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# ZIONISM — JUDAISM

IS THE OLD TESTAMENT ZIONIST ?

by

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Dr. William Holladay

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The Zionists have used many kinds of argumentation in the past 75 years — political, historical, and religious. Now the political and historical arguments can be met by anti-Zionist political and historical arguments : one can point to facts and factors which the Zionists have ignored or bypassed. But religious arguments are harder to deal with, since they are hardly open to proof or disproof : it seems, to the non-Zionist, that the rockbottom argument, the Zionist's «ace in the hole,» is simply : «Anyway, God gave us the land, once and for all» : and it seems that the basis of this assertion is the Old Testament.

Now the Old Testament is a thick book — about three and a half times as thick as the New Testament, and about four times as thick as the Qur'an. And not only thicker, but far more mixed in its contents, and written over a far longer period of time, than either the New Testament or the Qur'an : the Old Testament took shape over a period of ten or fifteen centuries; and it is an easy book, therefore, to get lost in.

And because of the whole Zionist movement, climaxed now by the establishment of the state of Israel, a state taking its very name from the Old Testament people, the Old Testament has been shunned, has become taboo among Arabs. Arab Christians have not wanted to discuss it; Arab preachers have avoided preaching from it; and a whole generation has grown up with only the foggiest notion of what the Old Testament is all about. But : we should not allow the Zionists to teach us what the Old Testament is all about, and in a university community we should not be bound by taboos. Therefore we raise the question tonight, «Is the Old Testament Zionist?» An easy question to ask, but not an easy question to answer, since it takes us through three thousand years

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of history, and religious interpretation of that history. What follows, then, can only be an outline of an answer to the question!

I begin by making a distinction between ancient Israel and modern Israel. This distinction is already suggested by the two English words **Israelite** and **Israeli** — «Israelite» being the name we give to the inhabitant of ancient Israel, and «Israeli» the name we give to the inhabitant of the modern state. All the European languages that I know maintain this distinction — thus, in French, **Israélite et Israélien**. I mention this because the Arabic word **Isra'ili** has to do for both, and the word «Israel» in all languages has to do for both. So I am going to use mathematical subscript numbers this evening to keep us clear on the matter : I will say «Israel<sub>1</sub>» when I am talking about ancient Israel, and «Israel<sub>2</sub>» for the modern state of the same name. Because we cannot take it for granted that these two are identical. Names tend to take on a semi-magical quality in our minds; we begin to assume that a name **inevitably** communicates an essential reality : we forget that names are quite arbitrary, and that the founders of the modern state could just as well (from our point of view) have called their state «Jacob», or «Zion», or «David», or «X.» They chose the name they did because they wanted to assert their belief in a continuity, even an identity, between their state and Israel. But their assertion does not make the identity real; we must still explore the question of the nature of the relationship between Israel<sub>1</sub> and Israel<sub>2</sub> : there may be both continuity and discontinuity here.

All right, then, Israel<sub>2</sub> is a Zionist state; but was Israel<sub>1</sub> Zionist? We must come to understand what Israel<sub>1</sub> was and what she claimed to be. (Nations seem to the feminine in English, I don't know why!) The question resolves itself into three questions — a question of political history, a question of religious history, and a question of theology. (1) The question of political history is this : What, actually, was Israel<sub>1</sub>? — at what period did this people enter Palestine? — what were her relations with other peoples living there? — how much political control did she have, and for what period of time? — and what was her corporate life when she did not have effective political control? (2) The question of religious history is this : What, in the Old Testament, did Israel<sub>1</sub> claim that God was doing through these events of political history? — what did she claim God's purpose and intentions to be through these events? — and, note well, this question can be answered quite aside from the question as to whether Israel<sub>1</sub>'s claim is ultimately true : that is, God may not exist, or, if he does, he may be quite neutral about Israel<sub>1</sub>, or opposed to her, and we may still answer the question about her claim to God's purpose through her. (3) The question of the truth of her claim is the

theological question, our third question : Is the claim of Israel<sub>1</sub> about God's purpose through her true? — or, more generally, What was God's purpose, if any, through Israel<sub>1</sub>?

## I

First, then, the question of political history. About 1220 B.C. a group of Northwest Semitic tribes, calling themselves «Israel», who had been led out of Egypt by their leader Moses, invaded Palestine. In this invasion they were victorious over several city-states inhabited mostly by other Northwest Semitic groups. The Israelites settled in the central hill country and only gradually extended their control over the whole area. It is important to note that there was evidently little large-scale slaughter of the previous inhabitants, in spite of late theological theorizing : mostly the Israelites seem to have settled down alongside the earlier peoples — their cultures certainly interpenetrated. In fact, they themselves were almost wiped out a century after their invasion, by a Western people, the **Philistines**, who, as we see, gave their name to **Palestine**; and it was only about two hundred years after the Israelite invasion that the city-state of Jerusalem was captured, that the Philistine threat was overcome, and a stable political order was established, under King David, about 1000 B.C. David built his empire up by a series of brilliant campaigns at a time of Egyptian and Assyrian weakness; he seems to have extended his control down to the Gulf of Aqaba, to use the modern name, and up through the Transjordan area, including what is now Amman; he put a garrison of soldiers in Damascus, and the king of Hama owed him allegiance. And in this empire were of course a great number of non-Israelite peoples.

This empire built up by David was short-lived, however; after the death of his son Solomon, roughly eighty years later, it split into a northern half (also called, confusingly, «Israel» — Israel<sub>a</sub>) I suppose we should have to call it!) and a southern half (called «Judah», from which our word «Jew» derives). The northern kingdom lasted for another two hundred years, often weak, rarely strong; occasionally it was in active warfare against its sister-kingdom to the south. It did not keep control of Damascus — sometimes Syria was at war with Israel, as was the case about 880 B.C.; sometimes in alliance with Israel against Assyria, as was the case about 740 B.C.; but this northern kingdom, in the end wracked by coups d'état and anarchy, and hard-pressed by Assyria, fell to Assyria in 721 B.C. and her leadership deported.

