Epilogue

In the face of continual conflict and the increasing influence of the of religious right in Israel, the secular view, which is widely held among world Jewry, has to be asserted. I could have used quotes from Spinoza or Einstein but the Jewish Virtual Library makes the case clearly.

On the founding myths of Judaism:

The saga of the Israelites, as told in the Bible, was designed as a morality tale to prove the importance of faith in the One God. The stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Joshua demonstrate that the Israelites were rewarded when they obeyed God, but were punished when they strayed.

The historical evidence to back up these events is sparse, and, in some cases, contradictory. In particular, the account of Joshua’s conquest of Canaan is inconsistent with the archaeological evidence. Cities supposedly conquered by Joshua in the 14th century BCE were destroyed long before he came on the scene. Some, such as Ai and Arad, had been ruins for a 1000 years.

The Book of Judges, which directly contradicts Joshua, and shows the Israelites settling the land over a prolonged period, is nearer historical reality; but even it cannot be taken at face value.

The conclusion is somewhat startling to Bible readers who know the Canaanites portrayed in the Bible as immoral idolaters: most of the Israelites were in fact formerly Canaanites. The story of Abraham’s journey from Ur of the Chaldees, the Patriarchs, the Exodus, Sinai, and the conquest of Canaan, all these were apparently based on legends that the various elements brought with them from their countries of origin. The consolidation of the Israelites into a nation was not the result of wanderings in the desert and divine revelation, but came from the need to defend themselves against the Philistines, who settled in the
Canaanite coastal plain more or less at the same time the Israelites were establishing themselves in the hills.

Thus the founders of Israel were not Abraham and Moses, but Saul and David. It was apparently Saul who consolidated the hill farmers under his rule and created fighting units capable of confronting the Philistines. It was David who defeated the Philistines and united the hill farmers with the people of the Canaanite plains, thus establishing the Kingdom of Israel and its capital city.¹

The existence of the Kingdoms of Saul and David is not widely accepted; there is insufficient archeological evidence and the biblical texts were written centuries after the events described; the Book of Samuel at the end of the seventh and completed in the sixth century BCE, during the Babylonian exile, and Chronicles in the third century BCE. Yet the myth persists that the founding nation (albeit a very small nation) of these people was created in Hebron, then Jerusalem, in the eighth century BCE. Hence the tremendous effort in time and expense and in land seizures since the creation of modern Israel to find some evidence in the ground of the existence of the Kingdom of David, an essential quest to validate the nation’s divine right to the lands of Judea and Samaria. And in the process, deny the historical existence of Palestine.

So, the continuing violence in Palestine arises without a base in fact or reason, from myths propagated three millennia ago. The most insidious part of the myth is that the land of Israel was a divine gift from a singular God to those singular people. Deny this and you are denying their God, their faith.

Israel’s extremely slow war of attrition against the remains of Palestine is a war fought with walls, walls extending from Jerusalem in barriers, buildings, and fortified settlements large and small. An estimated half a million Jews live in the more that 130 government-sanctioned communities and 100 “outposts” developed with government assistance, though not officially sanctioned. Some live in sizable secular towns, essentially dormitories for Jerusalem; others, developed for the ultra-Orthodox, are closed to outsiders. In total these amount to more than 230 physical implants of Israeli life and culture into the body of the West Bank: arrivals embedded aggressively and, for the builders, permanently, into the land. According to Arutz Sheva, in September 2016 there were 407 118 Jews in Judea and Samaria. The article continues:

In addition, about 375,000 Jews live in the Jewish neighborhoods of “East” Jerusalem, which... contain the majority of Jerusalem’s Jewish residents. Actually, close to 800,000 Jews live over what is called the Green Line (pre-1967 borders) and serve, with G-d’s help, to ensure that the heartland of Israel will flourish and grow in the coming years – and will stay in Jewish hands forever.²
In 2017 there are estimated to be more than 2.9 million Palestinians in the areas under their control (forbidden to Israelis). They live in sizeable cities, ancient cities significant to all the religions of the Book – Hebron, Nablus and Jericho. Many more, estimates are as high 300,000, live in Area C, the 60% of the West Bank under Israeli military control. The Israel plan to annex major settlement blocks, even including Area C, would cut the West Bank in half and destroy any possibility of ever forming a viable Palestinian state. Ariel Sharon’s boast that “We’ll make a pastrami sandwich out of them [the Palestinians]. We’ll insert a strip of Jewish settlements right across the West Bank, so that in twenty-five years’ time, neither the United Nations nor the United States, nobody, will be able to tear it apart,” could become reality.

There are numerous versions of the series of maps shown in Figure E.1. Many are deliberately deceiving, which has led to rebuttals in the Israeli press and elsewhere. This however, appears to be reliable and objective; though still seen by some commentators as propaganda, it does accurately illustrate the culmination of the vision of creating a new nation that originated a century ago.

The sequence of transformations can be viewed either as the spread of an invasive culture which has all but destroyed the host’s, or the insertion of a revitalizing culture which, through a succession of extraordinary acts of will, politics, and violence, has succeeded in resurrecting an ancient nation.
It was an asymmetrical struggle. The invaders had all the advantages: they had a single profound cause, the culture they displaced had none; they were an exiled people who had preserved their culture for two millennia, never forgetting that the land they were separated from was theirs by divine right. Never doubting that one day they would return, return for many not just to be reunited with their founding fathers but to prepare for the coming of the Messiah.

Israel is two distinct cultures: a modern democratic nation state, defined as much by its advances in science and technology as by the power of its armed forces; and a theocratic nation whose extensive settlements – the walls of Jerusalem – have, with the help of its military, destroyed Palestine.

Israel’s future in some measure will be defined by whether it remains a democracy or becomes increasingly a theocracy.

Notes


