

ONE

The Bible in the Service of Zionism

*“We do not Believe in God, but he Nonetheless Promised us
Palestine”*

Ilan Pappé

THERE IS A TALE, which is 66.5% true, about Ben-Zion Dinburg (later Dinur), the doyen of early Zionist historiography in Palestine and later one of the first Ministers of Education. In 1937, he was approached by David Ben-Gurion, the leader of the Jewish community in Palestine and later the first Prime Minister of Israel, two weeks before the arrival of the Royal Peel Commission that was asked by His Majesty's Government to find a solution for the conflict in Palestine. Ben-Gurion inquired whether the respectable historian could produce some research that would prove Jewish continuity from 70 CE, the time of the Roman exile, to 1882, the time of the arrival of the first Zionists. “Well,” replied the historian, “I could but this involves many periods and a variety of expertise and therefore it will probably take a decade or so to complete it successfully.” “You do not understand,” retorted Ben-Gurion, “The Peel Commission is coming in two weeks' time, therefore you have to reach your conclusion by then. After that, you have a whole decade to prove it!”

Even if this story is not entirely true—it has no identifiable source—it shows the interaction between the ancient Jewish experience in Palestine and the Zionist battle for recognition and legitimacy in the twentieth century. It is not clear whether the presentation of the continuity argument won the day. It was in any case presented as a powerful argument in front of both the Peel Commission and the United Nations Special Committee On Palestine (UNSCOP) in 1947. British and later UN support for Zionism, it seems in hindsight, had little to do with the proof for such continuity. However, both for internal consumption and external support, Zionist exploitation of the Bible as both a scientific truth and moral justification for the colonization of Palestine did matter considerably in the ability to recruit large sections of the Western Christian

world behind the Zionist movement.

The secular early Zionists quoted intensively from the Bible to show that there was a divine imperative to colonize Palestine, or in their discourse, to redeem Eretz Israel.¹ But in fact the Bible is not a very useful text for reinventing a Jewish nation: the father of the nation, Abraham, was not from Palestine, the Hebrews became a nation in Egypt, and the Bible was given to them in Egypt (the Sinai). This text was reinterpreted by the early and secular Zionists: the nation was one of the tribes, living under occupation in Canaan, exiled to Egypt, and come back to redeem the homeland, as did the modern Zionists. The secular Zionists saw themselves as the new occupiers of Canaan—namely the successors of Joshua and the Judges; and they too founded a Jewish kingdom.²

On the margins of the secular, and quite often socialist, early Zionist settler bodies grew a small group of religious people who were taken by the idea of Zionism. They added to the secular interpretation the idea that the exile—not only to Egypt, but the various exiles throughout the biblical period associated with the immoral and anti-God behaviour of the people—was a punishment that came to an end with the arrival of Zionism in Palestine. Later, on the ground in Palestine, they would add that in order for the exile not to reoccur, a more religious behaviour would be required by the settlers, an issue that continues to divide Jewish society in Israel.³

What secular and religious Zionists agreed on was that the Bible had a central place, not as a religious text, but rather as a historical document that reaffirmed the right for ownership over the land. Moreover, it was read by secular Zionists as a text that deemed exile from that land as an abnormal and unhealthy historical condition.⁴

The Bible was treated as a book that foresaw and predicted the return of the people to their land, the building of the country, and the gathering of exiles—all Hebrew terms appearing the Bible and re-used as a modern national dictionary. So it provided both a spiritual justification and a practical map which pointed to the locations, and sites, where things happened during the biblical period that would become the Zionist map of colonization.⁵

Both these approaches, which regarded the Bible as an independent basis for settlement and rejected exile as non-Jewish and abnormal, in reality were alien concepts to any practicing and religious Jew when Zionism appeared; this fusion still leaves practicing Jews in an uncomfortable position today.

