ in Jesus' Second Coming.<sup>42</sup>

While returning to Palestine was a priority, the most important issue surrounding the Jews was salvation. This evangelist also realized how difficult it was for Jews to convert to Christianity. After all, he was himself beaten and nearly died when he claimed Jesus to be His Lord and Savior. On this account, he challenged his fellow Christians to be ready to assist Jews who would convert:

The Jew who accepts the Christian faith has to pay a price for it. His father and mother and nearest and dearest will often turn against him. He is put to a severe test. He may be ostracized by his people. In this hour of mental struggle and the travail of the soul, he needs all the sympathy available. He longs for new friends to take the place of the old ones. A kind and cheering word will go far. Some Jews will have to leave their homes, and it will be necessary for Christians to receive them into their homes.<sup>43</sup>

According to him, the Jews needed to return to Palestine. First, he felt this was their land. Most importantly, he believed it was a prophetic destiny. However, most importantly, he taught Jews needed Jesus. The Jews needed to be reached for Christ and saved before it was too late.

### **Hyman Appleman on the Jews**

Like Gartenhaus, Hyman Appelman had a passion for the Jews. This SBC evangelist and preacher was once a practicing Jew. He released his own book titled *The Jew in History and Destiny*. He explained his rationale for releasing such a book, writing, "As goes the Jew, so goes the world. Watch the Jew if you want to know what will happen to the United States."<sup>44</sup> Appelman further elaborated on the importance of the Jews: "He is God's measure; God's yardstick; God's plan; God's outline; God's program; God's blueprint of what He will do with all other nations of the globe under given circumstances."<sup>45</sup>

Appelman was a European Jewish immigrant and held bloodlines connected to the Jewish race. Although he was a convert to Christianity, his connection to Judaism never disappeared. According to him, "Jews were hated across the world."<sup>46</sup> He explained, "this is in a large part since Jews were peculiar and different than every other person on earth."<sup>47</sup> Appelman continued:

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>43</sup> Gartenhaus, *What of the Jews*, 80.

<sup>44</sup> Hyman J. Appelman, *The Jew in History and Destiny*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1947), 6.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>46</sup> Appelman, *The Jew in History and Destiny*, 8.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

God has kept the Jew apart from the nations. God has a purpose in this. The Jew is peculiar. He has his own holidays. He has his own church. He has his own stores. He has his own rituals and ceremonials. He has his own customs, such as circumcision and confirmation. He has his own language. He seldom intermarries with a Gentile, and when he does so, there is trouble. We are so constituted that we hate anyone who is different from us.<sup>48</sup>

In the opinion of Appelman, the Jew was a special race typically isolated from the rest of the world. Isolation and individuality appeared to be some people's goals when solving the Jew problem. Appelman seemed to disagree with this notion. The United States had a strong presence of Jews, just as Europe did. From 1946 to 1947, there was a discussion of relocating the "American Jews to an isolated area."<sup>49</sup> For this SBC evangelist, this was a bad idea.<sup>50</sup> Appelman mentioned, "There were many Jewish doctors, dentists, and nurses,"<sup>51</sup> and for him, Americans would suffer if the Jews left the U.S.<sup>52</sup> He was strongly against the idea of encouraging American Jews to leave the United States. This deeply contrasted his beliefs before and during World War II. During the late 1930's, he believed the Jews needed to return to Palestine. Nevertheless, Appelman differed from some regarding the future of the Jews. Appelman did not think the Jews needed to be "isolated or ignored in a foreign land."<sup>53</sup> His answer was conversion. He wrote:

There is one hope for the Jew-scriptural hope, spiritual hope. God hope, divine hope, eternal hope and that is salvation, justification, regeneration through the Lord Jesus Christ. To kill the Jew, make a Christian out of him. When we are in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, but all are the ones in Christ Jesus. To destroy the Jew, win him for Jesus. To destroy the Jew, wash him in the blood of the lamb. To solve the Jewish Problem, give the Jew the Lord Jesus Christ. That is our task.<sup>54</sup>

Appelman desired the Jews converted to Christianity. He wrote the following: "If you have the love of God in your heart, you are going to pray for them; you are going to preach to them; you are going to pay for them; you are going to try to win them for the Lord Jesus Christ, together with other Christians they may rejoice in the assurance of life everlasting."<sup>55</sup> His passion was to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ, especially to the Jews. He felt the only hope the Jews had on earth was to become born-again Christians. This Southern Baptist leader emphasized spiritual change rather than relocation. Appelman and Gartenhaus held similar beliefs, as they both sought salvation for the Jews. However, they did differ in their views regarding the Jews returning to Israel.

