

# *William E. Blackstone*

COMMEMORATION

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*September 28, 2016*

*Forest Lawn Memorial Park, Glendale*



HONORING THE 175TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS BIRTH, HIS  
PIONEERING EFFORTS TO PROMOTE WARM AND RESPECTFUL  
CHRISTIAN – JEWISH RELATIONS, AND HIS HISTORIC  
DIPLOMATIC CAMPAIGNS FOR A JEWISH HOMELAND

## *L.A.'s Pioneer in Jewish/Christian Relations*

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Today, 175 years after his birth, we gather at the Forest Lawn Memorial Park grave site of William E. Blackstone. Historians, rabbis, pastors, leaders, and representatives of many civic and educational organizations recognize his historical significance as a pioneer of respectful relationships between Christians and Jews. As a Christian bible teacher and missionary, Blackstone visited eastern Europe and the Middle East in 1888-9, where he was appalled by the humanitarian crisis of the Russian Jewish refugees who had been expelled by force from their villages in the Russian empire. Blackstone was inspired by the vision and enterprise of the new agricultural settlements established by the Chovevei Zion (Lovers of Zion) to resettle some of these Jewish refugees in Palestine, then a province of the Ottoman Turkish Empire. Decades earlier, Blackstone had written a book on Biblical prophecy which expressed confidence that the Jewish people would be re-gathered to their ancient homeland and resume a significant historical and spiritual role for humanity.

Returning from Palestine to his home in Chicago, Blackstone gathered a broad group of respected scholars and religious leaders for a historic multi-faith conference on the Past, Present and Future of Israel. In 1891, Blackstone drafted and circulated a petition (the Blackstone Memorial of 1891) for presentation to President Benjamin Harrison, calling for an international conference to address the suffering of the Russian Jewish refugees and allow them to return and resettle their ancient homeland. Blackstone's historic document, signed by over four hundred of the most prominent Americans is recognized by historians as one of the earliest and most significant events in American Zionist history. For the rest of his life, Blackstone continued to advocate for the Jewish people, repeatedly updating and presenting his petition to future presidents and speaking at Zionist meetings and conferences.

Blackstone's mobilization of Christian support for a Jewish national homeland as early as 1891, five years before the publication of Theodore Herzl's *The Jewish State* in 1897, motivated Jewish businessman Nathan Straus and Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandies, leaders of the American Zionist movement, to call Blackstone the "Father of Zionism." Brandeis invited Blackstone to address a national Zionist Conference in 1916, and introduced him as "Zionism's greatest ally outside of its own ranks."

In 1916, Zionist leaders asked Blackstone to gain endorsement for his Jewish homeland petition from Protestant denominations, college presidents and other Gentile civic leaders. This was presented to President Woodrow Wilson and was influential in obtaining his support for the British Balfour

Resolution of 1917, which began the process which birthed the modern State of Israel in 1948.

Blackstone moved his family from Chicago to Los Angeles in 1901. Blackstone, a member of the Methodist-Episcopal denomination, was a popular lecturer and Bible teacher, embraced by all denominations. In 1908, he was a founding trustee and first dean of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (now Biola University). Between 1910-1914, Blackstone served as a missionary and director of Bible translation work in China, and travelled into Korea, Tibet, India and the Middle East promoting Scripture distribution and preaching his evangelical faith. He continued to serve as a trustee of the school until his death in 1935.

In 1966, seventeen leading Protestant, Catholic and Jewish leaders, including Catholic Archbishop Francis Cardinal Spellman and Rabbi Harold Gordon, President of the Board of Rabbis, gathered in New York City to honor Blackstone on the seventy-fifth anniversary of his 1891 Memorial and the eighteenth anniversary of Israel's independence.