The first problem for them was that they had never studied the Bible as a separate book, if they studied it at all. But the problem was more serious than that. As underlined

¹ Bracha Habas, ed., *The Book of the Second Aliya* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1947) [Hebrew]. This book is the largest published collection of Second Aliya diary entries, letters, and articles.

² Oz Almog, *The Sabra: A Profile* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1981), 81 [Hebrew].

³ Yohanan H. Levy, *Disputes Regarding Land in Israel in Ancient Times*, in *Studies in Jewish Hellenism* (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1969), 60–78 [Hebrew].

⁴ Micha Yossef Ben-Gurion (Berdichevsky), *Writings and Articles* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1960), 99–150 [Hebrew].

⁵ See David Ben-Gurion, *Studies in the Bible* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1976).

by Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, Zionist experience raised from the very beginning many problems for practising Jews who had found themselves unable to interpret the “return” of the Jews in Israel before the return of the Messiah. Thus, on a metaphysical level, exile is not ended with the creation of the Jewish state. Indeed, exile is a major constituent of Jewish identity and is supposed to have a therapeutic function which Zionism endangers in claiming the return to Eretz Israel, as only God is able to put an end to exile. This particular criticism of course prevailed among the Orthodox Jews such as the *Haredim*, who were not at all comfortable with the use the Zionists made of the Torah and the concept of the Promised Land.⁶

These theological and ideological divergences of opinion about the place of the Bible, the concept of return and other more marginal issues were symptoms of a much more profound gap between the Orthodox and Zionist Jewish perspectives. Mainstream Zionism was not only a movement seeking the colonization of Palestine and the assertion of the Jewish right for self-determination; it was also a very significant movement of secularization. As such it was not unique in the period when other religious groups for similar or other reasons redefined themselves in national terms. But its relationship with the religious interpretation of identity proved to be complex, as in many cases of what Anthony Smith used to call “vertical nationalism”—national identities born in a close association with the religious affiliation despite their modernization and success in creating a nation state.⁷

When the early Orthodox protests were made, Zionism was still a minority opinion among world Jewry and in many ways this objection could have wilted the early buds of secular Jewish nationalism or at least the insistence of implementing the idea of Jewish nationalism necessarily in Palestine. Hence in the early twentieth century, some of the leading figures of the Zionist movement, including the founding father of the movement, Theodor Herzl, opted for colonization elsewhere. The preferred option was Uganda.⁸

Christian Biblical Scholarship and the Zionization of Palestine

Eventually Palestine was chosen. Among the reasons for this shift was strong British support for the idea. The support was mainly on the basis of religious, rather than strategic, interests—although one could very rarely separate the two in the British imperial drive across the globe. The foundations for this British religious interest in settling the Jews in Palestine are to be found in the Western Christian scholarship about the Bible as a text that foresees the future and serves as a political, not just a divine, master plan.⁹

⁶ Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Jewish Memory Between Exile and History,” *JQR* 97, no. 4 (2007): 530–43.

⁷ Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nationalism* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1986).

⁸ Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State: An Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question*, ed. Jacob M. Alkow, trans. Sylvie D’Avigdor (New York: American Zionist Emergency Council, 1946), 69–77.

⁹ Michael Prior, ed., *Western Scholarship and the History of Palestine* (London: Melisende, 1998).

Several studies have shown that the gravitation towards Palestine as the epicenter of Zionist visions and aspirations were facilitated, among other factors, by a very keen and intensive Protestant interest in connecting the Jewish colonization of the “Holy Land” with divine and apocalyptic Christian doctrines that saw the return of the Jews as precipitating the second coming of the Messiah.¹⁰

The orientation of Zionism towards Palestine drew on the European scholarly preoccupation with biblical Israel in the age of colonialism and imperialism. As Keith Whitlam has indicated, this scholarship adopted two attitudes that served secular Zionism particularly well.¹¹ In its scholarly coverage of the history of the Holy Land—from biblical to contemporary times—this scholarship studied the country as an empty space and by that entirely de-Arabized it. The Arabs and the Muslims were left outside the realm of professional historical writing. Secondly, this scholarly research was motivated by apocalyptic and millenarian notions in which the return of the Messiah would be precipitated by the return of the Jews. This combination of de-Arabization and the religious imperative for the return of the Jews paved the way for the imposition, by word and sword, of the Zionist narrative on the land.