But if the northern kingdom kept the name «Israel», nevertheless the southern kingdom, Judah, held the capital Jerusalem, and ultimately produced the Old Testament. She had the advantage



of a single ruling house, descended from David, and a greater distance from Assyria, but she survived after the fall of the north only by paying heavy tribute-money as a puppet kingdom to Assyria. She emerged from her humiliation when her overlord Assyria grew weak, at the end of the seventh century B.C., but her independence was short-lived, since Babylonia replaced Assyria as the threatening power from the east, and Babylonia conquered her in 587 B.C. Kingship in the line of David was thus wiped out forever, and, again, her leading citizens were deported eastward.

The land was not empty of Israelites; there were peasants in the north who survived, and some of them emerged into the light of day later on, in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., as the Samaritans; and there were peasants, too, in the south, and so some continuity of life. But any consciousness of nationhood and of religious integrity resided not with the folk who stayed behind, but with the exiles from the south who were in Babylon during the years of the sixth century.

When Babylon fell to Persia in 540 B.C., those Jews who wished to return to Palestine were allowed to do so, and a good many did, though probably not a majority. Palestine then formed a province of the Persian empire, then of the empire of Alexander the Great, then of the Egyptian sector of Alexander's empire ruled by the Ptolemies. Then, at the end of the third century B.C., the Ptolemies lost Palestine to the Seleucids, whose capital was at Antioch; the Seleucids, in contrast to the Ptolemies, were active in trying to unite their subject peoples around the focus of Hellenistic culture. A sizeable number of Jews in Palestine vigorously resisted these efforts, and gained political independence under the Maccabees, beginning in 165 B.C.; but the difficulties of governing a small state in Palestine along the lines of Jewish absolutism were formidable, and there followed a whole succession of alliances, factions, coups d'état, and civil wars to which Rome finally put an end in 63 B.C., working either directly, or, later, indirectly through a puppet like Herod. But Rome in turn found it increasingly difficult to rule Palestine, and major war broke out twice — 66-73 A.D. and 132-135 A.D., after which time organized Jewish life ceased in Palestine except for quiet rabbinic schools; though of course there continued to be a fluctuating Jewish population all through the Middle Ages.

To summarize, then : the ancient people calling itself Israel came into Palestine at the end of the 13th century B.C., established coherent power and administration over the whole area at the beginning of the 10th century, split in two after 80 years. The northern half came to an end in the 8th century, the southern

half at the beginning of the 6th; the Jews thereafter were able to control events politically only during the Maccabean period in the middle of the 2nd century B.C., and more briefly during the uprisings against Rome. So on the basis of the bare historical events, the Zionist claim to the land carries little weight, as we all recognize; but it is its religious dimension that forces it upon us, and it is to this which we now turn.

## II

What did Israel claim that God was doing through the events of political history? Our resources for answering this question are found, of course, in the Old Testament, though, parenthetically, we might ask a preliminary question : how representative of the religious thinking of Israel is the Old Testament — does it represent a total view, or only a partial view of the religious thinking of Israel? There is no way to answer this question with precision, because we have no body of material from the same period by which to counter the Old Testament claim. (The Samaritan material is mostly late, was deeply influenced by Christian and Muslim theological thinking, and in any case does not figure in the Zionist problem. And both the sectarian Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament date from a period later than that of the Old Testament, and both of them independently claim religious continuity with the Old Testament.)

Nevertheless, there are strong internal indications within the Old Testament itself that it represents not a total view of the religious thinking and practice of Israel, but a kind of «minority report» : there is much within the laws of the Old Testament that seems to be a reflection of an ideal rather than actual practice, and there is much within the poetry of the prophets that cries out against the prevailing practice and the prevailing assumptions of the time — I dare say there was a great deal in the life of Israel which did not measure up to the outlook of the Old Testament. But, since the Old Testament is the witness of what became normative for the faith and practice of Israel, we use it to answer the question before us now.

So, once more : what was the outlook of the Old Testament ? — what did Israel claim God was doing through her history? It is beyond our means, tonight, to survey all of Old Testament theology — much that is important we shall have to pass by. We will affirm without discussion that Israel witnessed to a God who reveals himself in history and who is concerned for justice and for righteousness. What we are concerned about particularly is what Israel had to say about her covenant with God, about her taking over the land, about the nature of her community — all



those matters which have a bearing on Jewish nationalism today. And on these questions we find both agreement, and real disagreement, within the Old Testament itself.

The agreement first. All the relevant portions of the Old Testament agree in the claim that God had done something altogether special for Israel — in taking the initiative to rescue her out of Egypt, and to present her, then, with a kind of contract — the biblical word is «covenant» (in Arabic : 'ahd) — setting forth the pattern of behavior (in the Law) which was her permanent obligation to this rescuing God. And a further demonstration of the love and concern of this God was the granting of the land of Palestine to her: she was to obey this God, and God in turn would give her the laboratory-space, so to speak, in which she could work out the life of obedience expected of her by God. Let me quote Jeremiah's expression of this conviction:

*Thus says the Lord, I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of his harvest. All who ate of it became guilty; evil came upon them, says the Lord... Thus says the Lord, what wrong did your fathers find in me, that they went far from me, and went after worthlessness, and became worthless? They did not say, Where is the Lord, who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that none passes through, where no man dwells? And I brought you in to a plentiful land, to enjoy its fruits and its good things. (2:2-3, 5-7)*

(I realize that this idea of God granting Israel the land makes us deeply uneasy, concerned as we are about Zionism: but let us withhold our judgment until we see what Israel did with the idea.)

