

The Importance of the Jewish State

The Jewish connection to the land of Israel is rooted in three thousand years of history, dating back to when the Jewish people established the first independent political entity in the land of Israel. While foreign armies conquered the territory in subsequent centuries, they never managed to break the link between the Jewish people and the land or to completely dislodge Jews from the area.

In 1948, the Jewish people reestablished the Jewish state after millennia of exile and persecution. Based on the basic tenet of Zionism—that Jews must have their own country as a haven—Israel has served as a refuge for Jews the world over. Israel has been built on the principles of freedom and democracy, fulfilling both a political and historic imperative.

An Idea to Build a New Nation in an Ancient Land

The memory of Israel and the desire to return to its ancient homeland remained a central part of the Jewish faith. Most Jews were dispersed from Israel following the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E., although Jews have maintained a continuous presence in the Land of Israel for more than 3,000 years. Jews who left the Holy Land found themselves in locations as diverse as Europe, North Africa, and the Persian Gulf.



The Holocaust demonstrated the need for the State of Israel as a safe refuge for Jews after the war.

In most societies, Jews were the subject of discriminatory laws, violence and even expulsion.

The religious yearning of Jews to return to their land ultimately spawned the political movement of Zionism in the 19th century, when European anti-Semitism made itself plain in the form of persecution and massacres. Many Jews came to believe that they would only escape discrimination and murder in a state of their own. One of the first and most outspoken proponents of Zionism was Theodor Herzl, a prominent Austrian journalist. In the late 1890s, Herzl helped rally religious and secular Jews to the idea that a viable Jewish state could be re-established in the historic Land of Israel.

The Zionists sought international backing for their quest to form a new political entity in the land of their ancestors—a sparsely populated desert

wasteland described in the 1860s by writer Mark Twain as “a desolate country...given over wholly to weeds—a silent mournful expanse.” In a major political victory for the Zionists, the British issued the Balfour Declaration in 1917, pledging to facilitate the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in the country. On that basis, Britain was awarded the Mandate for Palestine by the League of Nations in 1920.

Since its establishment in 1948, Israel has been forced to wage a struggle for its survival.

Holocaust Increases Urgency for Establishing a Jewish State

Less than three decades later, the genocidal murder of Europe’s Jews would clearly demonstrate to the world the vital need for a safe Jewish refuge.

Trapped without anywhere to flee, 6 million Jews—a stunning third of the world’s Jewish population—were systematically murdered during the Holocaust.

The Nazis killed Jews by massacres such as Babi Yar and in death camps like Auschwitz. After the war, hundreds of thousands of homeless survivors were kept in Displaced Persons camps. President Harry Truman was among the most prominent international

leaders urging increased immigration of Jews to Mandatory Palestine.

In 1947, the United Nations voted to partition the country into two states—one Arab and one Jewish. Even though more than half the area allocated for the Jewish nation was desert, the Jewish community in Palestine immediately accepted the compromise. The Arabs rejected the plan, and five Arab armies invaded Israel, openly seeking to abort the creation of the Jewish state.

A New Nation Struggles for Survival

Since its establishment in 1948, Israel has been forced to wage a struggle for survival, facing hostile neighbors with numerically superior armed forces while also contending with the constant threat of terrorism against its civilians.

In its early years, Israel fought three defensive wars against its Arab adversaries: in 1948, 1956 and 1967. The Six-Day War in 1967 left Israel in control of territory including the Sinai (later returned to Egypt), the Golan Heights, Gaza and the West Bank as well as the Old City of Jerusalem. The united city is Israel’s capital, and Israel has opened the city to all—protecting Christian, Muslim and Jewish holy sites and guaranteeing access.

Even today, after more than six decades, Israel must fight to justify its own existence and legitimacy. Unfortunately, the calls for Israel’s destruction still resonate in Iran and parts of the Arab world. And the United Nations, which helped give birth to the modern state of Israel, has often become the forum for efforts to delegitimize Israel.

A Home for Immigrants from Around the World

While combating these challenges, Israel has also faced the task of forging a unified nation from an incredibly diverse range of immigrants. Israel welcomed immigrants who doubled the size of its population in its first few years of existence. Since its founding, the tiny state has absorbed millions of immigrants from more than 100 countries, including Jews from Europe, Ethiopia and those forced to flee from Arab countries.

The achievements of Israel are even more remarkable considering that the country possesses few natural resources—two-thirds of its land mass is arid desert. Israel has developed agricultural techniques that enabled the nation to develop a worldwide reputation for “making the desert bloom.” Today, Israel is home to world-class universities and is a global giant when it comes to high-tech and medical innovations.

A National Ethos: Repairing the World

For Israel, it is not enough to serve as a safe haven for world Jewry. Equipped with first-hand knowledge of the challenges that resource-poor countries face, Israel has always strived to share its blessings with other countries that are less fortunate.

Before it had even established embassies in many world capitals, Israel sent experts abroad to teach Third World nations such skills as how to upgrade medical facilities, improve schools and coax crops from arid land. Today, Israel has one of the most extensive foreign assistance programs in the world.

Less than a century removed from being only a dream in the hearts and minds of millions of Jews, Israel has emerged as a thriving democracy and



Israel has shared its agricultural expertise and technologies throughout the world, including in impoverished Africa.

global leader, committed to fulfilling its Biblical mandate of being “a light unto the nations.”

Like the United States, Israel is not a perfect country. But also like the United States, its government and people constantly strive to fulfill the principles embodied in its Declaration of Independence: freedom, justice and peace.