A multi-faith committee was formed in Chicago to establish a Blackstone Memorial Forest under the auspices of the Jewish National Fund in Israel. The completion of the forest was postponed due to the Six Day War, and never completed. In addition to commemoration ceremonies and historical exhibits in L.A. and Israel, the Blackstone Commemoration Project organizers desire to complete the fund-raising and planning for a Blackstone Forest in the Jezreel Valley/Nazareth area. Their goal is to have the forest dedicated in the fall of 2017.

“This inspired layman... continued his self-appointed task of arousing public sentiment for the (Jewish) victims of Russian oppression. ‘Will the Christian nations of this nineteenth century stand by this wreck and launch no life boat,’ he wrote... Blackstone also advocated Jewish return to Palestine... The simple eloquence and great sincerity of his passionate plea moved powerful backers. These prophetic words anteceded those of Herzl by at least five years... How shall the Jews of America and of Israel honor the memory of such a man? Perhaps by a growing forest to keep his memory green.”

***Anna Libman Lebeson***

“ZIONISM COMES TO CHICAGO,” IN ISADORE S. MEYER, ED.,  
*Early History of Zionism in American*, NEW YORK: AMERICAN JEWISH  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY, 1958.

***William E. Blackstone***  
***2016 Commemoration Project***

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**MULTI-FAITH COMMEMORATION  
CEREMONY AT BLACKSTONE GRAVE SITE**

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SEPTEMBER 28TH, 2016

1:00 PM – 2:30 PM

FOREST LAWN MEMORIAL PARK, GLENDALE, CALIFORNIA

Reception and statements of tribute at the Upper Esplanade Courtyard  
by representatives from Biola University, Jewish and Christian community  
leaders, dignitaries and friends and family of William Blackstone:

***MK Dr. Michael Oren***

DEPUTY MINISTER FOR DIPLOMACY,  
FORMER ISRAELI AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED STATES

***Consul General Sam Grundwerg***

CONSULATE OF ISRAEL – LOS ANGELES

***Reverend Jim Tolle***

SENIOR PASTOR, EL CAMINO CHURCH

***Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein***

SIMON WIESENTHAL CENTER

***Professor Paul W. Rood***

BIOLA UNIVERSITY

*Guests may re-assemble at the Blackstone gravesite at 2:00 pm, for a brief  
multi-faith memorial service of prayers, scripture readings, and reflection.*

# *William E. Blackstone*

## *Biographical Highlights*

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- 1841** Born in Adams, New York (October 6th).
- 1864** Licensed as a Christian Minister with the U.S. Christian Commission of the Union Army in the Civil War (October 6th).
- 1866** Marries Sarah Louis Smith.
- 1868** Moves to Oak Park, Illinois and takes up a successful career in insurance and real estate.
- 1878** Covenants to spend the rest of his life as a Bible teacher and evangelist. Publishes his best-selling book on Bible prophecy, *Jesus is Coming*, over three million copies sold in 47 languages.
- 1888** During eight month journey to Europe and Middle East, witnesses effects of Russia's Jewish expulsion order. Visits agricultural settlements established by *Chovevei Zion* in Palestine.
- 1889** Meets with Jewish and Christian leaders in Chicago to discuss the grave humanitarian crisis of the Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe and Russia.
- 1890** Organizes multi-faith conference in Chicago on Past, *Present and Future of Israel*, with Rabbis, ministers and university scholars participating (November 24-25).
- 1891** Presents to President Benjamin Harrison a memorial petition, signed by over 400 prominent government, civic and religious leaders, (the Blackstone Memorial) calling for an international conference to address the humanitarian crisis of the Russian Jewish refugees and their need for a national homeland in Palestine (May 5).
- 1901** Blackstone and family relocate to Los Angeles, where he lectures at churches, conferences and Bible training schools.
- 1903** Pogrom against Jews of Kishinev prompts Blackstone to update the Blackstone Memorial and obtain resolution of the Methodist General Assembly for presentation to President Theodore Roosevelt.