Agreement on these things, yes: but there is much else on which the Old Testament is not unanimous at all. Perhaps the basic question not only for us this evening, but for Israel in ancient times, is this: What does it mean to be the people of God? Granted that Israel understood herself to be under obligation to God — how, as a matter of fact, was she to organize her common life so that God's great experiment with her might be a success in his sight?

One of the great debates in the earliest days was over the **nature of the government** of Israel. We have already seen that in the earliest days (from the end of the 13th century B.C. to the end of the 11th), Israel had only an informal control over the

land. Actually, to be more specific, Israel was a loose league of twelve tribes united by their sense of common obligation to God, expressed in Law and battle: they renewed their contract to God, and therefore to each other, periodically, and, when military emergencies arose, they united themselves for war. They acknowledged no man as their leader, except for temporary military leaders. This arrangement, which Israel felt to be unique and to express her understanding that her only king was God himself, worked tolerably well against the relatively weak tribes already in Palestine, or against raiders from the desert; but it did not work at all against the better-organized Philistines, who had invaded from the sea. And in order to meet this new and unprecedented threat, there were those in Israel who called for a king — for permanent hereditary leadership — but our sources in the book of I Samuel all show great uneasiness about the whole affair. One source says it is all right to have a permanent leader so long as you call him, not «king,» which is a bad word, but «prince» (so in chapter 9); the other source says that having a king is wrong, but God has allowed it anyway because of the sin of the people (so in chapter 8). Either way, they were uneasy! And when David established his kingship in Jerusalem, a whole new theology had to be worked out, of a covenant between God and (not Israel in general but) David, in order to justify the actual turn of events. In the meantime, the folk in the north rejected this new theology, and this is the religious background of the split between north and south. So: was kingship a good thing or a bad thing? The Old Testament was not sure, in the beginning; but by the time more than four hundred years of the Davidic line had ruled in Jerusalem, nobody questioned it any more — nothing succeeds like success.

Nevertheless, though kingship as an institution came to be accepted as part of God's will, always it was taken for granted that a specific king stood under the judgment as well as the blessing of God. The prophet Nathan, in the tenth century B.C., rebuked David for the latter's affair with Bathsheba, and David admitted his guilt; the prophet Amos, in the eighth century, spoke of the coming downfall of King Jeroboam II in the north; Isaiah, a little later, rebuked King Ahaz for his frightened seeking after military aid from Assyria; Jeremiah, late in the seventh century, rebuked King Jehoiakim for his exploitation of the poor. And these judgments against the rulers come up again and again, without apology, in the pages of the Old Testament. King after king was judged unworthy of God's support.

And, inevitably, there were other questions that came up in the minds of the Israelites, particularly as the great empires, Egypt, or Assyria, or Babylonia, pounded at their gates. Let me deal briefly with three of these questions, all interrelated.



First, did God give the land unconditionally to Israel? It is easy for us to assume that the answer is « yes, » but the actual views of the Old Testament are not so simple. Obviously the Old Testament assumed the giving of the land to be a **necessary consequence** of the covenant; I have already suggested that the land was a kind of «laboratory » for the working out of covenant obedience. But the very **nature of the covenant** forced Israel, to be aware of the **contingency** of their stay on the land. Thus the book of Leviticus, which represents one legal tradition, insists that the land really belongs to God, and that God is only, so to speak, leasing the land to Israel: «**The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me.**» (25:23) That is, the people in this passage are understood to be resident aliens, and so are granted no permanent ownership. (What a fascinating bit of law this is for Zionists to consider!)

Again, the book of Deuteronomy, which represents another legal tradition, insists that Israel, will remain on the land only so long as she is **obedient**: thus, in 30:16-18, we read:

*If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God... by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments... then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear... I declare to you this day, that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land which you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess.*

Here the stay on the land is not presented to Israel, as a perpetual right, but as a gift, a privilege, something that can be withdrawn if the people are disobedient.

And, indeed, **exile** was a threat which all the pre-exilic prophets held over the nation if they were not found faithful to God. Amos has a memorable pun on Gilgal, which was the name of a cult center — where, some think, a **conquest festival** was celebrated periodically (so G. on Rad, *Theol. of the O.T.*, Engl. ed. I 297) : Amos said, **ki gilgal galoh yigleh** — « for surely Gilgal shall go into exile. » And then, as Assyria did exile the leaders of the north, and as Babylonia did exile the leaders of the south, the prophets were able to say, see, we told you so. In fact, religiously speaking, it was the exile of the southerners to Babylon in the sixth century B.C. that is the great dividing-line in the Old Testament, the event that changed the theological mood more than anything else.

An American newspaper editor once said that the job of a newspaper is to comfort the afflicted, and to afflict the comfortable. Well, this would be a good description of the job of the Old Testament prophet as well : in times of prosperity he warned darkly of doom, but when the people seemed without hope, he felt called upon to bring hope. And so it was that, during the terrible days of the Babylonian exile, when the Jews sang hatefully or wanting to **bash little Babylonian babies' brains out** (to refer to Psalm 137, which Prof. Nabih Faris cited in his lecture here not many weeks ago), during those days, and after the exile, too, when it still seemed to the Jews that God's great experiment was fizzling out, then it was that the prophets began to speak in dazzling colors of the great rewards that God would bring. Ezekiel spoke of the return of all the exiles, and the author of Isaiah 40-55 did too; and the prophets began to sing of a new Israel, whose territory would be even greater than before.

