

## ZION-ISM: THE FORTRESS IN THE CEMETERY

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*We're marching to Zion,  
Beautiful, beautiful Zion;  
We're marching upward to Zion, Zion!  
The beautiful city of God.*

This refrain, from Isaac Watts' 1707 hymn is imbedded in my cultural DNA. I have sung of Zion as long as I have known my own name. Zion, the goal of every life properly lived, the place of refuge. Paradise. The image of Zion, fixed within me in blissful contrast to the coal dust covered grit of Appalachia of my earliest memory, where me and Lee Joe and Bobby went into the Colored cemetery behind our house and knocked over headstones to built a fort. We knew we were play acting, that our fort was pretend just like shooting each other was make believe, too. Some of us grew to know there was something wrong with knocking over markers with their modest records of the disappeared, who had sunk down into the ground as well as down into the memories of folks who lacked the power to interfere with the White boys' fun in the Colored graveyard.

Next door, we had friendly Jewish neighbors, who owned two sleek boxers they had named *Blitz* and *Krieg*. I wanted to ask them why, but because this was where Jodie lived, I was too shy. Jodie would be pushing seventy now, a number I am pulling away from, like a quiet sailboat gliding out of its slip, under control. Apparently.

Before long, Jodie, her parents and Blitz and Krieg moved to Texas. I never did ask them why. Why Blitz? Why Krieg? Why Texas?

There is a heaven, child. It is Zion! Is it Texas, too? Is it Israel?

## ZION IS NOT ZION-ISM

My father preached of Zion, as did his father and his grandfather, back through the generations of Baptist, Methodist, Congregational and Pilgrim divines of familial connection and tribal remembrance.

The sharp edge of Protestant frontier enthusiasm has been buffed smooth within me, by way of a 20th century theological education - smooth as the chest of drawers my double great grandfather Ezekiel Dorland made in 1840. But, like that chest, the notion of Zion remains a treasured item, within my reach. Zion invoked, is both ancient and immediate. Who would not want to go to Zion?

For Christian believers, whether Protestant, Evangelical, Roman Catholic or the adherents of Eastern rites, as well as for virtually all currents of Judaism, Zion is the evocative expression of hope, the gathering of the Elect upon the Mount, the mystic abode of God. But in hardly more than a century past, *Zion* has been twisted by some into *Zion-ism*.

### **ZION, A CANAANITE FORTRESS**

*Zion* - turned into *Zion-ism* in recent decades - is a word and an image borrowed by the ancient Israelites from another Canaanite clan, possibly the Jebusites, who rallied in their mountain fortress for celebrations and to fend off intruders. In all likelihood, the first *zion* was a fort with water flowing near it. (1)

The part about Israelite borrowing is OK, since the ancient Jews were Semitic people themselves and in those religion-inventing days, borrowing is what everybody did. The part about *Zion* made over into the much more modern *Zion-ism* is not OK.

The word, *zion* is likely older than the Hebrew language and refers to flowing water. The oldest references to *Zion* in the Hebrew Bible are found in the Psalms and place *Zion* (Psalm 46) in the “north” and identify *Zion* (Psalm 48) with a river. These geographical allusions to *Zion* do not fit the locale of Jerusalem. (Please see sources at Endnote 1.)

The construction of the First Temple prompted the coming together of various tribes and explains why *Zion* became a borrowed reference to the mountain abode of God's people, where God the Creator of the universe was said to abide. During the generation of King Solomon or shortly after, in order to justify a continuing regency and a succession linked to King David, *Zion* the Canaanite fortress was adopted as an election-tradition associated with warlord David and his rule over conquered Jerusalem. Before long, *Zion* received pride of place, beside the tellings of the two other strands of narrative, the traditions of the patriarchs and the deliverance from Egypt, which constitute ancient Israel's self-understanding as a tribal federation united in the worship of the one true God. In exile, *Zion* became a potent spectre of longing, arrestingly taken up by the prophets.

### **THE POLITICAL ZIONIST PROJECT IN PALESTINE HAS EXPLODED THE DREAM OF BIBLICAL ZION**

Today, in Israel, *Zion-ism* is the slogan for a political project to transfer a resident population out of Palestine and to transfer into Palestine a non-resident population.

Never did it occur to me nor, I think, to that composer of hymns, Isaac Watts, to look for *Zion* in the only world we can see and touch, the world of human endeavor. To twist biblical evocations of Mount Zion into the sordid service of 21st Century Israeli nationalistic appeals is to reduce the texts of the Bible to political slogans. The ongoing Zionist project today, which is to bring *Zion* into being by violent displacement of other people, reveals political Zion-ism to be a naked land grab.