- 1908** Lyman Stewart and other Protestant evangelicals start the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. Blackstone is named Dean.
- 1909** Blackstone leaves for China. For five years he is busy financing and organizing Bible translation, missionary training, and Bible conference work.
- 1914** Following outbreak of World War I, Blackstone writes Secretary of State Bryan and the American Ambassador to Ottoman Turkey requesting assistance to assure safety of Jews.
- 1916** Nathan Straus writes to Blackstone requesting his help to mobilize Christians support for a Jewish homeland.
- 1916** At the request of Louis Brandeis, Blackstone circulates an update to his 1891 Memorial for presentation to President Wilson. Blackstone obtains the signatures of eighty-two congressmen, governors, mayors, university presidents and civic leaders, and endorsement of Presbyterian General Assembly, Baptist and Methodist ministerial organizations, and others.
- 1916** Blackstone addresses the Zionist General Conference in Philadelphia. Louis Brandeis introduces Blackstone as “Zionism’s greatest ally outside of its own ranks.”
- 1917** President Wilson authorizes Brandeis to convey U.S. support to the British Cabinet favoring their proposal for a Jewish national homeland.
- 1918** Blackstone speaks at Pan-Zionist Congress in Philadelphia and Zionist Inter-Faith Celebration in Los Angeles. From 1914-1930 Blackstone serves as Trustee of Biola.
- 1935** Blackstone dies on November 7, 1935.

# *Comments of Jewish Leaders and Historians Concerning William E. Blackstone*

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## CONTEMPORARIES OF W.E.B.

“Mr. Brandeis is perfectly infatuated with the work that you have done along the lines of Zionism. It would have done your heart good to have heard him assert what a valuable contribution to the cause your document is. In fact, he agrees with me that you are the father of Zionism, as your work antedates Herzl.”

*Nathan Straus (to WEB, May 8, 1916)*, LEADING AMERICAN MERCHANT,  
PHILANTHROPIST AND ZIONIST

“Blackstone is Zionism’s greatest ally outside of its own ranks.”

*Justice Louis Brandeis, Chicago Jewish Sentinel, JULY 14, 1916.*

“When recently the British pronouncement [Balfour Declaration] was made touching on the restoration of Palestine as a national homeland for the Jewish people, I thought of you, of your own faith and of your own efforts of twenty years ago and more. We always think of you as one of our warm friends.”

*Rabbi Stephen S. Wise (to WEB, March 4, 1918)*, PRESIDENT OF  
ZIONIST ORGANIZATION OF AMERICA AND KEREN HAYESOD

## SCHOLARS OF W.E.B.

“...the fact remains that no 19th century document dealing with the Jewish question and Palestine, including Herzl’s Jewish State, evoked as much editorial response in this country as Blackstone’s Memorial.”

*Marnin Feinstein, American Zionism, 1884-1904,*  
NEW YORK: HERZL PRESS, 1965, 56.

“Blackstone exemplified, in life and in his works, Fundamental Christianity at its very best. He was chiefly responsible, in 1890, for the convening of the first American “good will” conference in Chicago. The daughter of Rabbi Bernard Felsenthal wrote about Mr. Blackstone and this conference: “Mr. Blackstone came sometimes to visit my father – not, I am sure, expecting to convert

him, but to discuss questions of creed. My father met him in a friendly spirit, recognizing his sincerity and respecting the frank and courteous manner of his approach.”

**Rabbi David Max Eichhorn**, *Evangelizing the American Jew*,  
NEW YORK: J. DAVID, 1978, 167.

“BLACKSTONE, WILLIAM E. (1841-1935), Chicago businessman who became an evangelist, missionary, and ardent supporter of the return of the Jews to Palestine. His “Zionistic” views sprang from his millennialist theology as expressed in his first book *Jesus is Coming* (1878), which was translated into many languages, including Hebrew. He considered the Jewish restoration to Zion as the fulfillment of biblical prophecies signifying the approach of the second advent of Jesus. After a visit to Palestine in 1888/89, Blackstone organized meetings of Jews and Christians to promote his Zionist ideas. In 1891 he initiated a memorandum to President Harrison urging the restoration of Palestine to the Jews as a primary solution to the problem of Jewish persecution in Czarist Russia. The petition was signed by 413 outstanding Christian and Jewish personalities in the United States. In 1916 a similar memorandum was sent to President Wilson that may have influenced his positive attitude to the Balfour Declaration.”

