



## Eretz Yisrael – The Land of Israel

By Steve Cohen

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## Meaning

For the past three thousand years, the name “Israel”, alluding to the patriarch Jacob; “persevere with God,” has meant both the Land of Israel and the entire Jewish nation.

## Origin of Name

According to the Bible, Jacob is renamed Israel after successfully wrestling with an angel of God.

## History

The earliest archaeological artifact to mention “Israel” is the Merneptah Stele of ancient Egypt (dated to the late 13th century BCE), which refers to a people of that name located in Canaan.

The modern country was named Medinat Yisrael, or the State of Israel, after other proposed names, including Eretz Israel (“the Land of Israel”), Zion, and Judea, were rejected. The government chose the term “Israeli” to denote a citizen of Israel.

Israel today is a parliamentary republic in the Middle East located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. It borders Lebanon in the north, Syria in the northeast, Jordan and the West Bank in the east, the Gaza Strip and Egypt on the southwest, and contains geographically diverse features within its relatively small area.

Today, Israel is the world’s only predominantly Jewish state, with a population estimated in 2010 to be 7,602,400 people, of whom 6,051,000 are Jews. Arab citizens of Israel form the country’s second-largest ethnic group, which includes Muslims, Christians, Druze, and Samaritans.

The modern State of Israel traces its historical and religious roots to the Biblical Land of Israel, also known as Zion, a concept central to Judaism since ancient times.

Political Zionism took shape in the late-19th century under Theodor Herzl, and the Balfour Declaration of 1917 formalized British policy preferring the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people. Following World War I, the League of Nations granted Great Britain the Mandate for Palestine, which included responsibility for securing “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people”.

In November 1947, the United Nations voted in favor of the partition of Palestine, proposing the creation of a Jewish state, an Arab state, and a UN-administered Jerusalem. Partition was accepted by Zionist leaders but rejected by Arab leaders, leading to civil war. Israel declared independence on 14 May 1948 and neighboring Arab states attacked the next day. Since then, Israel has fought a series of wars with neighboring Arab states, and in consequence occupied territories, including the West Bank, Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights, beyond those delineated in the 1949 Armistice Agreements.



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Israel has signed peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, but efforts by elements within both parties to diplomatically solve the problem have so far only met with limited success and some of Israel's international borders remain in dispute.

## Modern Israel

Israel is a developed country and a representative democracy with a parliamentary system and universal suffrage. The Prime Minister serves as head of government and the Knesset serves as Israel's legislative body.

The economy, based on the nominal gross domestic product, was the 41st-largest in the world in 2008. Israel ranks highest among Middle Eastern countries on the UN Human Development Index, and it has one of the highest life expectancies in the world. Jerusalem is the country's capital, although it is not recognized internationally as such. Israel's main financial center is Tel Aviv, and its main industrial center is Haifa.

## God's Promise

*The Lord told Moses to give this order to the people of Isra'el: "When you enter the land of Kena'an, it will become your land to pass on as an inheritance, the land of Kena'an as defined by these borders. "Your southern portion will extend from the Tzin Desert close to the border of Edom. The eastern terminus of your southern border is at the end of the Dead Sea. From there your border turns, goes south of the 'Akrabbim Ascent and passes on to Tzin. From there it goes south of Kadesh-Barnea, on to Hatzar-Adar, and on to 'Atzmon. Then the border turns and goes from 'Atzmon to the Vadi of Egypt and along it to the Sea. 6"Your western border will be the Great Sea. "Your northern border will be as follows: from the Great Sea mark a line to Mount Hor, and from Mount Hor mark a line to the entrance of Hamat. The border goes out to Tz'dad. Then the border goes to Zifron and finally to Hatzar-'Einan; this is your northern border. "For the eastern border mark your line from Hatzar-'Enan to Sh'fam. Then the border goes down from Sh'fam to Rivlah, on the east side of 'Ayin, then down until it hits the slope east of Lake Kinneret. From there it goes down the Yarden River till it flows into the Dead Sea. These will be the borders of your land." Moshe gave this order to the people of Isra'el: "This is the land in which you will receive inheritances by lot, which ADONAI has ordered to give to the nine tribes and the half-tribe. The tribe of the descendants of Re'uven have already received their land for inheritance according to their clans, and so have the descendants of Gad and the half-tribe of M'nasheh. These two-and-a-half tribes have received their inheritance on this side of the Yarden, across from Jericho and eastward, toward the sunrise." -- Numbers 34: 1-15*

*So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD handed all their enemies over to them. -- Joshua 21:43-44*



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## For More Information

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