The political Zionists, who have created the State of Israel, insist their project is both "Jewish and democratic." But any faction which proclaims itself ethno-dominant is not a democratic state. Who in the U.S. would be fooled by a movement to remake, say, Montana or South Carolina into a "White and democratic" state - by forcing out non-White citizens?

Despite the Israeli electorate's recent rightward turn, voices are raised which insist that political Zionism can be defeated. Hagai El-Ad, the director of [B'Tselem](#), an Israeli human rights organisation based in Jerusalem, has said, "I think the narrowing of Jewish identity to demographics – that's profoundly un-Jewish. When you build a wall in this city to expunge, reject, thousands of people on a demographic basis, that's un-Jewish." (2)

### **ZION-ISM IS THE IDEOLOGY OF ETHNIC PREFERENCE MASQUERADING AS STATECRAFT**

Political Zionism announced itself to the world in 1897, from the the concert hall of the Municipal Casino in Basel, Switzerland. Many of the founders of political Zionism self-identified as secular, assimilated or non-observant Jews. The founding leader of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) believed that European Jews, repeatedly subjected throughout the centuries to vicious acts of anti-semitism, needed a Jewish national state.

But where? Proposals included relocation to Argentina or Palestine, or British controlled territory in Uganda/Kenya. These first political *Zion-ists* settled on Palestine, as offering the only real connection to Jewish history. But at what cost? Privately to his diary, Herzl wrote (3) in 1895:

"We shall try to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in transit countries while denying it employment in our own country. Both the process of expropriation of land and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly."

Secular Zionists drape their principles with Biblical texts.

The primary biblical theme put forward to uphold political Zionism is the promise to Abraham that the land of Canaan is God-given to the Jewish people: "*for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it*

*and to thy seed forever" (Genesis 13:15); "I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee the land of thy sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession" (Genesis 17:8).*

The primary biblical theme which is set aside by political Zion-ism is the declaration that the land shall be taken away from the children of Israel because of their sins, which have condemned them to live in exile until the arrival on earth of the Messiah, who shall rule the world from Zion-Jerusalem: *"But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of Jehovah thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I commanded thee this day, that all these curses shall come upon thee and overtake thee . . . And it shall come to pass that, as Jehovah rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you, so Jehovah will rejoice over you to cause you to perish and to destroy you; and you shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest in to possess it and Jehovah will scatter thee among all peoples, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth" (Deuteronomy 28:15, 63-64).*

*"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout O daughter of Jerusalem; behold thy King cometh unto thee; he is just, and is salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt, the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off; and he shall speak peace unto the nations; and his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth" (Zechariah 9:9-10).*

A salutary corrective to political Zionism is found in the views of Mahatma Gandhi, who consistently criticized the Zionist invasion of Palestine from 1938 until 1948, the year of his death. Gandhi said (4):

*"I do believe that the Jews have been cruelly wronged by the world. But in my opinion, they have erred grievously in seeking to impose themselves on Palestine with the aid of America and Britain and now with the aid of naked terrorism . . . Why should they depend on American money or British arms for forcing themselves on an unwelcome land? Why should they resort to terrorism to make good their forcible landing in Palestine?"*

*"Palestine of the Biblical conception is not a geographical tract."*

*"The cry for the national home for the Jews does not make much appeal to me. The sanction for it is sought in the Bible and in the tenacity with which the Jews have hankered after their return to Palestine. Why should they not, like other peoples of the earth, make that country their home where they are born and where they earn their livelihood?"*

### **AMONG AMERICAN JEWS, POLITICAL ZIONISM DID NOT TAKE HOLD RIGHT AWAY**

In 1920, the Central Conference of American Rabbis passed a resolution opposing the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. According to the *New York Times* (July 20, 1920, page 47), the

resolution declares “Israel is not a nation but a religious community” and “Palestine is not the homeland for the Jewish people.”