**Yona Malachy**, *ENCYCLOPEDIA JUDAICA*, 2ND.ED., VOL. 3.

‘We believe this is an appropriate time for all nations, and especially the Christian nations of Europe, to show kindness to Israel,’ stated the ‘memorial’ that Blackstone submitted to President Benjamin Harrison and Secretary of State James G. Blaine on March 5, 1891 ... more than four hundred noteworthy individuals (affixed their signature), including America’s financial, political, and cultural elite: John D. Rockefeller, Charles Scribner, J. Pierpont Morgan, Supreme Court Chief Justice Fuller, William McKinley. Several dozen Jews also signed the petition, marking the first time that personages of the two faiths cooperated on staking the Jewish claim to Palestine.”

**Michael B. Oren**, (MK AND FORMER ISRAELI AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED STATES) *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present*, NEW YORK: NORTON, 2007, 278-9.

“Rev. Blackstone was honored by the Jews for his steadfast support for Zionism. Yet, he remained an enigma to many Jews – a Christian who walked his personal path with God, saving Jewish life and doing the right thing. Two dates critically defined Rev. Blackstone’s mission to help the Jewish people. The first was 1891. Rev. Blackstone courageously faced the evil of the Russian pogroms against the Jews. He wrote his famed Memorial to President Harrison. Harrison received the Memorial and the State Department promptly

“lost it.” Twenty five years later, 1916, World War I raged. It was not going well for the British. The British needed Jewish foreign volunteers for their war effort. They were considering a homeland in Palestine for the Jews. But they were afraid to act alone. Louis Brandeis, President Wilson’s close personal advisor and head of the American Zionist movement, knew of the British dilemma. He asked Rev. Blackstone to create a second Blackstone Memorial for the Jews. Brandeis needed to reassure President Wilson of American Christian backing before the President supported the British and eventually the Balfour Declaration creating a Jewish homeland. Brandeis knew, being a Jew, he could not do it. He needed a Christian. Blackstone readily agreed, creating a second Blackstone Memorial assuring Wilson. Blackstone did what no Jew could do.”

***Jerry Klinger***, PRESIDENT, JEWISH AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION (FOR THIS CEREMONY, 2016).

“Few people in the history of Christian Jewish relations deserve tributes and thanks as does William E. Blackstone. His legacy of devotion to the Jewish people, and defense of their lives and well-being, has been cherished in a number of Christian circles, but his deeds and contribution have been almost forgotten, fading away into oblivion. ... It is therefore a particularly appropriate occasion, indeed a mile stone that a group of Christians and Jews are gathering to commemorate this remarkable visionary and activist, near his grave in Los Angeles, a city that served as his last home, where he spent the last years of his extensive activity, and where he died and was buried. ... His activity, in favor of bringing the Jews back to Palestine and allowing them to build a commonwealth there, predated the rise of political Zionism. Blackstone was also the first Christian activist to reach out to and establish alliances with Jewish leaders in order to systematically co-ordinate their work towards the common Zionist goal. ... A modest, physically frail person, who nonetheless possessed a great amount of inner strength and determination, Blackstone stood at the center of the extensive efforts, coordinating meetings, persuading church leaders, and handing in petitions. The unassuming Christian Zionist activist worked mostly on his own, refraining from establishing an organization or employing secretaries, and claiming very little for himself. ... His work in favor of the Jews, whom he viewed as a people destined to have a special role in history, was not his only cause. Among other campaigns, Blackstone went out of his way to militate against what he considered to be injustices empires launched against colonized people. ... assisting in the founding of the International Court of Justice in the Hague. ... Reading Blackstone’s writings and correspondence, both in relation to Zionism and other causes, one cannot but admire his highly modest yet deeply humanitarian soul and charismatic personality.