Thus a Eurocentric, as well as a Christian-centric, narrative served well the Zionist one. This is exemplified best in one of the principal Zionist claims: Israel is a nation returning not only to a homeland but also to a space that in the past had been occupied by a Jewish nation-state.

The exclusive nature of the Zionization of the past hinged on the biblical scholarship produced in the nineteenth century in Europe. It began with the theological construction of the “nation of Israel” myth. This term was presented by biblical scholars in the last century as a historical fact—indeed, as the only suitable term for defining the people living in Palestine from the late Bronze Age onward, even though it seems that the scattered villages of that Palestine had very little in common. The reinvention of the Jewish people as an ancient nation of Israel was an important product of that scholarly effort. It played an important role in shaping the founding myth of Zionism: a people without a land returning to a land without a people. Excluding the Palestinians from the land was one thing; claiming that the land had its original nation, wandering about, was another. Yet the two are interconnected: a genuine nation returned home; an undefined group of people had to move, and later move out, to make place for this act of historical justice.¹² As Thomas Thompson showed, the myth of a wandering nation was hardly ever challenged in a scholarly way. He claims that after the great Jewish rebellion against the Romans in 70 CE, most people stayed. Not only that; in due course they were Christianized more or less at the time the empire as a whole was “baptized” and, in turn with the advent of Arab conquerors, were partly Islamicized.¹³

¹⁰ Keith W. Whitlam, “Western Scholarship and the Silencing of Palestinian History,” in Prior, ed., *Western Scholarship*, 9–22.

¹¹ Whitlam, “Western Scholarship.”

¹² Prior, ed., *Western Scholarship*.

¹³ Thomas L. Thompson, “Hidden Histories and the Problem of Ethnicity in Palestine,” in Prior, ed.,

This was the indigenous population of Palestine; at times mostly Jewish, later mostly Christian, and finally predominantly Muslim—a population undergoing processes of conversion over a period of 2,000 years which were similar to most people in the area, a historical chapter ending with the redefinition of these communities as national movements.¹⁴

The late Michael Prior exposed very carefully this enterprise and concluded that the Bible “can be a charter for dispossession, not only for liberation.”¹⁵ This is, of course, true about all Holy Scriptures and the elastic interpretation that can be given to them to serve contemporary political aims.

A prime example for this scholarship is the reinvention within Christian scholarship of the Kingdom of David as a Jewish nation-state, a reinvention later adopted gladly by the Zionist movement. The theological scaffolding for Zionism was absurd in Judaism as it was for Christianity. As Thomas Thompson argued, from a biblical point of view (i.e., a theological point of view), any secular (i.e., national) attempt to reclaim the past, or nationalize it, for the present, is false.¹⁶ So he asked, rhetorically, is there a genuine story to be told when such a distant past is considered?

Religion deals with beliefs and not scientific truth and thus even sceptics would be less bothered with the lack of scientific proof for its conviction. But in the case of Palestine a holy, or rather an unholy, alliance was formed between Christian scholarship of that kind and secular Zionism (which also developed a propensity to prove scientifically, later on, these ideological claims over Palestine). The most common thread was the ability to Zionize, or nationalize, anyone who lived in the biblical era up to the Roman time and then de-Palestinize others—namely question other people’s, even indigenous ones’, affinity or connection to the land of Palestine, up to the arrival of the early Zionists.

