



Israel and the Two-State Solution

by Dr. Jim
Denison

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James C. Denison, Ph.D.

CEO, Denison Forum on Truth and Culture

January 5, 2017

On December 23, 2016, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 2334, which calls on Israel to "immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem." The US has the power to veto such resolutions, but it chose to abstain, allowing the resolution to become international law.

Since that time, Israel and the "two-state solution" have continued to make headlines. Why?

The State of Israel ranks 154th among the world's nations in land size. Thirty-two Israels would fit in the state of Texas. The country ranks 97th in population, comprising 0.2 percent of humanity. And yet this tiny nation dominates the news regularly.

I have led more than twenty spiritual pilgrimages to this nation and am impressed each time by its tiny size and global significance. Who and what is Israel? What is the "two-state" solution? Why does Israel and the Middle East matter to America, to the world, and to our future?

A history of the Holy Land

The area of Israel is a very narrow land bridge between the gigantic continents of Africa and Asia. People from the north and the south have moved back and forth across it continuously. As a result, human history in the land extends over half a million years.

Today the global Jewish population numbers 14.2 million: 5.7 million live in the United States, 6.1 million live in Israel, and the remainder are scattered across the world. Most living outside Israel are "Ashkenazim," descendants of Jewish communities in central and Eastern Europe. Others are "Sephardim," descendants of Jews from Spain, Portugal, other Mediterranean countries, and the Middle East.

Let's begin with a brief history of this ancient people and their land. While this subject deserves the thousands of volumes that have been written on it, we will confine ourselves to a practical overview, identifying what we need to know to understand the significance of Israel today.

The Stone Age (1,400,000—4,500 BC)

The oldest human skeleton found in Palestine is dated to 1.4 million years ago. People lived by the shores of rivers and lakes in the region and used flint tools to hunt the large game which roamed the area. Evidence of fire first appeared around 200,000 BC. The major revolution of the era occurred between 10,000 and 8,000 BC, when the economy

shifted from food-gathering to food-producing. As people learned to domesticate animals and produce grain, they moved from camps to villages and from stone to pottery.

The Copper and Bronze Ages (4,500—1,200 BC)

Trade grew and villages prospered. The potter's wheel was introduced, and copper was combined with tin to produce a much harder metal, bronze. Empires in Egypt and Mesopotamia grew strong, and eventually Egyptian pharaohs assumed control of the coastal plain of Palestine.

One of Noah's sons was named Shem (Genesis 11:10); the "Semitic" people take their name from his. His great-grandson Eber (v. 14) would lend his name to the "Hebrews." Six generations later we meet "Abram" (v. 26).

Abram and his father's family originated in Ur of the Chaldees, a city located in the southeastern region of modern-day Iraq (v. 31). After his father's death, Abram heard the Lord say, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you" (Gen. 12:1, all references from the NIV). Then God made a promise that has forged the character and courage of Abram's descendants ever since:

I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you (Gen. 12:2–3).

Abram made his way to "Canaan" (v. 5), where he heard God say, "To your offspring I will give this land" (v. 7). This would become the "Holy Land" claimed by Israel as her inheritance from God.

In time, God would promise Abram an offspring as numerous as the stars (Gen. 15:5). However, Abram and his wife Sarai were childless, so she gave him Hagar, her maid, to be a surrogate mother. Hagar and Abram produced Ishmael (Gen. 16), from whom the Arab people trace their descent.

God soon changed Abram's name to "Abraham," meaning "father of many nations" (Gen. 17:5). Abraham and his wife were enabled by God to conceive and produced their son Isaac (Gen. 21:1–7), from whom the Jewish people trace their ancestry. Thus, Abraham serves as the "father" of both the Jewish and Arab races.

When Isaac was a young boy, God called Abraham to offer him as a sacrifice on Mt. Moriah (Gen. 22:1–10). When Abraham complied, God stopped his knife and provided a sacrifice in place of the boy (vs. 11–13), thus ending the ritual of child sacrifice common

in that day. This mountain would become the location of the Jewish temple. Roman armies destroyed the temple in AD 70; the Muslim Dome of the Rock stands over the site now.

Isaac's son "Jacob" ("thief" or "supplanter") met God in a dramatic encounter and was renamed "Israel" ("he who wrestles with God"; Gen. 32:28). His twelve sons produced descendants who would become the "twelve tribes of Israel." Jacob's eleventh son, Joseph, was sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt. There he rose to second-in-command and brought his family to live.