While Gartenhaus agreed that every soul, including the Jew, needed Christ as their Savior, Gartenhaus underlined that the relocation of the Jews to Palestine was of great importance. The relocation of the Jews held heavy implications for his Christian faith and Biblical prophecies

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Appelman, *The Jew in History and Destiny*, 23.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 27.



surrounding the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Appelman remained confident the world needed Jews, including the United States.

### **The Annual Southern Baptist Convention**

During the 1947 annual convention, the SBC was "informed that twelve million Jews remained on earth, half of them living in the United States."<sup>56</sup> For the SBC and their missionaries, this gave them a unique opportunity to evangelize the Jews.<sup>57</sup> Gartenhaus declared the following at the annual convention:

The opportunities for winning my people to Christ are unprecedented, and it is heartbreaking to think how comparatively little the true church of Christ, with its message of hope, has done to meet the great challenge with the nearly six million Jews of America – practically one-half of the Jewish population of the world-present. No other country in the world has such an opportunity for service as America; but how tragic that Christians are not alert to these things!<sup>58</sup>

It was apparent that the SBC did have an opportunity for home missions. According to Gartenhaus, with several Jews present in the country, the denomination needed to live out its Biblical duty and share the Gospel of Christ.<sup>59</sup> After all, one could not ignore the Jews, as millions of them were just killed in a campaign to end their race.

In 1947, the SBC reported, "that over one million people remained displaced in Europe."<sup>60</sup> This included Jews and Christians.<sup>61</sup> According to these statistics, the number of displaced Jews had fallen drastically. This was due to several Jews taking it upon themselves to relocate to Palestine.<sup>62</sup> However, one million people displaced and without a home was still an alarming statistic.

The Social Service Commission of the denomination "went on record stating their country should assist the displaced souls in Europe and allow up to 400,000 Jews to live in the United States."<sup>63</sup> The commission "also mentioned the Palestinian problem."<sup>64</sup> They were aware that "the region was possibly going to be divided by the Arabs and Jews."<sup>65</sup> Regarding the future, the SBC noted, "they would have to wait and see what took place in Palestine before their own missions could continue and become fruitful."<sup>66</sup> Southern Baptists knew that tension in Palestine was prominent and would only continue with Muslims and Jews, both claiming to be the rightful heirs of the land. The Foreign Mission Board declared, "We are fully convinced that peace will never come to Jerusalem and other cities that have denied Him, until the Prince of Peace has been received by

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<sup>56</sup> *Annual*, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, "Digital Resources," *Southern Baptist Convention*, [http://www.sbhla.org/digital\\_resources.asp](http://www.sbhla.org/digital_resources.asp), 1947, 159.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Annual*, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, "Digital Resources", 1947, 160.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Hexham, *Understanding World Religions: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, 290.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Annual*, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, "Digital Resources", 1947, 88.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Annual*, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, "Digital Resources", 1947, 88.

his own. <sup>67</sup> The concern over Palestine was not limited to Christians, yet political leaders and even the President of the United States had opinions on the matter.

### **Harry S. Truman and His Connection to Israel**

President Truman's support of the Jews returning to Israel was evident before his presidency. <sup>68</sup> In fact, in 1939, "Truman criticized the English for their White Paper policy that limited the number of Jews allowed into the region." <sup>69</sup> By 1941, he was a member of the American Palestine Committee. <sup>70</sup> For the Jews, Truman was perhaps one of the most influential people on a global scale who supported their desire to relocate to Israel. For a group of people often ignored, having the President of the United States embrace their desire to create their own nation was a blessing in disguise.

In 1945, "the United Nations met in San Francisco." <sup>71</sup> One of the most important discussions of the meeting was the future of Palestine. <sup>72</sup> Palestine "was technically under English rule as they occupied the land with military force following the First World War." <sup>73</sup> By November, English "officials were reporting they sought Truman's advice on the region's future." <sup>74</sup> England knew that its nation played a major role in the Jewish problem. After all, the "White Paper policy implemented by former Prime Minister Chamberlain" only worsened matters between the Arabs and the Jews. <sup>75</sup> England's political leaders were divided and "unaware of what to do with the current Jewish problem." <sup>76</sup>