This act of nationalizing people in the past was not unique to Zionism of course. As Benedict Anderson noted, it was always easy for national movements to nationalize dead people who could not resist this act of nationalization.¹⁷ The human problem created by this act of Palestine was not whether justifiably or not people were regarded a Jewish nation, but that the Zionist adoption of the biblical narrative was an *a priori* nationalization of the land, as a people-less space between 70 CE and 1882, while the native people were deemed as absent or usurpers who took over a land that was not theirs. In fact the people of Palestine had been excluded from the Zionist narrative of the land already in 1882, long before they were uprooted forcefully from it in 1948. In other words, the imposition of the biblical narrative produced real victims—the Palestinian

Western Scholarship, 23–41.

¹⁴ Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People* (London: Verso Books, 2010).

¹⁵ Michael Prior, “The Moral Problem of the Land Traditions of the Bible,” in Prior, ed., *Western Scholarship*, 53.

¹⁶ Thompson, “Hidden Histories.”

¹⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 2003), 41.

people who did not fit the definition of the people of Israel according to the biblical-cum-Zionist narrative.

The Bible as a Secular Charter

By 1905, Zionism was focused on Palestine and any other territorial options were ruled out. The people who took over from the early central European prophets of the day injected socialist and even Marxist ideology, in huge doses, into the growing secular reality of Zionism in Palestine.

But as Zeev Sternhell, and before him Zachary Lockman and Gershon Shafir (among others) have shown, this was always a very conditional and limited version of socialism and Marxism.¹⁸ The universal values and aspirations that characterized the various ideological movements in the Western Left were very early on nationalized or Zionized in Palestine.

Zionization meant in this case evoking the religious dogma and reframing it in such a way that would assert an eternal moral right to the land, which transcends not only any other external claims to the land in those dying days of colonialism and imperialism, but also those of the native population. One of the most socialist, secular colonialist projects demanded exclusivity in the name of a pure transcendental promise.

A secular reliance on the Word of God as a justification for colonization is not the only basis for solidifying a takeover. Material power, diplomacy, and brutality, etc. are of course at times even more essential. But the Zionist leaders wished to cement these discrete impulses into a coherent narrative that would explain not only why they arrived in Palestine but also why they denied the right of the Palestinians to be there.

This however turned out to be a heuristic and dangerous exercise. The Labour movement navigated successfully between Realpolitik and pragmatism when it came to employing the Bible. Colonization and dispossession were a secular strategy but were justified—internally and internationally when needed—on the basis of the Bible. When Labour lost power, the more right-wing factions of Zionism would take the biblical text as justifying disregard for Realpolitik, Israel's international standing or obligations, or indeed of human rights considerations. This reliance on the biblical text as overriding any universalist approach to politics was at first only adopted at the right margins of the Zionist movement but it soon became a mainstream force and in recent years even a domineering force. These political movements within Zionism reconnected, very much as the Labour Zionists did, to a very selective reading of the Bible. In this new, more revered reading of the Bible it became a text that justified not past conquest but also

¹⁸ Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism and the Making of the Jewish State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998); Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906–1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

present-day policies towards the Palestinians, consisting of occupation and dispossession.

Right-wing and marginal religious groups were not the only ones tempted to employ the Bible in such a way. Every now and then the more sober Labour Zionists would do the same, especially in moments of violent clashes with the native Palestinians, over land, water, and other natural resources. Their authors, leaders, and poets described these clashes as a re-enactment of some of the Bible's most famous battles. And thus Israel's foremost national poet, Nathan Alterman, compared various Palestinian attacks on settlers to the defeat of Saul's army in front of the Philistines in the Battle of Gilboa. And he assumed that, unlike in exile, in the homeland defeat will always be succeeded by victory; as it did in the Bible.¹⁹

But in principle the labour and mainstream Zionist establishment's reliance on the Bible for the major strategy of colonization, as well as for spiritual inspiration in maintaining the colonies, attempted to extricate the Bible from its religious connotations and from the hands of the Rabbis. It was the leader of the Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine and Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, who led this secular way. "The eternity and greatness of the Bible are not conditioned by another book, interpretation or Talmudic text that came after it," he declared—referring to the Orthodox tendency to stress the importance of other texts. They were wrong and only in Palestine can they realize it:

Only with the renewal of the homeland and the Hebrew renaissance can we understand fully the real and full light of the Bible.²⁰

Thus clear references in the Bible to the Jewish people as spiritual gatekeepers of the text were reinterpreted as the Bible became a pragmatic manual for how to keep the gated Jewish communities in colonized Palestine.²¹

It is not an exaggeration to say that David Ben-Gurion turned the Bible into a foundation of his Zionist thought after 1948. He already made a concerted and conscious effort in the early 1930s, when he was elected as the undisputed leader of the Jewish Community, to extricate the research and study of the Bible from the hands of religious quarters. But more importantly for him was to convey the message that Jewish life in exile revolved around the Bible.

This point was repeated by one of the leading intellectual lights of Zionism, the poet Haim Nahman Bialik. In a lecture he gave to activists and leaders of Mapai, the leading Zionist socialist party, in one of the veteran and highly secular settlements of Nahalal in 1932, he explained how wrong was the Orthodox Jewish assertion that Jews in exile

¹⁹ Haim Guri, "On Nathan Alterman: Poets of Our Times," *Zeman Yarok*, July 31, 2008 [Hebrew].

²⁰ David Ben-Gurion, "Exile and the Bible: A Dialogue with Haim Hazzas," *Dialogues on State and Culture*, October 1962, 12 [Hebrew].

²¹ Assaf Sagiv, "The Forefathers of Zionism and Myth of the Nation's Birth," *Techelt* 5:1–4 (Autumn 1989) [Hebrew].

did not learn the Bible or did not know it well. He claimed it was a fundamental part of Jewish education.²² This rather flimsy and unfounded assertion was connected to another notion in Ben-Gurion's mind that the Jewish nation was not born in exile but only on the land, and the proof for this was in the Bible.²³

Ben-Gurion insisted on the secular teaching of the Bible as a national text to be inserted in a core place in the educational system, throughout all the stages of learning. He also elevated what one can call the secular and national knowledge of the Bible to a core value and supreme manifestation of what the essence of being an Israeli is all about. For this purpose he initiated the Bible Youth Quiz in 1958, which became an organic part of the Day of Independence celebrations.²⁴

Labour Zionist historians see the Bible as indeed one would assume the leaders of the Labour Zionist movement saw it, as linking the East European Jews to the foreign land of Palestine. The land was foreign in its landscape, the people inhabiting it, and the language they spoke. As a recent book by such an historian put it, as absurd as it may sound, the secularization of the modern Jews via Zionism—and not for instance via Marxism or Liberalism—brought the Bible back to the Jewish people who had earlier distanced themselves from it during the attempt to assimilate in Europe. It became the essential link between the second Aliya, the core group that founded the Jewish state, and the land. Hence, the Bible could be found in the room of every socialist worker who laboured in the name of Zionism.²⁵

Rediscovering The Land of the Bible: The 1967 Occupation and its Impact

The Israeli reasons for occupying the West Bank and the decision to maintain it as part of Israel are a topic for another article and I have discussed it elsewhere. The government documents before the war and during the first year of the occupation are now accessible to the public. They reveal a mixture of strategic reasoning for the occupation but also a biblical justification.²⁶ Quite a few secular ministers in the thirteenth government of Israel regarded the West Bank as the heart of ancient Israel and saw the occupation as redemption of the homeland and in this respect the Bible became once more an imperative and important text.

But because there was strategy involved, the biblical map—at least in theory—was not supposed to dictate the plan of colonization and Judaization. The principle, embodied in the famous Yigal Alon plan and accepted by all the politicians, was to settle only where there was no dense Palestinian population. Alas, the biblical map charted a

²² Anita Shapira, *The Bible and the Jewish Identity* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2012) [Hebrew].

²³ Anita Shapira, *New Jews, Old Jews* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1997), 233 [Hebrew].