Feeding into these poems of the post-exilic prophets was some pre-exilic phraseology which we can only call Oriental rhetoric and bombast. Thus, for example, there is Psalm 72, which is pre-exilic: it is a royal psalm, coming out of the time when there had been real kings; and its flavor is the flattery of any Oriental court. The singer first wishes the king long life by voicing the hope that he will live as long as the sun and moon endure (verse 5), and then offers the following, in verse 8: « **May he [the king] have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.** » This, I repeat, is simply Oriental rhetoric, for this territory extends from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean, and from the Euphrates River to — wherever the ends of the earth are. But such rhetoric became programmatic in post-exilic times of what God would surely do, to reward his oppressed people, ultimately, when the end-time comes — and so we see emerging all the apparatus of supernatural eschatology — the miraculous events of the coming end of history — the re-establishment of the kingship of David, the defeat of all enemies, and even the re-creation of nature so that the sun will shine 24 hours a day, and the sea dry up: and it is in this frame of mind that we find written such a passage as Zechariah 9:10, which comes from the late Persian or even Greek period: universal peace, and the indefinite extension of the territory of Israel :

*I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.*

We have said that the prophets comforted the afflicted, and afflicted the comfortable. This contrast in mood between the post-



exilic and the pre-exilic period is illustrated equally well by what some of them had to say about the covenant. We have already affirmed that the idea of the covenant was central to the claim of Israel, in the Old Testament, but this idea, in our day, makes us uneasy — it seems to us too much as if God played favorites. How can we take seriously any religious testimony, we ask, which focuses on a special contract between God and one particular group ?

The prophet Amos, in the eighth century B.C., certainly did not question the validity of the covenant, but what he did do, unforgettably, was to lash out against any complacency, any smugness, any sense of superiority the Israelites might be tempted to develop because of the covenant. Thus, at the beginning of the third chapter of Amos, we read a word of judgment from God : « *You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.* » That is, you will be punished because you have been chosen by God (not in spite of your having been chosen, but because of your having been chosen). To be chosen means responsibility, not privilege; a harder life, not an easier one; a keener sword of judgment, not comfort. Again, in Amos 9:7, we read : « Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel ? says the Lord. Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Capthor and the Syrians from Kir ? » That is to say, « Yes, of course, I brought the Israelites out of Egypt, but this is not a reason for complacency : I also brought the Philistines, our traditional enemy, from the western islands, and the Syrians, our current enemy, from the desert : I have been in the moving business for a long time, and you are really no different in my eyes than are the Ethiopians far beyond the horizon to the south. » Amos gives no cause for comfort to those Israelites who sat back to anticipate the joy of God's rewards :

*Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord ? It is darkness, and not light; as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house and leaned with his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him. Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it ? (5: 18-20).*

And by the time Jeremiah came along, at the end of the seventh century B.C., the political future was dark indeed: Babylonia was just about to take over, and Jeremiah felt called to the insane task of telling his fellow-Jews to welcome the Babylonians as the agents of God's punishment on his own people. He felt, when the destruction finally did come, that it meant the end of the covenant with God: the covenant was a failure, he thought; the people had done

nothing but break the contract with God by their worship of fertility gods and by the injustices to each other, and therefore this destruction, which God intended, signaled the end: really the end: this is it; but, since God is faithful to his promises, he would draw up a new contract, a new covenant, without the loopholes of the old, a contract which Israel would not be able to break as she had broken the old one:

*Behold, the days are coming... when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel... I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (31:31, 33).*

(We note, in passing, that the Christian claim is that this replacement of the old contract by a new one has really been accomplished by God, in the event of Jesus Christ, and that the new Israel-prime, I suppose we should have to call it ! — is, in fact the Christian church : but of this, more later.)

A new contract ! — the old one had defects — the whole idea was terribly threatening to the Jews in their exile, never mentioned again in the Old Testament, except to be undercut, steadily, by later poets who insisted on the permanence of the original covenant: « *The word of our God stands forever,* » we read in Isaiah 40:8.

I want to pursue further the Old Testament understanding of the way Israel was to be organized, but first let me try to summarize what we have learned so far about the claims of Israel, about herself. There seem to be two moods within the Old Testament about the matters that concern us here: the first, which I have called « afflict the comfortable, » which suggests that God is a free-lance deity, that what he does and what he wills is constantly unexpected and not always reassuring : that if he has called Israel to a special task, it is a harder task than other nations have, and for this task she will be held responsible; that if the land is to be under the control of Israel, it is because she is to be a steward, a trustee, of that land — it is not for her to use in any old way she wishes; indeed, some of the expressions of this mood are so wild that the astonishing thing is that they were preserved by later generations at all. And then the other mood is a more conventional and expected one : I have called it « comfort the afflicted » — we see it in pre-exilic times, in expressions of flattery of Israel's king and in dreams of military glory, but we see it particularly in post-exilic times, when there seemed so little to point to, in current events, that squared with the expectations of the covenant people, so that a marvelous rosy future was set forth, programmatically, as part of the assured will of God for his people.



But : and perhaps this is the most important thing I can say this evening — both these moods are to be seen as reactions to a sovereign God of judgment and of grace. It may be that the pre-exilic afflict-the-comfortable kind of people were more conscious of the judgment of God: why shouldn't they be ? — the nation was prosperous then, and needed to be reminded of its responsibilities; and it may be that the post-exilic comfort-the-afflicted kind of people were more conscious of the grace of God, who works far past what the nation may deserve. But the Old Testament **always** understands judgment and grace as twins, and as twin attributes of the living God. They belong together, and God offers both. The rescue from Egypt was grace, evidence of the love of God; the giving of the land was grace; the exile to Babylon was judgment; the rescue from Babylon was grace. Always it is the same God at work: and **never** was a political program sovereign: it is God who is sovereign, not a political program, and he always stands as Lord and Judge over every political arrangement. As the book of Deuteronomy says it:

*Take heed lest you forget the Lord your God... lest, when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply... then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth; that he may confirm his covenant which he swore to your fathers. (8:11-14, 17-18).*

Yet, if God is understood as the Lord of history who has covenanted with a people, this people must have some kind of political order: we have already examined the debate within the Old Testament as to whether kingship was a good thing or a bad thing; now let me turn to a more general form of the same question, which arose when kingship was wiped out at the beginning of the sixth century B.C.: Does the people of God require a government and borders, and an army ? — political integrity, in short ? The question, of course, was forced upon them by the exile in Babylon, and it continued to agitate the Jews through the rest of the Old Testament period, through the Maccabean times, through time of the wars with Rome, and, of course, down to the present day.