Morris Jastrow, son of a rabbi and professor of semitic languages at the University of Pennsylvania, in his 1919 book, *Zionism and the Future of Palestine: The Fallacies and Dangers of Political Zionism* (p. 113) wrote:

*“No one questions, of course, the good faith of the political Zionists in thus placing themselves on a sound democratic basis, but the point is that they contradict the principle of their platform the moment they combine the adjective 'Jewish' with 'State.' The adjective and noun do not agree; they are mutually exclusive.”*

In 1919, Professor Jastrow predicted the agonies which would befall the indigenous people of Palestine, including Orthodox non-Zionist Jews, Arab Christians and Moslems. If a "Jewish and democratic" state were to be violently set up in an area already populated, Mr. Jastrow worried:

*"Will not those in Palestine who do not belong to the Jewish nationality find themselves precisely in this position of not forming an integral part of the country? "*

As late as 1944, the president of the American Council for Judaism equated (5) the Zionist ideal of a Jewish state with "the concept of a racial state -- the Hitlerian concept."

Although political Zionism and its project to invade and dominate Palestine found little favor among American Jews prior to the Holocaust and World War II, this European ideology resonated powerfully among many 20th century American Protestants, who understood the colonial founding of America by Europeans as something like a righteous rebirth of reformed Christianity, a “new Israel” on a new continent. In the 20th century, this still vibrant current of American exceptionalism invited Protestants to embrace political Zionism in Palestine. They did. The door was opened by Protestant pietism, which likes to view the entirety of the Hebrew Scriptures as a pattern for a subsequent, more complete revelation from God in Christ Jesus, that is, Messiah Jesus.

**U.S. PROTESTANTISM, LONGING FOR ZION,  
HAS BEEN ROMANCED BY THAT FALSE LOVER,  
ZION-ISM**

The Protestant embrace of the founding of the State of Israel has occurred without much reflection on its ironic coloring: the experiment of European colonizers in America required a program of ethnic cleansing, the destruction and removal of indigenous peoples, with the aboriginal survivors of this centuries long campaign quarantined into economic pestholes - reservations - just as Israeli

Zionists have killed indigenous Palestinians by the tens of thousands and have quarantined the survivors into similarly neglected reserves.

Zealotry undermines rational thought. When public policy is grounded in folk tale nostalgia, the march to Zion can become a trail of tears for any peoples in the way of the ethnic pretentious of the occupiers, who arrive with a flag in one hand and a rifle or a bomb in the other. This is exactly what has happened in Palestine over the last eight decades.

Today, and throughout the years since its founding in 1948, the State of Israel has enacted an explicit policy of ethnic cleansing against the indigenous Palestinian population, numbering some 6,000,000 in 2015; 1.7 million Palestinians within Israel are subjected to demeaning second class abuse, while 4.3 million Palestinian men, women and children live under Israeli military occupation on the Gaza reservation and in the Palestinian "West Bank" reserve, which includes East Jerusalem. Here is a list of some of the worst atrocities committed by the State of Israel since the 1940s to the present:

- in 1947-48, Jewish-Israeli terrorist gangs attacked unarmed Palestinian villages, killing men, women and children; many of the Palestinian survivors of the 1947-48 Palestine catastrophe were herded onto trucks and driven victoriously through Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem, where the prisoners were physically attacked before being taken away and murdered;
- the terror prompted some 750,000 Palestinians in 1948, to flee into neighboring countries as well as other parts of Palestine;
- contrary to the mandates of international law, the State of Israel has refused to permit the surviving Palestinian refugees and their descendents from the 1947-48 catastrophe, to return to their ancestral homes;
- contrary to international law, the State of Israel, for decades, has placed Jews from Europe, the United States and elsewhere into settlements within the remaining majority Palestinian territories;
- contrary to international law, Israel has expended untold millions of dollars, much of it from the treasury of the United States, to maintain a European standard of living and provide first class services to relocated "settlers" while neglecting Palestinian communities under military occupation in the same areas;
- Jews, who reside anywhere on the globe and who therefore are already citizens of many nations, are invited, under provisions of Israeli law, to become citizens of the State of Israel and to move to Israel or at least buy second homes in Israel; Israel does not extend this exclusively religious-ethnic benefit of citizenship to any other peoples, including displaced Palestinians or Africans or Arabs, seeking political asylum;