By 1947, Baptist leader J. Frank Norris became involved in the "Jewish controversy." <sup>77</sup> Norris penned "a letter to Truman expressing his concerns and opinion on the future of the Jews and Palestine." <sup>78</sup> Norris wrote the following to the President, "The Lord God Almighty in Genesis the 17<sup>th</sup> Chapter, specifically states that the title to Palestine is given not to Ishmael, the ancestor of the Arabs, but to Isaac and his seed forever." <sup>79</sup> Norris sought to educate Truman on the history of the Jews and convince the President that the rightful owners of Palestine were, in fact, the Jews. Norris continued, "explaining thirteen hundred years ago followers of Muhammad with fire and sword robbed the land from the Jews." <sup>80</sup> Norris was "adamant that former English Prime Minister Chamberlain made the situation worse in 1939 when he allowed the Arabs to control whether Jews could continue to migrate into Palestine." <sup>81</sup> He felt England had violated

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Allis Radosh and Ronald Radosh, *A Safe Haven: Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 48.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> *Ogdensburg Journal*, November 5, 1945, 1.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Radosh and Radosh, *A Safe Haven: Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel*, 61.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Radosh and Radosh, *A Safe Haven: Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel*, 61.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> J. Frank Norris, *Letter to President Truman* October 2, 1947.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Norris, *Letter to President Truman*.

international law and had no right to dictate how many Jews lived in Palestine. According to Norris, Palestine "was taken away unfairly by followers of Muhammad."<sup>82</sup>

It was obvious Norris wanted Palestine to be under the control of the Jews.<sup>83</sup> Norris taught the region held extreme importance for Jews and his religion of Christianity. He concluded his letter by writing, "I interviewed many Arab leaders, and without question, I found that the whole crowd is for Stalin, just like they formerly were for Hitler. While this country was fighting Hitler, thirty thousand young Jews from Palestine volunteered and went to the battle front and not a single Arab regiment."<sup>84</sup> Norris highlighted the loyalty of the Jews to the Allied cause to persuade the President to support the creation of Israel.

On October 7, 1947, President Truman responded to Pastor Norris. He wrote the following: "I am most grateful for your thoughtful letter on October 2. I deeply appreciate having the benefit of this expression of your views because I know that you have given long and extensive study to the Jewish Palestinian question."<sup>85</sup>

### **The State of Israel**

Not known to some people was the fact that Jews were present in Palestine. However, their numbers were small, and attacks regularly occurred even during the war years. Division already existed between the Arabs and Jews. The Arabs made up the majority of the population, so for the Jews, they felt like an outsider in their own Promised Land.

Between 1945 and 1946, Jews left Europe by the thousands "seeking a safe place to call home."<sup>86</sup> They were tired of waiting and decided to take matters into their own hands. The ultimate destination for the majority was Palestine, also known to them as Israel. Palestine, under English "mandate or rule, was not so welcoming to the fleeing Jews."<sup>87</sup> Religious Studies Historian Irving Hexham writes, "Traumatized Jews fleeing Europe after the war sought refuge in Palestine, but neither the British authorities, who held a League of Nations Mandate over the territory, nor the local Arabs, the majority of whom were Christians, welcomed massive Jewish immigration."<sup>88</sup>

The English and Arabs alike opposed migration into the region.<sup>89</sup> The English even used force at times to forbid entrance into Palestine. By February 1946, the "English sought to remove themselves from the situation and allowed the United Nations to solve the Jewish Problem."<sup>90</sup> Hexham notes, "On February 14, 1946, the British handed over the Problem to the newly founded United Nations, which on November 29, 1947 endorsed a plan for the partition of Palestine

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Norris, *Letter to President Truman*.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Hexham, *Understanding World Religions: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, 290.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 290.

<sup>89</sup> Hexham, *Understanding World Religions: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, 291.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

between Arabs and Jews. This led to Arab attacks on Jewish settlements and Jewish countermeasures, in which over a thousand Jews and many Arabs died."<sup>91</sup>

By 1947 Canadian officials "called for an official Jewish State."<sup>92</sup> Senator Arthur Roebuck felt confident "with the support of the United States and England that up to five million Jews could call Palestine home."<sup>93</sup> Realizing this was a "controversial topic," the senator stated the following regarding the Arabs: "If Britain and the United States move firmly, they have nothing to fear from the military or economic power of the Arab states. The might of Islam is a myth, but its aggression must be stopped lest by strengthening their hands and weakening ours."<sup>94</sup>