Their nation was eventually enslaved by the Egyptians. Four centuries later, Moses led the Jewish people through the Red Sea and wilderness to the edge of the land promised to Abraham's descendants. Joshua led the people through the flooded Jordan River and into the land of Canaan, where they conquered the inhabitants and established their nation.

The Iron Age (1,200—586 BC)

The Philistines and the Canaanites developed the use of iron and chariots, making life miserable for the Jewish newcomers from Egypt. And so the Israelites abandoned their loose tribal system for a centralized monarchy. Their first king, Saul, helped them defeat the Philistine armies and establish the security of the nation. Then David (1004–965 BC) made the nation strong, conquering Jebus and making it into the capital city of Jerusalem, and defeating the enemies of the people on every side. "Zion" would come to signify the Jewish nation as "Washington" signifies America.

His son Solomon (965–928 BC) built the first Jewish temple atop the adjacent mountain of Moriah, where Abraham had offered Isaac a thousand years earlier (marking the "First Temple" period). He acquired riches on a scale unprecedented in the ancient world and ruled the united kingdom with wisdom. However, over time his tight bureaucratic control and heavy taxes led to rebellion. In 922 BC, the ten northern tribes revolted against his son Rehoboam and established the nation of "Israel"; the two southern tribes (Judah and Benjamin) remained loyal to the house of Solomon and became the nation of "Judah."

In time, the sins of these two nations led to their downfall and judgment at the hand of the God who created them. The Assyrian Empire (roughly Syria and northern Iraq) conquered the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC and assimilated its people; we refer to them as the "ten lost tribes of Israel." The Babylonian Empire (roughly Iraq) conquered the Southern Kingdom in 586 BC and destroyed Solomon's temple. For seventy years, the Jewish people were enslaved in Babylon, until the Persians defeated the Babylonians under Cyrus the Great and liberated them.

The Persian Period (538—332 BC)

In 538, Cyrus sent the Jewish people home. They rebuilt Jerusalem under the leadership of Nehemiah, and their temple as well. The Old Testament closes with the Persians as the dominant world power. Relative peace ensued until the Greeks came.

The Greek Period and Independence (332–63 BC)

In 331 BC, Alexander the Great destroyed the Persian Empire on the way to conquering the known world. (It is said that when he was done he wept because he had no more nations to defeat.) When Alexander died in 323 BC, his generals carved up his Greek Empire. A general named Seleucus received Syria and Babylon; Ptolemy received Egypt; and two others fought over Palestine.

Around 200 BC, the Seleucids won the land back from the Ptolemies, but ruled the Jewish people with great insensitivity to their faith. In 167 BC, three Maccabean brothers led a revolt. In time the Jewish people gained their independence and land, almost exactly the same borders they had enjoyed during the reigns of David and Solomon.

However, their freedom was short-lived. In 63 BC, the divided Jewish leaders could not rule the country, and the Romans took over.

The Roman Era (63 BC to AD 640)

Rome ruled from Jerusalem through kings and procurators they appointed until Titus destroyed the city in AD 70. The Jewish people had revolted against the Romans in AD 66, seizing the fortress palace of Masada to the south of Jerusalem; Titus destroyed Jerusalem, and eventually recaptured Masada in AD 73.

After a second revolt (AD 132–5), the Jewish people were excluded from Jerusalem and even Judea. The Romans renamed the country "Palestine" (for the Philistines who lived in the area) and changed the name of Jerusalem to Aelia Capitolina. For the next twenty centuries, the Jewish people would be without a homeland.

The Roman Empire moved its capital to the Greek city of Byzantium around AD 300, ushering in the Byzantine Period (AD 324–640). Rome continued to rule Palestine; Constantine and his followers built churches and holy places by the hundreds in what was now called the Holy Land; and Jerusalem grew until it regained its former size and significance.

However, the Muslim revolution would change everything in the Holy Land.