Now there was no real choice open to the Jews during the Babylonian, the Persian, the Greek periods: they had to make do with existing as a peculiar population in a particular province of a heathen empire. But the strange thing is, they discovered,

they could maintain their covenantal integrity in this new way, without **political** integrity, more or less indefinitely. Prof. Faris mentioned Ezra, chapters 9-10, in his lecture here, as a charter for racial exclusivism, and so it is. But we must see it in its context, as part of the growing pains of learning how to be this new sort of community, this community-with-covenantal-integrity-but-without-political-integrity. They found they could be, by rallying around the rebuilt Temple and its cult, by instructing each other in the Law, by keeping the Sabbath. And Ezra was rightly concerned that this covenantal integrity not be lost by mixed marriages. We may regret his methods, but we must understand that he was faced with an absolutely new set of historical demands, and that this was his response.

And we must not forget, either, an anti-Ezra pamphlet which was being circulated in that day — I mean that wildly funny little book, the book of Jonah. — I do not say « wildly funny » because of the episode with Jonah and the great fish — that is not my immediate concern at all. My concern is what the book as a whole is about — a parable of a prophet called by God to preach to the king of **Assyria** — Assyria, the terrible military machine that had swallowed up the northern kingdom, that kept the southern kingdom in puppet status for decades — this prophet was called by God to preach repentance to the king of Assyria — like asking Genghis Khan please to repent, or — shall I be topical ? — it's like asking an Arab Christian to walk south to ask repentance of Moshe Dayan. This little pamphlet suggests that the best way to be a covenant community is not to lock our doors and keep the good news of the God of the covenant to ourselves, but to throw open our doors to the world, even to Assyria. And if we are to be fair to the Old Testament in the post-exilic crisis of the very existence of Israel, we had better take a good look at the book of Jonah as well as to Ezra 9-10.

Does Israel need political integrity ? — the question of course became a live issue again in the Maccabean period, in the second century B.C. The Jewish community divided quite severely into three groups: the Hellenizers — the young men who liked Greek civilization, and Greek ideas, and Greek athletic events; the political patriots like Judas Maccabeus, who felt there was no future for the Jewish community without political freedom, and that God helps them who help themselves; and the Hasidim, the « Pious Ones, » who were not interested in political questions at all, feeling that God would solve the political problem if the Jew were faithful to his religious obligations. Again, later on in Jesus' day, we see the same sectarian divisions; there were the Sadducees, who were content to let Rome rule so long as they could keep their own



privileges; the Zealots, who wanted to start a revolt against Rome; and the Pharisees, who felt content to suffer, knowing that God would rescue them if they remained faithful to him. And each of these groups found substance for its position in material from the Old Testament.

Now, if we have not surveyed Old Testament theology in its entirety, we have at least demonstrated the variety of conviction within the Old Testament, the varied voices that speak of how history shows the work of God, and how Israel<sub>1</sub> is to respond within history to this work of God.

### III

We come now to the last kind of question we have set for ourselves this evening : granted the kind of claim Israel<sub>1</sub> makes about herself, this claim may be only a historical curiosity now, only an interesting event in the religious history of the past : granted this claim, has it any value today? Does this Old Testament material have any relevance to the policy of Israel<sub>2</sub>, or to us?

Now this is a new kind of question for us this evening. Up to now we have been dealing with questions of history, which are open to historical validation. We dealt with the turn of political events in ancient times, and we can verify these events with historical tools. We dealt with the religious claims of Israel<sub>1</sub>, and we can verify these claims by reference to the Old Testament. But now we are raising the question of religious truth, a question of value and such a question cannot be answered in the same kind of way. Specifically, I cannot prove or disprove the existence of the God of the Old Testament to everyone's satisfaction. But still, we must try to find out whether the Old Testament can be used today, and if so, how : and so, to get at this set of problems, which are both descriptive (how do people use the Old Testament today ?) and normative (how **should** people use the Old Testament today?), I shall offer a simple proposition, and then expand on it, and that is this: Some communities today do not use the Old Testament at all; other communities do use the Old Testament, and use it in a variety of ways, but some of these uses are responsible ones, while some are not.

First, obviously, some communities do not use the Old Testament at all; specifically for us here tonight, Muslims and secular non-Zionists. To the Muslim, the Old Testament is misleading, and any claim based on it, whether by the Zionist or anyone else, is irrelevant. If one believes that God spoke through the Jewish scriptures, but only incompletely, and if one believes, further, that these

scriptures have been tampered with in later times, then any argumentation based on the Old Testament is surely a snare and a delusion; and the Muslim is baffled by a religious claim which is tied up so closely to a given piece of land.

And, by the same token, the secular non-Zionist, who acknowledges no transcendent God, remains unmoved by the theocentricity of the Old Testament, and is irritated by those who seem to be dragging God into the argument. The secular non-Zionist assumes that the problem of Palestine is essentially a political one, and he sees no way to deal with an opponent who uses argumentation based upon a religious claim.