- Palestinians who live in the reserves marked off for them by the State of Israel, are subjected to cruel limitations upon their freedom of movement, which are enforced by means of hundreds upon hundreds of checkpoints, at which Israeli soldiers are empowered to delay or detain people or simply turn people away, thereby restricting the mobility of family members to visit one another, sick persons to seek medical attention, school children and university students to make their way to school, employees to make their way to work, Palestinian Muslims seeking to visit their venerable mosque in Jerusalem;
- Palestinians, including children, who live in Israeli-occupied territories are subjected to civil and criminal prosecution in Israeli military courts, which have no jurisdiction over Jewish-Israeli settlers who live in the same areas;
- Israeli settlers in the occupied territories are permitted to vote in Israeli elections but Palestinians who live in the same territories are not;
- on the pretext of national security, the State of Israel conducts periodic state-of-the-art warfare, by land, sea, and air against defenseless Palestinian communities, who are barred by the State of Israel from possessing any practical means of self defense;
- in the most recent such massacre, in 2014, the Israeli military killed over 2,000 residents of the Gaza Strip, most of the dead were civilians not engaged in any combat whatsoever; over five hundred children were killed including an estimated 300 below the age of twelve; entire families were wiped out by rocket and artillery fire, while Israeli citizens in the south of the country, sitting in lawn chairs, sipping drinks and munching snacks, watched the murderous destruction unfold.
- Israel is the only nation on earth whose juvenile justice policies divide children into ethnic classifications, consigning Palestinian children living under Israeli military occupation for prosecution before military courts. Both the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), other human rights advocacy groups as well as UNICEF report (6) that in the past decade, 7,000 such children have been subjected to arrest, detention, interrogation, and/or imprisonment by the Israeli army and police. These children are routinely interrogated without counsel, abused, and denied basic due process rights during their arrest and detention. The AFSC has reported, three out of four children arrested by Israeli forces suffer some form of physical violence during arrest, transfer, interrogation or detention. Each year, approximately 700 Palestinian children between the ages of 12-17 experience the Israeli Military Court. UNICEF's report summarized, "the ill treatment of children who come into contact with the military detention system appears to be widespread, systemic and institutionalized throughout the process, from the moment of arrest until a child's prosecution and eventual imprisonment."

Shamefully, since the end of World War II, the community of nations has lacked the will to enforce international legal strictures against Israel's endless military occupation of a defeated population.

One of the immediate consequences of Israel's brutal regime, is the refusal of Israel to permit adequate reconstruction and other aid to flow into Gaza after the 2014 “war” - the destroyer nation is permitted to block reconstruction aide for the trapped and defeated population.

All of this horrific, criminal misconduct by Israel is the consequence of political Zionism; the impact of this explicitly Apartheid program is cruelly felt by people who are not Zionist and who are to be punished for the crime of existing, of living in the way of invading European and Americans colonizers.

The threat to civil liberties and human rights are found in the smugly racist public statements of cabinet ministers of the State of Israel in the year 2015:

- Israeli Education minister Naftali Bennett, whose mandate includes the educational needs of 20 percent of the Israeli population who are not Jewish but Palestinian: “I’ve killed lots of Arabs in my life — and there’s no problem with that.” (7)
- Israeli Justice minister Ayelet Shaked has called for the State of Israel to murder Palestinian women, since they give birth to "little snakes;" Justice Minister Shaked has declared, “the entire Palestinian people is the enemy.” (8)
- Israel's deputy defense minister, Rabbi Eli Ben-Dahan: “[Palestinians] are beasts, they are not human.” Painting with an even broader racist brush, Ben-Dahan said: “A Jew always has a much higher soul than a gentile, even if he is a homosexual.” (9)
- Israel’s deputy foreign minister and chief diplomat Tzipi Hotovely, citing religious texts rather than international law or treaties, declared for Jewish ownership over all of historic Palestine: “This land is ours. All of it is ours.” (10)

These bigoted sound bytes by powerful Israeli government officials echo the playacting of children in their little fort made of the overturned grave markers of the disappeared. The Israeli game of conquest of Palestine is far from childish pretense; it is a lethal program of extermination directed against an indigenous population who happens to be in the way.

Zionists-racists, lately arriving in Palestine, deserve to be publicly denounced by the leaders of American Judaism - as they used to be denounced, a generation ago. The silence of Jewish American leadership, in the face of such comments as quoted above, highlights the risk of moral degradation for Judaism in the United States, posed by political Zionism in Israel. The muted voice of heroic, dissenting, ethical Judaism, whether gagged voluntarily or by the coercion of kinship, marks a turning away from the ancient Jewish demands of justice for the stranger, the weak, the excluded.

All is not lost. Yet. To their everlasting credit, voices are being raised and are growing both more insistent and more powerful within American Judaism. (11) Heartening, too, is the increasing visibility and effectiveness of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions ([BDS](#)) movement, which was begun by Palestinian organizations in 2005, and which is spreading across the world ([www.bdsmovement.net](http://www.bdsmovement.net)).