***Dr. Yaakov Ariel***

PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA.  
Author of *An Unusual Relationship: Evangelical Christians and Jews*,  
NYU PRESS, 2013.

# *Comments of Christian Leaders and Historians*

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“Blackstone stands as a highlight in the evangelical tradition as one who maintains his conservative theology with tact, enjoyed genuine relationships outside of evangelicalism, and displayed his beliefs in works, not words alone.”

***Dr. Jonathan Moorhead***

“WILLIAM E. BLACKSTONE: THE FATHER OF ZIONISM?”  
*Journal of the Evangelical Theology Society*, 2010, 53,4.

“None of these [today’s critics] ... really understands or seriously addresses the original nineteenth-century American Christian Zionism that sought to restore a long-displaced and tormented people to their ancient homeland as an act of restorative justice and for their ongoing protection from persecution. It looked to a new Zion that would model political and economic justice to the world as well as serve as an ongoing witness to God’s faithful fulfillment of his promises. Blackstone and his earnest adherents, mostly mainline Protestants working with Jewish colleagues in an early manifestation of interfaith collaboration, offered a vision of spiritual and moral beauty that today’s critics, whether harsh or therapeutic, cannot match.”

***Mark Tooley***

(PRESIDENT, INSTITUTE ON RELIGION AND DEMOCRACY) IN THE NEW  
CHRISTIAN ZIONISM: FRESH PERSPECTIVES ON ISRAEL & THE LAND,  
(DOWNERS GROVE, IL: IVP ACADEMIC, 2016, 218.)

“The fact that the enemies of Israel are able to keep alive their groundless slanders is owing to the fading of the religious faith that informed Blackstone’s vision – faith in the moral authority of the Word of God and faith in its authentic predictive value – its ability to contradict knowledge that wise men imagine that they have on other grounds. The victories of BDS in the churches and the victories of the bullies who have nearly shut out from the universities the voice of Zionism simply could not have occurred if Blackstone’s voice were being heard today in those places – the churches and the universities and the seats of elite opinion. So long as men and women of faith continue to present the case for Israel on biblical grounds it cannot be budged.”

***Dr. Paul Merkley***

EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, CARLETON UNIVERSITY, OTTAWA, CANADA  
REMARKS PREPARED FOR THIS CEREMONY (2016).

# ***William E. Blackstone 2016 Commemoration Project***

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The William E. Blackstone 2016 Commemoration Project is organized by a committee of historians, Christian and Jewish religious leaders and Zionist organizations, and representatives from the government of Israel to commemorate the 175th anniversary of his birth, and the 125th and 100th anniversaries of his two historic initiatives in public diplomacy on behalf of the Jewish people, the Blackstone Memorial Petitions of 1891 and 1916.

The Commemoration Project includes the following activities:

## ***Multi-Faith Commemoration Ceremony at Blackstone Gravesite***

SEPTEMBER 28, 2016

FOREST LAWN MEMORIAL PARK, GLENDALE

## ***Completion and Dedication of the Blackstone Forest in Israel***

TO BE COMPLETED BY FALL, 2017

NAZARETH REGION, ISRAEL

## ***Historical Museum Displays in the United States on Israel***

TO BE COMPLETED DURING 2016-17

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***We invite you to join this project by connecting with us on-line and receiving updates on our planning and fund-raising activities.***

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PAUL W. ROOD, BLACKSTONE MEMORIAL PROJECT COORDINATOR

*paul.rood@biola.edu*

# *Sponsors*

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**This Blackstone Commemoration Committee is composed of members representing the following co-sponsoring organizations:**



Consulate General of Israel  
in Los Angeles

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