But, just as obviously, both Jews and Christians acknowledge the authority of the Old Testament. Each of these communities represents a pattern of interpretation of the Old Testament which meets its own needs of witness; and the contrast between these two communities is at least partly encouraged by the variety of voices within the Old Testament itself, a variety which leads to varying understandings of the ultimate « meaning » of the Old Testament. For example, the Christian, as we have suggested, agrees with Jeremiah that the old covenant was a failure, and that God not only promised a new covenant, but has actually contracted one, in Jesus Christ; the Jew, on the other hand, sees no reason to follow Jeremiah literally here, but agrees instead with Isaiah 40 that «the word of our God stands forever ». The Christian sees the whole nature of the covenant-relation between God and his people as having been radically transposed, so that the Law, as the Jews have understood it, is seen to have been at best a temporary makeshift, and at worst a delusion. The Christian sees membership in the covenant-people to be open to anyone, of any tribe or nation, who acknowledges God's invitation to be adopted into membership. The Christian, if asked whether the people of God need borders, and army, and government, would answer « no », that this is the responsibility of the state, not the church — though there have been some alarmingly intimate relations between state and church in the course of Christian history; while when the Jew is asked the question, then he is not so sure of the answer. I repeat, both the Jew and the Christian are able to establish their respective religious affirmations out of a selective reading of the Old Testament, which, as we have seen, is ideal for selective reading.

But, just as surely as Christians and Jews diverge from each other in their use and understanding of the Old Testament, so each community is also divided within itself as to a proper understanding of the meaning of the Old Testament. One can imagine the debates for the past twenty centuries within the Jewish community



over such questions, and the debates within the Christian community as well: but we must confine ourselves now simply to the current scene. Let me begin with the Jews, and deal first with the Zionist Jew.

Zionism is a political program which has made an appeal to every group of Jews, whatever their religious outlook or lack thereof. Zionism points to the steady persecution and discrimination against Jews in whatever country; points to the attachment of the Jews to the land of Palestine from as early a time as Jews were conscious of their distinctiveness; appeals to the steady longing of the Jews for a return to this land, a longing reflected in the post-exilic prophets and seers and reflected in the drinking toast which was offered every year on the eve of Passover for the past two thousand years, « Next year in Jerusalem. » This Zionist appeal is not based upon specific biblical interpretation, but simply assumes a biblical interpretation: it appeals to sentiment, to ethnic solidarity, to the yearning of the Jew for a place to call home where he need not apologize for being Jewish. One could easily raise the question as to whether Judaism, as a religion taken historically in its own categories, is not being hopelessly distorted by being forced into the mold of a specific political program. Granted; but what we simply affirm now is that Zionism uses the Old Testament only incidentally: Zionism appeals rather to Jewish ethnic solidarity and to the deep existential fear of genocide. But we can go on to say this: Zionism does not want to listen to the Old Testament, does not want to grasp the nature of the debates carried on within its pages — because it does not want to be subject to the God of judgment and grace there revealed. No, if the Old Testament speaks of an eschatological return of God's people to the land, it will be because God has done it; but Zionism tries to force God's hand.

Let me be quite specific, and deal now with Israel<sub>2</sub>. Israel<sub>2</sub> as a political entity does not acknowledge the God of judgment and of grace. Obviously not. Israel<sub>1</sub> has gained her victories by her own hand and strong right arm; she does what she does out of her own conception of military necessity and of political self-interest, but without any sense of the judgment and grace of God: her victories are not understood as God's grace to her, past her deserving, nor does Israel<sub>2</sub>, as a state, have any awareness that her victories stand under the judgment of God. Israel<sub>2</sub> conducts herself as any other nation-state does, with self-interest uppermost. Indeed (and this is the irony) Israel<sub>2</sub> is no more capable of repentance now than Isaiah or Jeremiah found Israel<sub>1</sub> to be in their day. The present Israeli government maintains a great deal of interest in biblical geography and biblical history, but no interest in the God who can be met within the pages of the Old Testament. Therefore, I say, for Israel<sub>2</sub> to use the Old Testament as she has done, is to misuse the Old Tes-

tament, because the witness of Israel<sub>1</sub> in the Old Testament is a witness to a God of judgment and of grace.

Therefore, theologically, Israel<sub>2</sub> is not Israel<sub>1</sub>. There may be cultural continuity between the ancient nation and the modern nation; there may be sociological or ethnic continuity, but not theological continuity. This is why it is necessary to distinguish between the two. This is why, when a Christian reads the Old Testament, he is not reading about Israel<sub>2</sub>; but of this, more in a moment.

First, though, we should have a look at some selected groups within the Israeli population — because the policies of a government may not reflect the belief and outlook of some specific segments of its population. Therefore, let us look at Israeli<sub>2</sub>a, <sub>2</sub>b, <sub>2</sub>c, and <sub>2</sub>d. Israeli<sub>2</sub>a is an avowed secularist, and he forms about 90% of the Jewish population of the nation: and when we ask what he does with the Old Testament, the answer is that he does with it what his government does — he sees in the Old Testament nationalistic lore from the past. Israeli<sub>2</sub>a is an enthusiastic archeologist. But does he have any ethical uneasiness about the policies of his government? From all reports, he does not. In short, the dimension of God's judgment and grace, about which we have been speaking, is absent from his thinking altogether.

Israeli<sub>2</sub>b is an orthodox Jew, and he forms about 10% of the Jewish population of the nation. He keeps the traditional Jewish law set forth in the Talmud, which, itself, ultimately, is commentary on the Law found in the Old Testament. Thus Israeli<sub>2</sub>b believes himself to be utterly faithful to the Old Testament and to the God revealed therein; but he is so concerned with how the state should legislate such matters as pig-farming and open cinemas on the Sabbath that he has no mental equipment left for asking how the military policy of the state, the international policies of the state, should come under the scrutiny of God; for the Talmud does not legislate these matters. As a result, then, however faithful Israeli<sub>2</sub>b may be to the provisions of the Old Testament against eating pork or breaking the Sabbath, he is wildly irrelevant to the kind of political questions about which the pre-exilic prophets were concerned, and he is content to let the government make the decisions.