How Palestine became Muslim (640–1917)

The Romans continued to rule Palestine from Byzantium, their capital city (thus the "Byzantine Period) from AD 324 to 640. However, continued battles with Persia and other political enemies severely weakened the Empire's military power. When cavalry swept out of the Arabian desert, motivated by the new faith preached by Muhammad (AD

570–632), the Empire could offer no resistance. On August 20, 636, at the battle of Yarmuk, Palestine fell into Muslim hands. Two years later, the second Muslim caliph Omar (AD 634–44) accepted the surrender of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem soon became a sacred site for the Muslims and a center of pilgrimage for them. They considered Judaism and Christianity to be their predecessors and thus recognized Abraham, Moses, and Jesus as prophets. In addition, the Qur'an taught them that Abraham offered Ishmael (not Isaac) at the top of Mt. Moriah where the Jewish Temple had been located.

They believe that Muhammad was taken from Mt. Moriah to heaven and returned to Mecca the same night, making the rock atop this mountain their third-holiest site (after Mecca, the birthplace of the Prophet, and Medina, where he died). They completed the Dome of the Rock in AD 691 as a shrine over this sacred location. From 636 to the present, Muslims have been a major presence in Israel and Palestine.

Relations with the Christian world were peaceful until 1071, when the Seljuk Turks seized Jerusalem and refused to allow Christians to journey there. The resulting frustrations led to the Crusader Period (AD 1099–1291), one of the most tragic episodes in Christian history.

The Crusaders recaptured the Holy City on July 15, 1099. Their first act was to massacre all its Muslim inhabitants. They continued their war against the Muslims until they were defeated by the Mamluks from Egypt. Buildings dating to the Crusaders are common in Jerusalem today.

From 1250 to 1517 the Mamluks from Egypt controlled Palestine, later to cede power to the Ottoman Turks (from Turkey, hence the name). Suliman the Magnificent (1520–66) rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem; his work is still evident throughout the city today. But the Turks sided with Germany in the First World War, and the victors dismembered their empire.

How Palestine became Israel (1917 to today)

As we have seen, "Palestine" (the Latin version of "Philistine") was the name given by Emperor Hadrian to the land of Israel after the AD 132–35 revolt. It remained the name of the land until the modern State of Israel was created in 1948. How did that State come to be?

There has always been a significant Jewish presence in the Holy Land. It is simply untrue that the Jews all left after the temple was destroyed in AD 70 and their nation was dissolved by Hadrian in AD 135. While many (known as "Diaspora" Jews) left the region, many others stayed in the land.

In the late nineteenth century, Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) and other Jewish leaders began a movement called "Zionism." Named for Mt. Zion, the location of David's

Jerusalem, it argued that the Jewish people needed and deserved a homeland of their own. Their work encouraged many Diaspora Israelis to emigrate to the Holy Land over the coming decades.

This movement was especially influential in Great Britain, so that it was often called "British Zionism." After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in 1917, Britain was given control of Palestine, leading to the "British Mandate" period.

British leaders eventually proposed a "two-state" solution to the United Nations (called the UN Partition Plan), creating a Palestinian state in part of the land while recognizing a sovereign State of Israel in the rest. Their proposal was accepted by Jewish leaders, but it was rejected by Arab leaders. The British then withdrew and Jewish authorities, led by David ben Gurion, announced the formation of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948.

The Arab nations surrounding Israel immediately attacked the new nation. By the end of the War for Independence on July 18, the Jewish people had created for themselves a homeland again (their first since AD 70). The nation of Jordan possessed the West Bank area (so named because it is located on the western shore of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea), as well as the eastern part of Jerusalem (the so-called "Old City," where Jewish and Muslim holy sites are located). Israel controlled the western part of Jerusalem and the rest of the country.

War erupted again in June of 1967 (the "Six-Day War"), during which Israel claimed the West Bank, all of Jerusalem, the Golan Heights (on the border with Syria), the Gaza Strip, and the Sinai Peninsula. Further conflict in 1973 (the "Yom Kippur War") strengthened Israel's hold on these areas.

In 1978, Israel signed the Camp David accords, creating a peace treaty with Egypt in exchange for returning the Sinai to Egyptian control. In 1993, the Oslo accords produced a treaty with the Palestinian Authority whereby Palestinian leaders recognized Israel's right to exist and Israel granted limited autonomy over Gaza and the West Bank to Palestinian control. The Golan Heights remain in Israeli control. Syria has made their return a pre-condition for peace with Israel.