For people such as Roebuck, the future of Palestine held great magnitude. This political leader connected the controversy to religion. Roebuck "described himself as a Zionist Christian," embracing the Zionist movement.<sup>95</sup> In 1946, the United Nations became more involved in the Palestinian Problem and had an idea that would split the region.<sup>96</sup> The UN's plan "divided Palestine between the Arabs and Jews."<sup>97</sup> This was a very good idea for many, yet for others, it was only going to make matters worse between Muslims and Jews.<sup>98</sup> Jewish Rabbi Louis Mann stated that "Jews should be welcomed in Palestine yet they should not be given an official state."<sup>99</sup> Mann claimed, "Palestine was holy to many world religions and should not be split in half."<sup>100</sup> For Mann, the United States was the perfect example, as "all world religions were present and protected under the U.S. Constitution."<sup>101</sup> In 1946, "two-thirds of the population was Arab, not of Jewish descent." This Jewish leader felt allowing a permanent Jewish state to form would result in exclusion and conflict.

Regardless of the opposition by many, an official Jewish state was the ultimate goal and plan for most Palestinian Jews. On May 12, 1948, "Israel was created with an individual declaration of independence."<sup>102</sup> This decision was controversial; entire nations were split regarding Israel's newly "formed state."<sup>103</sup> The Arab community and governments of the Middle East did not accept Israel and its declaration of independence.<sup>104</sup> It was apparent that a pre-existing conflict had just become worse.

For the Zionist Jews, May 12, 1948, was a day of celebration. Years before World War II started, "several American Jews calling themselves Zionists sought to create the nation of Israel."<sup>105</sup> Until 1948, this was a dream that had just become a reality. J. Frank Norris and the Zionists got their

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<sup>91</sup> Hexham, *Understanding World Religions: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, 291.

<sup>92</sup> Wilfred List, *Jewish Post*, Indianapolis, Marion County, February 1, 1946, 7.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Hexham, *Understanding World Religions: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, 290.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> *Jewish Post*, Indianapolis, Marion County, February 1, 1946, 7.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> *North Country Catholic*, May 23, 1948, 8.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Edwin S. Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, *The Religious History of America: The Heart of the American Story from Colonial Times to Today* (New York: Harper One, 2004), 285.

wish, and President Truman supported and recognized "the new state of Israel."<sup>106</sup> On May 14, 1948, the President of the United States released the following statement:

This Government has been informed that a Jewish state has been proclaimed in Palestine, and recognition has been requested by the provisional government thereof. The United States recognizes the provisional government as the de facto authority of the new State of Israel.<sup>107</sup>

It was reported "that Jews across the world were rejoicing with the announcement made by President Truman."<sup>108</sup> For several Jews, their wishes had come true, and they felt confident that their people now had a future. At the same time, the *North County Catholic* newspaper reported that "Arabs in Palestine" were furious.<sup>109</sup> Everyone across the globe knew a controversial yet monumental moment had just occurred. The most powerful nation on earth officially recognized Israel as an independent state.

By May 21, Russia "recognized the new state of Israel as an independent nation."<sup>110</sup> However, at this time, "England had yet to make such a declaration of Israel's existence as an individual country."<sup>111</sup> Israel "officially applied for admission into the United Nations."<sup>112</sup> Israel was planning the future strategically and knew they needed the UN's and Americans' support if they were going to remain a permanent country in the Middle East. Support was exactly what they received from the Truman administration. By June of 1948, "the U.S. President promised to financially assist the new nation of Israel."<sup>113</sup> Truman "announced his country had officially loaned Israel 100 million dollars."<sup>114</sup> While this was a reason to rejoice for the Jews, others felt betrayed by the American leader in the Middle East.

For the Jews, the loan solved significant issues, as the Arabs in the region did not "recognize Israel as a permanent state."<sup>115</sup> This meant constant attacks carried out between the Jews and Arabs.<sup>116</sup> Egyptian Premier Mahmoud Fahmy Nokrashy Pasha declared the following:

There never will be founded a state called Israel or any other name, as long as the creation of the state relies upon the theft of Arab land, the extermination of its Arab owners and the sacrifice of moral principles of its Arab neighbors.<sup>117</sup>

Regardless of the opposition to the creation of Israel, the United States and soon the United Nations positioned themselves to be a vital part of the new nation and the entire region. For the Americans, an "alliance had just been created that forever changed the Middle East and the history of the world."<sup>118</sup> The future of Palestine was clearly in question during the Second World

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<sup>106</sup> Harry Truman, "Telegraph on Israel," Telegraph, May 14, <http://www.ngu.edu/librarydatabases.php>.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> *North County Catholic*, May 23, 1948, 8.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> *Jewish Post*, Indianapolis, Marion County, May 21, 1948, 3.