²⁴ Shapira, *The Bible*.

²⁵ Yitzhak Tabenkin, "The Ideological Sources of the Second Aliya," *Essays*, vol. 2 (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Meuhad Publishing, 1972), 25 [Hebrew].

²⁶ See Ilan Pappé, "Revisiting 1967: The False Paradigm of Peace, Partition and Parity," *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, nos. 3–4 (2013): 341–51.

different option—the places deemed as the ancient locations from the Bible were at the heart of the Palestinian populated area and this is where the settlers chose to colonize.

And that particular map motivated the settlers' movement, appearing after the 1967 war. It was born in the learning centers of religious nationalism, which played a very minimal role in establishing the state and now, after 1967, felt they could play the leading role in redeeming the heart of the ancient homeland. And indeed the harbinger of this settlement plan was the forceful entrance into the heart of al-Khalil, Hebron in the spring of 1968. The movement, Gush Emunim, would use only the biblical map to determine where it settled next. In most cases their settlement was approved in hindsight by the government—either because the politicians were afraid to challenge this movement, or more likely, because quite a few leading figures identified also with this map of colonization and Judaization.²⁷

For the settlers, colonizing large parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip was repossession in the name of God and the Bible (and some of these texts such as Joshua's elimination of the Amalekites could have been easily interpreted as even a justification for genocide; but, thank God, no ideological movement in Zionism or later-day Israel has succumbed to such a view, yet). But these settlers did relate to the Jewish haggadah of the Passover Seder where God sends Moses to a land inhabited by others, who are all named, and whose fate is to be dispossessed for the sake of the "return" of the chosen people to the Abrahamite promised land. The first act of colonization in Hebron was done on the eve of the Passover Seder.

So biblical and later-day texts became the cornerstone of the interpretation of the Zionist dispossession of Palestine, combining to view it as an act of God. The biblical texts were needed not only to build new settlements but also expand existing ones—indeed it seems that by now in 2016 the map has been completed, but for maintaining possession in the face of Palestinian resistance and expansion in the face of international condemnation. Not surprisingly, the Christian Zionists in the United States, through their representatives on Capitol Hill, share this biblical license to oppose the American State Department's continued reference to the settlements as illegal.²⁸

The biblical texts create an immense energy, excitement, and zeal. And when this was to a certain extent exhausted in the West Bank and when Ariel Sharon, for tactical reasons, ended the Jewish colonization in the Gaza Strip around 2005, it was directed inside Israel into the seams that connect precariously mixed Arab and Jewish towns and locations. In mixed towns such as Acre, Jaffa, Haifa, Lydd, and Ramleh, the Palestinian inhabitants already succumbed to a spatial policy from above that strangled their habitat and living space—mainly by surrounding them with exclusive gated and apart-

²⁷ Idith Zertal and Akiva Eldar, *Lords of the Land: Settlers and the State of Israel* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1994) [Hebrew].

²⁸ Jim Rutenberg, Mike McIntire, and Ethan Bronner, "Tax-Exempt Funds Aid Settlements in West Bank," *New York Times*, July 6, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/06/world/middleeast/06settle.html>.

heid Jewish communities.²⁹

But recently this external policy of enclavement from above was accompanied by the appearance of biblical learning centres for Jews, who originally come from the settlements and purchase flats and houses in the heart of the Arab Ghettos of these mixed towns. They declare very openly that they came to redeem these lands. The Bible does not stop, so it seems, to be employed as a tool against the indigenous people of Palestine.

The “*Pulmus*”: The Debate

But the inherent paradox of secular Jews wishing to implement God’s will in the land in the name of the Bible was not easily solved in twenty-first-century Israel. The settler community in the occupied West Bank, like many parts of the religious national movement, underwent a process of Orthodoxation. What I mean is that secularism, and not only Arabism, is now their enemy. And part of the aversion to secularization is a resentment towards the way the Bible has been expropriated by the secular, hegemonic cultural elites in Israel (including through the establishment of departments for the study of the Bible in Israeli universities).