The Arab residents of Palestine who were displaced by the creation of Israel in 1948 still claim the land as their own. As we will see, some believe that Israel should be driven from the region and the entire land reclaimed for a modern nation of "Palestine." Others seek a "two-state solution" whereby Israel would keep some of the land and Palestine the rest.

Competing metanarratives

To understand this "two-state solution" and its challenges, we must first understand the motives of the nations involved in this issue.

George Friedman, a geopolitical analyst, has made popular the concept of the "metanarrative."¹ In essence, this is a guiding worldview, a set of priorities and agendas that form and explain behavior. Individuals, organizations, and countries all have metanarratives. When we identify a nation's metanarrative, we are better able to understand its past actions and predict its future behavior.

Israel's metanarrative

The metanarrative of the State of Israel has been clear from its formation on May 14, 1948: to provide a secure homeland for the Jewish people. This metanarrative is tied directly to the security and future of the country.

From its inception, the State of Israel has faced adversaries who seek its destruction. Its war of independence was fought against a coalition of forces from Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. In the years since, Israel has fought against these countries as well as forces from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Algeria, and the Palestine Liberation Organization. In recent years, it has faced attacks from Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip as well as terrorist attacks originating in the West Bank. Israel puts its national security above all other priorities.

This metanarrative was illustrated and reinforced in the latest Israeli elections.

The issue of security

Before the March 17, 2015 national elections, Israeli citizens were frustrated with a housing shortage and soaring cost of living. Opponents of the current prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, focused almost exclusively on these internal issues. Polls indicated that the leading opposition party would at least tie him in the vote if not defeat his party.

However, Netanyahu's Likud Party won more votes than any other party. It is has become a nearly-universal consensus after the election that Israelis voted for security over economic stability. They remembered the Gaza conflict, then barely six months old. They remembered rockets that can now reach Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. They remembered sirens sending them to bomb shelters, living for weeks in a war zone with no end in sight. And they did not want to go back.

Since the latest Gaza conflict, the Islamic State has enlarged its foothold in Syria, on Israel's northern border. A spate of "lone wolf" attacks and stabbings has ensued. Security personnel arrested six Palestinian men suspected of belonging to a Hamas cell in the West Bank. The cell was reportedly plotting to carry out bombings in Israel. And international negotiations with Iran have left many Israelis terrified that a nation that has pledged to annihilate them could possess nuclear weapons.

If we follow Maslow's hierarchy of needs, we need air, food, drink, and warmth first. Next comes safety and security. Only then do we move upward to love and belonging,

self-esteem, and realizing personal growth and potential. Security is valued over economic progress.

Increasing polarization

A class conflict is brewing in Israel. The modern state was founded by Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe. They tend to be more liberal and conciliatory.

By contrast, the working class Jews of Mizrahi, or Middle Eastern descent, tend to be more hawkish and conservative. As their numbers increase, so does the political power of the conservative parties they favor. These parties have historically resisted Palestinian claims to land and autonomy.

Like America, Israel is becoming increasingly polarized. Its divergent views are reflected in its approach to the Palestinian issues. According to a recent survey, 88 percent of those on the left supported a hypothetical two-state solution. Such an agreement was supported by just 10 percent on the right; it was backed by 59 percent in the political center.²

The settler movement

After the 1967 Six-Day War, an ultra-religious "Land of Israel Movement" was founded by Rabbi Moshe Levinger. Its goal was to promote Israeli settlement in the ancient biblical land of Judea and Samaria on the West Bank.

By 1975, the movement adopted the name *Gush Emunim* (the "Bloc of the Faithful"). It follows the belief that the redemption of the land of Israel was divinely ordained. As its leader stated, "The territory of the Land of Israel is assigned a sanctity which obligates its retention . . . as well as its settlement, even in defiance of government authority."³

Note that this movement began outside of governmental support and has often defied such control. However, it is supported by far-right political parties that play a very significant role in present-day Israeli politics.

Parliamentary politics

Israel is a parliamentary democracy governed by a prime minister and a 120-seat legislature known as the Knesset. In this system, citizens vote for parties rather than persons. These votes are then translated into seats in the Knesset on a percentage basis. If no party receives a majority of the votes cast, the leader of the party receiving the most votes is then given a period of time to build a majority coalition by creating alliances with other parties.