Three thousand years ago, Fort Zion was taken into the cult of ancient Israel, and then invoked by the prophets of Israel as the mythic homeland. But the dream of Zion has been distorted into a morally outrageous project - to make Israel "like all the nations" (I Samuel 8:20) (12). This ploy has worked on the global stage, primarily because the United States winks at the cruel absurdity of invoking "Beautiful, Beautiful Zion" as the rationale for the State of Israel's program of ethnic cleansing and Apartheid.

The State of Israel is the final, dreadful 19th century European colonial project, seeking violently to establish itself in a land already occupied by a people of color.

#### ENDNOTES:

(1) **Old Testament Theology**, Gerhard von Rad (Harper and Row, 1962, volume 1), p. 46, ff.; see also R.E. Clements' **God and Temple**, (Fortress Press, 1965), 40, ff. who states (p. 47) ". . . a distinctive Canaanite doctrine of the divine presence was well known in Jerusalem before the Israelites established the worship of Yahweh there."; see also  $\Sigma \iota \acute{\omega} \nu$ , p. 292, ff. by Fohrer, Lohse, **Theological Dictionary of the New Testament**, vol. VII, Gerhard Kittel, ed.(Eerdmans, 1971), G. W. Bromiley, trans. and ed.

(2) *"Israel The long read The battle to be Israel's conscience - For 25 years, the human-rights group B'Tselem has diligently catalogued the violations of its own government. Can it convince Israelis to listen?"* Eve Fairbanks, *The Guardian*, Friday 13 March 2015.

(3) **The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl**, vol. 1 (New York: Herzl Press and Thomas Yoseloff, 1960), pp. 88.

(4) "Mahatma Gandhi Rejected Zionism," by Professor A. K. Ramakrishnan, Source: <http://www.twf.org/News/Y2001/0815-GandhiZionism.html>

(5) Lessing J. Rosenwald, president of the American Council for Judaism, quoted in *"Zionism is the problem"* by Ben Ehrenreich, *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 2009.

(6) **Charting a New Course, Overcoming the Stalemate in Gaza**, AFSC, together with other organizations, April 13, 2015. See [AFSC.org/document/charting](http://AFSC.org/document/charting)

The UNICEF 2013 report: “The pattern of ill-treatment includes the arrests of children at their homes between midnight and 5:00 am by heavily armed soldiers; the practice of blindfolding children and tying their hands with plastic ties; physical and verbal abuse during transfer to an interrogation site, including the use of painful restraints; lack of access to water, food, toilet facilities and medical care; interrogation using physical violence and threats; coerced confessions; and lack of access to lawyers or family members during interrogation.”

“Treatment inconsistent with child rights continues during court appearances, including shackling of children; denial of bail and imposition of custodial sentences; and transfer of children outside occupied Palestinian territory to serve their sentences inside Israel. The incarceration isolates them from their families and interrupts their studies.

“These practices are in violation of international law that protects all children against ill-treatment when in contact with law enforcement, military and judicial institutions.” Source: [Children in Military Detention - UNICEF Feb 2013 Report](#)

(7) *Huffington Post*, July 29, 2013.

(8) "Israeli lawmaker's call for genocide of Palestinians gets thousands of Facebook likes" by Ali Abunimah, posted at the website: *The Electronic Intifada*, June 14, 2015. This article links readers to David Sheen's July 7, 2014, article on the phenomenon of racism in Israel and its widespread denial: "*Jewish Groups' Whitewash of Israeli Racism Ensures It Will Fester.*" Please see the article at [www.Muftah.org/Jewish-groups-whitewash](http://www.Muftah.org/Jewish-groups-whitewash).

(9) "Next Head of Civil Administration says Palestinians are Subhuman," *927 Magazine*, May 8, 2015 accessed at [927mag/next-head-of](http://927mag/next-head-of)

(10) "Israel's new deputy foreign minister: 'This land is ours. All of it is ours'," *The Guardian*, May 22nd, 2015.

(11) Two of the most compelling voices are [Jewish Voice for Peace](http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org) ([jewishvoiceforpeace.org](http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org)) and the articulate online presence of [Mondoweiss](http://mondoweiss.net) ([mondoweiss.net](http://mondoweiss.net))

(12) This biblical reference has been suggested (pp. 12, 67) in a brilliant, self-described “congregational study guide” - *Zionism Unsettled* - a booklet and CD produced by the

Israel/Palestine Mission Network (IPMN) of the United Presbyterian Church USA ([theIPMN.org](http://theIPMN.org))  
in collaboration with Sabeel North America ([FOSNA.org](http://FOSNA.org)).