Thus within the settlement movement and its constituencies inside Israel began a *pulmus* (a halachic debate, in Hebrew). At the heart of this lies a new phenomenon: the “*Hardalim*” (*Mafdal* is the national religious party and *Haredi* are Ultra-Orthodox Jews; a *Hardal*, which also means “mustard” in Hebrew, is a hybrid of *Mafdal* and *Haredi*). These Ultra-Orthodox national Jews, if such a hybrid is possible, resent strongly the secularization of the way the Bible is studied and taught in Israel. One example they offer is how to interpret King David’s attitude towards Uriah the husband of the beautiful Bat Sheva, whom the king coveted when watching her bathe on the rooftop. He takes her away from Uriah and sends the latter to die in the battlefield.³⁰ Secular Jews, so claim the new gatekeepers from the settlements, may understand it as it is written (they admit that only very few scholars through the ages give any particular different explanation for this unpleasant episode). However as Orthodox Jews, the seemingly sinful behaviour remains unexplained, and therefore not judged or criticized, as the mysterious work of the Lord.

The *Hardalization* of the national religious Jews is also the outcome of the political ascendance of the Ultra-Orthodox parties in Israel—allegedly anti-Zionist given their aversion for secular tempering with the divine scheme—but de facto Zionist because of their racist anti-Arabism and their willingness to settle in huge numbers in the Judaization programs of successive governments in the north and south of Israel and inside the West Bank (in particular in the greater Jerusalem area).³¹ Those close to them in the

²⁹ Ilan Pappé, *The Forgotten Palestinians: A History of the Palestinian Minority in Israel* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

³⁰ Hezel Henkin, “Everyone Who Says for Certain that David Sinned and the Critical Approach,” *Hatzofeh*, April 1, 2004 [Hebrew].

³¹ Pappé, *Forgotten Palestinians*.

settler communities began the *Pulmus* and demanded that, in the learning centers of the national religious Jewish institutions, secular interpretation of the Bible should be deserted and the Bible's singularity should be reconsidered. Thus a century after Ultra-Orthodox Jews rejected Zionism, partly also for the misuse and abuse of the Bible, they now demand a monopoly on the Bible in order to return the book to its pre-Zionist context.

The two ideological streams in Israel today that reject this reassertion are the national religious settlers who still wish to use the Bible in the same way the early Zionists employed it for colonization and Judaization of Palestine, and the secular liberal Jews, who—without any clear scholarly logic but only on the basis of pragmatism and Realpolitik—demand that the same impulse to colonize Palestine before 1948 would not be reignited for the occupied territories of 1967 so as to enable a chance for peace with the Palestinians. They also claim that the modern usage of the Bible in such a way distanced it from the younger, secular generation. As Anita Shapira claims in a recent book, the settlers spoiled the encounter with the real land of the Bible, namely the West Bank, after the 1967 war.³² She claims liberal Zionists can differentiate between love of the land of the Bible and the right of the other people living there to have that particular part of the land.

The Battle over the Representation of the Bible

For a long period in the academic world, the official Zionist historiographic version was received in the West and treated as unequivocally “legitimate”—as a scholarly and sound narrative of the conflict—while the Palestinian one was suspected as mere propaganda.

This changed in the late 1970s. The severe criticism directed at orientalist studies in the West, inspired by works of scholars such as Samir Amin, Walid Khalidi, Edward W. Said, and Sami Zubaida, has balanced the study of the Arab-Israeli conflict.³³ This new trend corresponded with the emergence of a revisionist history in Israel. A handful of Israeli scholars began recognizing the validity of at least some of the main chapters in the Palestinian narrative, notably among which is the acceptance of Israel's responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem.³⁴

However, studies that were associated with the Bible were kept out of this intellectual revolution, and in most cases mainstream academia treated the biblical narrative that justified the Zionization of Palestine as empirical fact. Only very few anti-Zionist

³² Shapira, *The Bible*.