Twenty-five different parties competed in the March 2015 election. Netanyahu's Likud party won thirty seats in the Knesset. Zionist Union (the main the opposition party) won twenty-four seats. Netanyahu then created a sixty-one-seat coalition by including four other parties. Among them is the Jewish Home party, which strongly supports the settler

movement and rejects an independent Palestinian state. Its leader, Naftali Bennett, currently serves as Education Minister in Netanyahu's cabinet. He has claimed that "the era of the two-state solution is over."⁴

If Netanyahu were to limit the settler movement, it is likely that the Jewish Home party would withdraw from his coalition and his government would fall. As a result, the prime minister's position and political future are tied to this movement and its growth. Unsurprisingly, Mr. Netanyahu has stated that his government is "more committed to settlements than any in Israel's history."⁵

To summarize: the Israeli approach to the two-state solution is complex. Some want an independent Israel and Palestine living side-by-side. Some want a single Israeli nation with no independent Palestine. Some want to settle the West Bank for Israel, viewing the region as the biblical Samaria and Judea promised to the Jews by God. And political advocates of the settler movement have an outsized influence on the present political situation, given their role in the current governing coalition.

The Palestinian metanarrative

When I was in the Holy Land in 1995, I became good friends with our Palestinian Christian tour guide. He and his family lost their home in Jerusalem when the Israelis took the city in 1948. He still had shrapnel in his neck from that conflict.

In his view, the Palestinians owned this land for twenty centuries. He felt that the Jewish people took what rightfully belongs to his people. He asked me, "How would you feel if the American Indians suddenly recaptured all the lands you took from them?"

Many Palestinians believe that the entire land should belong to them with no concessions to the Jews. They note that they were not responsible for the Holocaust and ask why they should be punished for it.

Lahcen Haddad, a political scientist at Rabat University in Morocco, describes the meta-narrative that drives a wedge between the West and Islam and leads radical Muslims into terrorism:

Arabs and Muslims are victims of an imperialist-Zionist conspiracy aided by reactionary regimes in the Arab world. It has as its goal keeping the Arabs and Muslims backward in order to exploit their oil riches and prevent them from becoming as strong as they used to be in the Middle Ages—because that is dangerous for Israel and Western interests.⁶

In this view of history, Israel has co-opted the West in a conspiracy to subjugate Islam and rule the Middle East. Multiplied millions of Muslims agree.

Fatah and Hamas

"Fatah" is an acronym for "Palestinian National Liberation Movement." The political party was founded in 1959 by Yasser Arafat, who led the group until his death in 2004. It is currently led by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

" Hamas" ("fervor") is an acronym (spelled backwards) for "Islamic Resistance Movement." It was established by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin in the late 1960s as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. In 1973 he established the "Islamic Center" to coordinate the Brotherhood's activities in Gaza and founded Hamas as their political arm in 1987. Its official charter, adopted in 1988, calls for the destruction of Israel and raising "the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine."

Their leader declared: "Palestine is ours from the river to the sea and from the south to the north. There will be no concession on an inch of the land. We will never recognize the legitimacy of the Israeli occupation and therefore there is no legitimacy for Israel, no matter how long it will take."⁷

For much of its history, the military wing of Hamas (*Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigade*) has sponsored terrorism against Israel. It has launched rocket attacks at Israeli towns and sponsored suicide bombers before Israel built a security fence around its borders. The Brigade claims more than a thousand members and is believed to have killed more than 500 people.

Hamas has also engaged in political and social work, funding clinics, schools, mosques, sports leagues, and orphanages. More than 90 percent of its work is educational, social, and cultural. In 2006 it won parliamentary elections in Gaza, defeating Fatah in the region. Fatah still governs the West Bank, however, so the Palestinian people have had no unified government or advocate since that time.

The two parties have pledged cooperation and mutual elections in the future. If Fatah (which recognizes Israel's right to exist) prevails, the peace process could move forward. If Hamas (which is pledged to Israel's destruction) gains control, it is difficult to see a way toward a two-state solution.

To summarize: Fatah (the party ruling the West Bank) has a metanarrative that presses for a two-state solution and an independent Palestine alongside an independent Israel. Hamas (the party ruling the Gaza Strip) has a metanarrative calling for the complete destruction of Israel and a one-state Palestinian nation.

