

Mark Levy August 2025

## Zionism, Judea, and the Jewish People

I am a Jew. I am an American and Israeli citizen and live over half the year in Israel in the Jewish settlement of Tekoa, just South of Bethlehem. Tekoa is in Judea, which is part of what is sometimes called the West Bank. Using the town of Tekoa as a backdrop, this essay makes three points. One, the Jews are not outside colonizers. The history makes this clear. Two, Judea (and Samaria in the northern West Bank) is not an afterthought for Israel. It is core to its historical and religious claims, and it being militarily controlled by Israel is a strategically critical defensive shield. Three, the Jews have tried to work things out with our Palestinian neighbors, but in large numbers they won't peaceably accept our presence.

Israel is not a colonial presence. Instead Zionism returned Jews to governing power in an area they had lived in since before the Roman Empire, and Zionism replaced control by the colonizing British and Ottoman empires that preceded the present State of Israel. The opportunity to live in peace and prosperity with the local Arabs (who have chosen to organize as the Palestinian movement) has to date been ruined by extremists who cannot accept Jewish sovereignty in any part of the Muslim Middle East.

The proof of Israel's non colonial status, and the Jews clear status as an indigenous people, is clear in the history of the area.

- In the book Josephus Flavius, *The Jewish Antiquities and The Jewish War*, written by the historian Josephus (Penguin Classics, Published 1984) , Josephus describes Judea as the core of Jewish society. The Dead Sea Scrolls, found near the Dead Sea in 1947, are Jewish religious writings from the 3rd century BCE to the 1st century CE. (*The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* by Michael Wise et al.)
- Herodian. King Herod was the Roman-appointed client king of Judea from about 37 BCE until his death. Herod reconstructed the Second Jewish Temple in Jerusalem in 20 BCE. His rule is also documented by Josephus. Herodian is a fortress built by Herod which sits across a wadi from Tekoa.
- There are records indicating a continuous Jewish presence in Judea from the end of Roman rule until 1948. During those centuries Jews lived in Judea, particularly around the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, which is a short drive from modern Tekoa. After the Romans came the Byzantine (313-637 CE) and Muslim dynasties (638 CE to 1099 CE), and after years of warring outside rulers the Ottoman (1517-1917) and British colonial periods (1917 to 1948). Each of these governing entities originated outside the area, including the Muslim Caliphate that came from the Mecca and Medina areas in Saudi Arabia. Around 1900, as the Ottoman Empire was nearing an end, the population of Jerusalem was 40 to 60 percent Jewish, the largest group. (Ottoman census data originals found in Israel State Archives).

- The current residents of Tekoa include descendents of the Jews who never left the region, and Jews who returned to the area in response to persecution. They include the Ashkenazi Jews who left Europe and came to Israel directly or via third country stopovers; Sephardic Jews who were expelled from Arab countries when Israel declared State in 1948; Ethiopian Jews who came to Israel beginning in the 1970's fleeing persecution; and Russian Jews who came escaping the Soviet Union.

Judea Is A Critical Part of Israel. Tekoa was established after 1968 when Israel retook Judea from Jordan which controlled the area when the British Empire gave up control in 1948. In 1948 Israel agreed to a partition which would have created a Palestinian State and Jewish State. The surrounding Arab countries attacked and Israel survived, but Judea became Jordanian controlled land. The Jews living in Judea were expelled and no Jews lived in Judea until 1968.

In 1968 Arab countries again fought a war to exterminate Israel and lost. This time Israel retook Judea, Samaria. Judea and Samaria were a critical link in the security buffer for Jerusalem and the central population centers around Ben Gurion airport. This security necessity remains today. This is the reason a potentially terror driven Palestinian State cannot be established without risking the lives of over half the world's Jews (who live in Israel) and existence of the State of Israel.

Despite Opportunities for a Two State Solution, Radical Islamic Rejection of Jewish Sovereignty Prevented Success. In 1995 Israeli leaders decided to take a risk, despite the critical security importance of Israel's control of the West Bank area, and negotiated to provide most of the West Bank Palestinian population centers administrative control, but not security control. In 2000 Bill Clinton and Israel proposed a two State solution which provided for a Palestinian State in most of the West Bank and Gaza. This plan allowed for most Jewish settlements to remain, but gave the proposed Palestinian State more land in then Israel to ensure an equal land swap. The proposal made East Jerusalem the capital of the proposed Palestinian state. The Palestinian leadership rejected this plan and began the second Intifida, which was the killing of Jews primarily by frequent bus and cafe bombings inside Israel for several years. Former President Clinton described the Palestinian rejection as a great tragedy for the Palestinian people (See YouTube video of Clinton speaking at the New York Times DealBook Summit on December 4, 2004) (For a quick review of the history of Arab/Palestinian rejection of statehood offers see Law and Society Magazine, "How Palestine rejected offer to have its own state 5 times in the past", October 13, 2023)

Conclusion. Jews have returned to their ancestral homeland and built thriving communities throughout Israel, including Tekoa in Judea. Most of Judea would have been turned over to the local Palestinians as part of a new Palestinian State had radicals not prevented agreements by refusing to accept a Jewish national home on land within the Muslim Middle East. Instead the radicals responded to

compromise offers with extreme violence. At this point the status quo is likely to remain until Palestinians can convince wary Israelis that a Palestinian State would never again threaten the security of Jews in Israel.