³³ Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism: Modernity, Religion and Democracy. A Critique of Eurocentrism and Culturalism* (2nd ed.; New York: Pambazuka Press, 2010); Walid Khalidi, *Palestine Reborn* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 1992); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Vintage, 2000); Sami Zubaida, *Islam: The People and the State, Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009).

³⁴ Ilán Pappé, “The Post-Zionist Discourse in Israel, 1991–2001,” *HLS* 1, no. 1 (2002), 3–20.

scholars, such as Gabi Piterberg have successfully deconstructed this narrative, and there were of course several significant works on the topic outside Israeli academia.³⁵

The Bible in Zionist narrative thus serves two narratives within the mainstream secular Zionist movement and later the state of Israel. The meta-narrative is that since this is the land of the Jewish Bible, there were Jews in it until they were brutally expelled; the second part of it, or the second narrative, is that the land then became empty until it was redeemed in the late nineteenth century.

Shlomo Sand, in the footsteps of Arthur Koestler and Paul Thompson, challenged the narrative of Jewish expulsion in the Roman era, and thus of “return” in the late nineteenth century.³⁶ However his work was a lone voice in an Israeli and pro-Israeli wilderness. Even more profound analysis on the cultural nature of Israel’s settler colonialism in this respect can be found in Gabi Piterberg’s book, *The Returns of Zionism*. Sand, Piterberg, Whitlam, Prior, and Thompson are still not mainstream, despite the significant revolution in the production of knowledge about modern Palestine and Israel. More typical is the cartographic representation of the Zionist meta-narrative that accompanies still quite a few venues where the narrative is relevant: university modules, popular virtual, electronic, and media presentations, and diplomatic material.

The most common example of this is the still very popular *Atlas of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* by Martin Gilbert, renowned historian and biographer of Winston Churchill. It is now in its tenth edition and still there is not even the slightest echo of the new challenges mentioned above or any reference to the historiographical changes in this atlas.³⁷ The atlas is a reproduction of mainstream Zionist historiography of the conflict, without any reference to revisionist Israeli historical views, not to mention the possibility of giving at least one map from a Palestinian perspective.

This is all the more remarkable since the pretension as it is stated in the preface is to try to present fairly “the views of those involved in the conflict.” A few examples will suffice to show in which direction this book is bent. They will prove once more how supposedly innocent artefacts, such as maps, disclose a strong ideological bias. The first map is a good place to start. It shows the Jews of Palestine before the Arab conquest. Fair enough, we may say, as this demonstrates the romantic Zionist claim to Palestine. But one would have expected at least one map that informs us about Arabs in Abbasid, Mamluk, Seljuk, or Ottoman Palestine. But there is none of that. The subsequent map is about the Jews in Palestine in all these Islamic periods, periods in which they constituted less than one percent of the population. The third map is about the first Jewish immigration of 1882. The myth of the “empty land waiting for the landless people” is recreated in these first three maps.

³⁵ Gabriel Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism: Myths, Politics and Scholarship in Israel* (London: Verso Books, 2008).

³⁶ Sand, *Invention*.

³⁷ Martin Gilbert, *The Routledge Atlas of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (10th ed.; London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 1–3.

The biblical map is not directly displayed in this atlas, but it is the basis for the story (a Palestinian atlas would begin the story with the arrival of Zionism as the departure point for the conflict). The industry of similar atlases in Israel, including the famous Carta series which covers the time of the Bible to our times, accentuates this connection even better. At the end of the day, however, it may be pointless now, in 2016, to expect that any deconstruction of the manipulation which Zionism and later the state of Israel employed with regards to the Bible would have any significant impact on the reality. The reality will change because of aversion to the abuse of human rights and basic civil rights. Whether this abuse is done in the name of the Bible, or secular texts, from the victim's point of view is irrelevant.