Hezbollah

Israel is bordered by the Muslim Brotherhood to its south, Hamas to the southwest, and Fatah to the east. On its northern border lies Lebanon, now dominated by Hezbollah ("Party of God"). The group was founded in 1982 by Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah and has been sponsored by Iran and Syria across its history. Hassan Nasrallah is its senior political leader.

The organization is a major provider of agricultural services, schools, hospitals, and social services for the people of Lebanon. However, its militant wing has been defined by the United States as a terrorist organization.

The year after its founding, the group launched a truck bombing on the US Marine barracks in Lebanon, murdering more than 200 soldiers. In 1992, it bombed the Israeli embassy in Argentina, killing twenty-nine people; it bombed a Jewish community center in 1994, killing ninety-five people. Periodic border skirmishes and shelling escalated into full-scale war with Israel in the summer of 2006. A United Nations-brokered peace agreement ended the conflict, but tensions in the area remain high.

American and dispensational Christian metanarratives

One popular version of Christian eschatology (doctrine of the "end times") claims that Israel holds the key to world history. Dispensationalists believe that the creation of the modern state of Israel in 1948 was the fulfillment of biblical prophecy and will lead to the last generations of human history. Bestsellers such as Hal Lindsey's *The Late, Great Planet Earth* and *There's a New World Coming* popularized this belief.

In this view, the final battle of human history (Armageddon) will be fought in and over Israel. In the meantime, Jerry Falwell warned, God "will bless those who bless the Jews and curse whoever curses the Jews."⁸ This view motivates the support Israel enjoys from many American evangelicals such as well-known pastor John Hagee and encourages continued Jewish settlement of the "Holy Land."

These evangelicals are strong supporters of the Netanyahu government and the West Bank settlement project. Many are opposed to a Palestinian state in the land of Israel, lest the Jews forsake the land promised to them by God. It is no coincidence that Netanyahu's approval rating is higher in America than in Israel⁹ and that he received such a warm welcome from many Republican leaders when he last addressed Congress. He is also the most-admired leader in the world among American evangelicals.¹⁰

Many theologians disagree with the dispensational view of Israel and the end times. However, this approach continues to find support among conservative Christian groups and plays a significant geopolitical role in the Middle East.

In addition, Israel serves as a strategic political and military partner to America in the Middle East. As the region's only democracy, its values and governance are significantly aligned with ours. It provides the US a crucial military platform as we deal with geopolitical issues in this region. In this way, Israel helps advance the American metanarrative as we seek to maintain our superpower status and secure our global economic interests.

Not surprisingly, a recent Gallup poll showed that 62 percent of Americans side with Israel in the Arab-Israeli conflict; just 15 percent side with the Palestinians. That same

poll found that all major demographic and political subgroups in America support Israel over the Palestinians.¹¹

The "two-state solution"

When two parties both claim the same land, there are three logical ways to resolve their dispute: The first can displace the second, the second can displace the first, or the two can share the land. The third approach is the "two-state solution."

Problems with a "one-state solution"

As we have seen, Hamas has a one-state solution: the entire land that now comprises Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank would become a united Palestine. Israel as a nation would cease to exist.

Some right-wing Israeli parties have their own one-state solution: the land that now comprises Israel and the West Bank would become a united Israel. (They do not claim interest in the Gaza Strip.) There would be no independent nation of Palestine; the Palestinian people would live under Israeli rule.

Hamas's "one-state solution" is obviously untenable for the Jewish people; their leaders rightly insist that Hamas must recognize the existence of Israel before the party can be part of negotiations for the future. The Jewish "one-state solution" is what many claim is happening in reality today as Israel continues to settle more land that would be part of an independent Palestinian state.

Why is this approach untenable not only for Palestinians but also for Israel?

Demographics and democracy

Consider the demographics of the region. The racial/religious makeup of Israel excluding the West Bank and Gaza is 6.1 million Jews (75 percent), 1.7 million Arabs (20 percent), and 350,000 others (5 percent). The West Bank and East Jerusalem comprise 2.7 million Arabs, while the Gaza Strip is home to 1.6 million Arabs. Adding their population to Israel produces a total of 12.1 million people, only 50 percent of whom are Jewish.

Even without Gaza, the population of Israel (including the West Bank) would be 10.5 million, of which only 60 percent would be Jewish. Given the high birth rate among Arab families and low birth rate among Jewish families, it is likely that a "one-state" Israel would be a majority Arab nation in a just a few years.