<sup>111</sup> *Jewish Post*, Indianapolis, Marion County, May 21, 1948, 3.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> *Fort Covington Sun.*, June 17, 1948, 4.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Gaustad and Schmidt, *The Religious History of America*, 285.

War. The Arabs present were vulnerable, as the British played a pivotal role in the region's future. Once England sought advice from the United States and United Nations, the world knew the Jews would find themselves a new permanent home. However, not every Jew across the globe returned to the Promised Land, although the ones who did established themselves in a new nation now united with the Americans.<sup>119</sup> Having the support and possible protection of the Americans meant more to the Jews than anything else did. After being near extinction due to Hitler and his ideology, the Jews and the nation of Israel sought a true ally that protected them at all costs. In 1948, this alliance formed, and Israel and the United States formally started a relationship that shaped the world's future. Due to politics and religion, this connection continued throughout the administrations of several U.S. presidents.

By the fall of 1948, it was apparent that Israel sought to rebuild its nation focused around Jerusalem. During the fall months, "there was talk of establishing the World Jewish Court" back in Israel.<sup>120</sup> Additionally, migration to the region was prevalent as Jews from across the world continued to enter Israel. The *Jewish Post* reported, "that American Jews traveled to Israel to join the local army."<sup>121</sup> The conflict with the Arabs proved to be especially deadly, "and the thought was that American Jews would be able to strengthen the Israeli fighting forces."<sup>122</sup> After all, for most Jews, Israel was their ultimate Promised Land, and nationalism spread across the globe. This move proved historical, as Jews worldwide felt a deep connection to Israel, and several people thought it was their duty and obligation to fight for their "Holy Land."<sup>123</sup>

While the existence of Israel was official for the United States, others remained hesitant to make such a declaration. Nevertheless, the year 1948 created a nation of Israel that was holy for a variety of Christians. Some leaders within the SBC felt the Promised Land had officially been reestablished and given back to the rightful owner.

### **The Southern Baptist Convention and the State of Israel**

The members of the Southern Baptist Convention were similar to every other American. The idea and support of an independent Israel separated the denomination. Leaders like Gartenhaus embraced the idea; others such as Appelman emphasized conversion to Christianity as the main impetus for the Jewish race.

By June of 1948, the SBC and its members wrote about the "new nation of Israel."<sup>124</sup> The *Biblical Recorder* mentioned that Baptists should read the book "Deuteronomy if they wished to learn more about the Jews and their history."<sup>125</sup> These Baptists acknowledged they did not know "how long the nation of Israel would last or remain independent."<sup>126</sup> It was evident that the tension between the Arabs and Jews left the future of the land unknown.<sup>127</sup> Regardless of the end,

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<sup>119</sup> Gaustad and Schmidt, *The Religious History of America*, 285.

<sup>120</sup> *Jewish Post*, Indianapolis, Marion County, November 12, 1948, 8.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> *Biblical Recorder*, Wednesday, June 2, 1948, 6.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

the facts remained that Israel was a country recognized by the United States and its President. The *Recorder* "urged its readers to read a book of the Jews by Hyman Appelman and to pray for the Jews and nation of Israel."<sup>128</sup> Appelman, like Gartenhaus, remained an important voice to study if one was seeking to gain more information on the Jewish race and the people's history.

In the fall of 1948, Baylor University released several columns on the new nation of Israel. This SBC University paper *The Daily Lariat* reported: "the Arab government was formally denied by the U.S. in its request to possess all of the Palestinian lands."<sup>129</sup> It was clear the U.S. would stand with Israel and remain an ally. According to this SBC student newspaper, this was a monumental moment, as Truman's administration not only recognized Israel as a nation but affirmed that it would stand alongside its new ally.<sup>130</sup> The U.S. Undersecretary Robert Lovett "was on record criticizing the Arabs and their form of government."<sup>131</sup> It was apparent that the U.S. viewed the newly established Israel as a nation that shared its traditions and values. At a time when the U.S. strictly opposed communism and totalitarian-run governments, standing with Israel was the only option for many political leaders.

In 1948, the fight for "Jerusalem was intensifying between the Arabs and Jews."<sup>132</sup> The SBC Foreign Mission Board remained concerned "as they had several missionaries present that ultimately were evacuated by the United Nations."<sup>133</sup> The actual city of Jerusalem was "divided between Arabs and Jews," and the tension remained high with no end in sight.<sup>134</sup> According to the UN, the only safe thing to do was to return missionaries back to their homeland, as the fight for Jerusalem was growing worse by the day.