Israeli<sub>2</sub>c is probably a representative of a very small group of people: he is a follower of Martin Buber, who died, alas, in 1965, a man deeply sensitive to the God of the Old Testament, who knew well the meaning of God's scrutiny on all aspects of life. Buber founded a movement many years ago called *Ihud* (« Union »), for



genuine unity, mutual concern, and common cause between Jews and Arabs. He wrote to Gandhi in 1939, « We have no desire to dispossess them (the Arabs): we want to live with them. We do not want to dominate them, we want to serve with them. » (Quoted in **Israel and the World**, Schocken Books, p. 233.) In referring to the Deir Yasin massacre, he wrote, « I cannot think about this without feeling myself guilty. Our fighting faith in the spirit was too weak, to prevent the outbreak and spread of false demonic teaching.» (*Ibid.*, p. 257) I say, there must be men like him today living across the border; I have heard, for example, of the ethical concern of the Reform rabbi of West Jerusalem. We must not forget the existence of such men, men who know that the measure of righteousness in the Old Testament was never how one looks after his kinsmen alone, but how one looks after the widow, and the orphan, and the stranger within one's gates.

Israeli, I ought to mention too: he is a member of the Mapam party (the left-wing Socialist). These folk maintain kibbutzim, and I am told by a Christian friend who studied in Israel for a year that the Mapam-kibbutzniks are the **only group** he found in Israel who were seriously concerned about sound relations between Jews and Arabs, relations not poisoned by prejudice and paternalism. Fine: God does not need a man to acknowledge him in order to do his will; if Karl Marx leads one to do God's will, this does not bother God at all. Let us not forget, then, these saving remnants within Israel.

One could report similar distinctions among Jews living in the West, outside Israel. Many Jews in the West, like most in the state of Israel, are quite secularist, and, even if he is not actively Zionist, the Western Jew supports the state of Israel simply because the Israelis are his kinsfolk. And I do not think there is much we Christians can do to change his mind. Curiously, I had the feeling that the Jew in the United States will be the last to learn what is really going on in the Near East; susceptible to sentimental propaganda, open to an appeal based upon his fears for his kin, or based upon his sense of guilt for his relatively easy life, he is a Zionist or a fellow-traveler of Zionism. We may regret that he feels this way; we may show very little sympathy for his feeling, but this is the way he is.

But we should also be aware of many voices, some of them quite lonely, within the Jewish communities of the West, which speak out against the policies of Israel. Some of us know of Rabbi Elmer Berger's group in the United States, the American Council for Judaism, which insists that Judaism is a religion, that the American Jew must not have a double loyalty, to two states, but must be an American whose religion is Jewish. (You may have seen his

article, called « Israel : the Fulfilment of Biblical Prophecy ? » in the booklet edited by Sami Hadawi, **Palestine and the Bible**).

One finds other unexpected voices being raised in the United States. In a « New Left » student paper published in San Francisco, called « The Movement », in the issue for last November, I found the following : « As a Jew deeply bound to his people and to their traditions I do not believe Israel has a right to exist at the expense of one and a half million Arabs. If it could not be done except at that price I would rather it not be done. Because that price is changing the Jews of Israel. They are proud of their militarism, discriminatory against the darker-skinned, racist toward the Arabs in their land and out... » (pp. 2, 14) Again, not all these voices are religiously oriented, but they serve God's purposes.

I think by now you can sense that I feel there is a saving remnant among the Jews of our time, both in Israel, and in the West, that use the Old Testament responsibly. There are Christians, I know, that assume by definition that no Jew can use the Old Testament responsibly, simply because no Jew acknowledges Jesus as Messiah. I cannot bring myself to feel that this kind of a priori reaction of Christians is helpful when discussing Zionism. If a Jew shows himself responsive to the God of judgment and grace, then I, for one, praise the Lord and am grateful for his response.

Now let us turn to the use Christians make of the Old Testament, particularly when faced with the issue of Zionism. First of all, let me pick up an observation I have already made. We who are Christian must take seriously the New Testament affirmation that it is the church, we ourselves, who are the true Israel — Israel-prime, as I whimsically called us. But if my code numbers this evening are whimsical, the identification is not. It is the identification the New Testament itself makes. Paul, at the end of his letter to the Galatian church, writes, « Circumcision is nothing ; uncircumcision is nothing; the only thing that counts is new creation! Whoever they are who take this principal for their guide, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the whole Israel of God.» (6:15-16 NEB) There you have it: what matters is not whether you are a Jew or a non-Jew, but the way in which God has reconstituted the whole nature of the covenant people, and we are it, the Israel of God. We have said that Israel<sub>2</sub> is not in theological continuity with Israel<sub>1</sub>. Now we must affirm that Israel-prime, the church, is in continuity with Israel<sub>1</sub> in the sense that we are the community charged to continue to be attentive to the voice of the God of judgment and grace who can be met in the Old Testament.



Now how has this worked out in practice? Well (of course there are a large number of Christians everywhere who, as we have suggested, reject this New Testament teaching, and simply ignore the Old Testament, but I hope I have made it clear that I consider this escapism to be theologically wrong and a rejection of our calling.