The conflict between the Arabs and Jews intensified and was named the "Palestinian Problem."<sup>135</sup> Southern Baptist George Sadler "reported that the tension was expected to worsen once the English permanently left the region in early May."<sup>136</sup> Sadler served as secretary for the Foreign Mission Board in Africa and Europe.<sup>137</sup> The SBC knew this conflict would not end anytime soon and realized it was bigger than different ideologies. According to Sadler, directly connected to the tension in Palestine, "was the fight for oil, government control (Communism & Democracy) and for the United States, involvement in Foreign Affairs."<sup>138</sup> Sadler was aware his once "isolationist home of the United States was changing due to the world war and sought to be involved in foreign affairs to include government reconstruction." Establishing an ally in the Middle East was strategic and essential for democracy and overall peace.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> *The Daily Lariat*, (Waco, Texas), Vol. 50, No. 19, Thursday, October 14, 1948, 2.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> *Annual*, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, "Digital Resources", 1949, 102.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> *Annual*, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, "Digital Resources", 1948, 125.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 395.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 125.

Sadler had his thoughts on the matter. He stated, "As world citizens, we cannot separate ourselves from a situation that is fought with such far-reaching possibilities; as Christians; we are concerned with its spiritual implications."<sup>139</sup> This Southern Baptist knew the existence of Israel connected to democracy and his own religion of Christianity. Like J. Frank Norris, Sadler knew the consequences tied to the land of Israel and the future of the faith connected to prophecies and the rightful ownership proclaimed in the Christian Bible.

The establishment of Israel meant many different things for Christians. The event was prophetic and directly correlated to "eschatology," or the end of times for some Christians. For those who believed this, the creation of Israel "signaled a prophetic return of the Jews to the Promised Land." For them, this was a great sign that Jesus Christ would be returning to earth for the ultimate judgment of humanity. Southern Baptists who believed this, now had the task of ensuring they were ready for such an occasion. The creation of Israel was historical for some and spiritual for others. Those who held to the spiritual importance of Israel referred to this event as the "Restoration of Israel."<sup>140</sup> By 1948, Israel was just beginning to make history. It is safe to say that the Southern Baptist Convention truly did not know what the future held for this independent state. For those who viewed this moment in a spiritual context, Israel was once again alive, which only supported the existence of the Christian God as the Lord of all nations and people.

## **Conclusion**

By the end of the Second World War, millions of Jews had died. The remaining Jews in Europe continued to suffer from starvation and lack of care. Opinions differed on how to solve the "Jew problem." The United Nations and the United States played a pivotal role in creating Israel. While controversial, the Americans, led by President Harry Truman, promised to stick with Israel and support the new nation. However, it would be the persecuted Jews themselves who sought change. They remained resilient in their return to their Promised Land. While the land was already claimed, the Jews felt it was their destiny to return to their home.

The United States embraced the new state of Israel and remained supportive of its independence. The neighbors of Israel did not. What occurred was constant tension and conflict between Arabs and Jews that remains to this very day. Battles continued, and a cease-fire would not happen until 1949. Even then, massive numbers of soldiers from both parties continuously died. Israel took a stand in the Middle East and refused to leave the region. Perhaps it was the persecution of the Jews during World War II that enabled them to be the fearless nation that it is today. For the Jews, Israel was worth fighting for, as it was more sacred than anything else on earth. With support from countries such as the United States, the Middle Eastern Jews felt honored and respected.

The creation of Israel did not come without a price. For a group of people that was the target of Hitler and Nazism, the Jews were prepared to fight to their deaths. Jews worldwide united to support Israel, as they continue to do so to this day. For some, the creation of Israel was not just a permanent home for God's chosen people, it was a prophetic destiny. A considerable amount of Christians viewed this moment as a sign from God.

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 170.



Within the Southern Baptist Convention, opinions differed on the creation of Israel. However, one thing was consistent – there was a need for salvation. According to the SBC, the Jews needed Jesus, and they sought to deliver the Gospel to the nation of Israel. With the U.N. and U.S. involved in creating Israel, missionary efforts and evangelism were permitted.

As it remains today, Israel is the Holy Land for the three great faiths of the world (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism). Whether one agreed with the creation of Israel or not, there is no denying that World War II paved the way for this to occur. The U.S. was arguably the biggest supporter of Israel gaining its independence, which changed the history of the world. The Jews were rebuilding their lives and making history with the development of the new state of Israel. The SBC continued to play an integral part in Jewish society and across the globe.

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