Then there are a great number of Christians, alas, particularly conservative Christians in Western Europe and the United States — but they are to be found in Arab churches here as well — who see the Old Testament as quite relevant to present events because they are convinced that present events are a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. These «Christian Zionists,» if I may so call them, are the victims, I submit, of a false understanding of the Old Testament, and I do not need to go over the argumentation again : the pictures in the Old Testament of the return of the Jews to Palestine are a part of an eschatology, of God's final acts beyond history, not of the acts of men within history; and as the years pass, and as these events are seen to be, not a part of the end-time, but to be simply one more evidence of man's inhumanity to man, then I trust this misreading of the Old Testament will fade away. But at the moment it is a very popular point of view, I fear. I was appalled to find, last October, in an Armenian Protestant church in Los Angeles, many of whose members know the Near East well, a pile of pamphlets on the literature rack which explained how the events of last June were foretold in the Bible, and I am afraid the pastor was too naive theologically to see how wrong these pamphlets were.

And though the Jewish Zionists do not depend much on the Old Testament for their argumentation, they are quite glad for the support of Christians who do; and they cultivate that support. Thus there is, in West Jerusalem, a «Near Eastern School of Archeology,» (no relation to my own school here, I hasten to say!), which cultivates Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land and which shows how the modern state lives up to the old prophecies.

But there are other Christians, not only in the West, but in the Near East as well, who understand the Old Testament as I have presented it here this evening, who see Zionism as a re-birth of the spirit **against** which Amos and Jeremiah and others were fighting, and who cry out **against** it in the name of the God whom they have learned to know within the pages of the Old Testament as well as of the New.

Now I cannot leave this survey without some specific reference to what is perhaps the most nagging question of all in the matter of the Old Testament and Zionism, the most nagging question for

both Jews and Christians sensitive to ethical issues, and that is the matter of the way in which the Old Testament describes the Israelite conquest of Palestine in the 13th, 12th, and 11th centuries B.C. The impression we get is that the Israelites were commanded by God to kill every Canaanite, man, woman, and child, even their animals. There is, for example, Deut. 20:16-18:

*But in the cities of these people that the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall utterly destroy them... as the Lord your God has commanded; that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices which they have done in the service of their gods, and so to sin against the Lord your God.*

With such a charter for slaughter, we ask, how can we take the Old Testament out of the hands of the Zionists?

Let me say two things. First, theologically the idea is that the Israelites should not take any personal **gain** from the land, no silver or gold, no animals, no slaves, because the land belongs to God; and furthermore they must not in any way have **contact** with the terrible pagan fertility practices of the local inhabitants. Therefore kill them all. But we have already noted, in passing, at the beginning of this hour, that the Israelites did **not**, as a matter of historical fact, consistently wipe out their Canaanite neighbors — the idea of a «holy war» was never consistently carried through. And this brings me to my second point. There is no substitute, when dealing with biblical material, for our constantly asking ourselves, when was this particular passage written, **and why?** And in the case of these passages about «destroy all the inhabitants,» they were committed to writing not at the time of the conquest at all, but much later, at the end of the seventh century B.C., when the southern kingdom was fighting for its life against Assyria and Babylonia; and it was not an appeal to wipe out the Canaanites in the seventh century B.C. — there were no pure-bred Canaanites then; it was an appeal to wipe out Canaanite **religious** practices, the fertility-cult practices in vogue among the Israelites at that time. It was a sermonic appeal (an idealized appeal, if you will!), saying, God commanded our ancestors, through Moses and Joshua, to wipe out the Canaanites with their filthy religion. Now, what about you: are you on God's side or against him? Far from being a charter for slaughter, then, these passages are really an appeal for religious purity: not to our taste, no doubt, but we should see them for what they are, within the circumstances of their original purpose.

Israel, was trying through the Old Testament to be sensitive



to the God of history. From the Christian perspective, she was defective in understanding God's will at a number of points. She assumed without question that God's covenant was permanently with a particular tribal group, while Christians see God's purposes working through that tribal group to his adopted children everywhere, Israel assumed too easily that evil is to be located «out there,» among «those other people» — Canaanites, Amalekites, and all those other «—ites,» instead of «in here,» although the prophets steadily turned the searchlight of God's judgment in upon their own people. Israel assumed without much question that the people of God needed a particular land, permanently. Perhaps God's great experiment of covenanting with men could never have been launched without tribalism, and borders, and an army, and even kingship. But Christians are convinced that the need for a land as a laboratory for the covenant people was only a temporary necessity, and that finally God's people has outgrown this need.

But, as I have said again and again this evening, the main question the biblically oriented person must ask the Zionist is this: what do you do with the God of Israel? How do you stand with him?

As you know, the hippies in the United States like to wear buttons with slogans on them. Here is one I bought in the hippie neighbourhood of San Francisco: «God was abducted by Israeli agents.» Now we know where God has been—why he has been given up for dead!... But, beyond the God-is-dead problem, this button dramatizes for all to see exactly what has happened: for the modern state of Israel has tried to lock up God, to make him dance to a political program. And this he will not allow them to do.

But what of us? Let us also take care. If God is not to be domesticated to a Zionist political program, then we should be careful that we not try to domesticate him to our political program either. For he will judge us as he judges all those who call upon his name.

The first great theologian of international relations was Isaiah, in the eighth century B.C. In an unforgettable passage in the 10th chapter of the book of Isaiah, he stuns the southern kingdom by saying, «*Ho Assyria, the rod of my anger... against a godless nation I send him...*» (verses 5-6) — that is, I, God, am sending that terrible nation Assyria against my own beloved people, whom I am calling godless. But Isaiah does not let us assume that God is permanently pro-Assyria and anti-Israel. In the 12th verse we read, «*When the*

*Lord has finished all his work in Jerusalem he will punish the arrogant boasting of the king of Assyria and his haughty pride.*» First God uses Assyria against Israel. Then God turns against Assyria. God uses political programs, but he is not bound by them. And if the folk to the south of us cannot domesticate him, then we must not try to do so either.