In this case, Israel would face a decision: it could be a democracy or it could be Jewish, but it could not be both. Muslim democracies with a majority religion, such as Indonesia and Turkey, do not face this challenge since Islam comprises such a high majority of their population.

In essence, without a "two-state solution," Israel faces the loss of either its religious identity or its democratic character. The nation's moral standing as the only democracy in the Middle East would be significantly challenged.

The escalation of military conflict

Now consider Israel's place in the international community. The plight of the Palestinians continues to inflame Muslim anger toward Israel (and America, given our support for the Jewish state). If the Palestinian people were denied a homeland, animosity from Israel's enemies would only escalate. We could foresee military response from a variety of nations, including Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, and Egypt.

Now imagine the conflict such a decision would produce within Israel. Previous intifadas ("uprisings") have cost thousands of lives and significantly damaged the Israeli economy. If Israel were to declare that it no longer supports a Palestinian state, internal conflict could lead to the equivalent of civil war.

Palestinians and their supporters live within easy reach of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and other major Jewish population centers. Previous conflicts with Hamas, Hezbollah, and other Arab enemies would pale by comparison with a united battle against all who support a Palestinian state. ISIS and elements in Iran very much want Israel to act in such a way that they can claim the Jews are "occupying" Muslim lands. Then they can use this claim to incite global Islamic aggression against Israel (cf. Qur'an 2:190–92).

A "three-state solution"

John Bolton, former UN Ambassador under President George W. Bush, has suggested an alternative "three-state solution." In his approach, Egypt would agree to assume responsibility for the Gaza Strip while Jordan would take responsibility for areas of the West Bank not annexed by Israel.¹²

As a result, the Palestinian people could have access to much more secure economies than they are likely to experience in the proposed two-state solution. And the geographical division between Gaza and the West Bank would no longer present a problem to a unified Palestinian state.

However, Egypt has repeatedly refused to assume responsibility for the Gaza Strip. Hamas would reject this solution outright, as would many of the people living in Gaza. This strategy would likely provoke further conflict between Hamas and Israel (and perhaps Egypt as well).

Jordan had control of the West Bank from 1948 until 1967, but refused to grant autonomy to the Palestinians living there. There is no clear reason why they would assume responsibility for the area now. Palestinians who want their own country would understandably oppose this arrangement. We could envision further conflict with Israel

(and perhaps Jordan) as a result. And we should expect attempts by ISIS and other terror groups to gain a foothold in the West Bank as well.

The "peace process"

For these reasons, a "two-state solution" has been the foundation of negotiations between Israel and her neighbors across recent history.

Peace between the State of Israel and her neighbors has, however, been a series of starts and stops. The Camp David accords between Israel and Egypt in 1978 were the first step—Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in exchange for Egyptian recognition of Israel's right to exist and normalized relations between the two nations.

Israel and Lebanon came to peace terms on May 17, 1983. On October 26, 1994, Israel came to agreement with Jordan; the Jordan–Israel Peace Treaty defined the international border between Israel and Jordan and normalized relations between the two countries.

But what of the Palestinians?

As we have seen, the areas that would have created a Palestinian nation are called the "West Bank" and "Gaza Strip." The West Bank covers 2,177 square miles, an area slightly smaller than Delaware; its population exceeds 2.7 million people. Gaza is an area twenty-five miles long and four to 7.5 miles wide, with a population of 1.6 million people.

In 1948, the Jewish War for Independence secured the region that would have been the State of Israel if the United Nations Partition Plan had been accepted. The West Bank remained under the control of Jordan, the Gaza area under Egypt. The 1956 Israel-Egypt conflict led to Israel control of the Sinai Peninsula.

The 1967 Six-Day War gave Israel control of both areas as well as the Golan Heights, a strategic area of high elevation on the border between Israel and Syria. The 1973 Yom Kippur War ended with Israel's victory and continued control of these areas.

The Arab people who had lived in the land now known as Israel were displaced, many from their homes and family inheritances. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, waged a continuing battle with Israel for these lands.

The first step toward peace with the Palestinians occurred on September 9, 1993, when Arafat affirmed that the PLO recognized Israel's right to exist. Arafat also pledged that the PLO would renounce the use of terrorism and seek a peaceful resolution to their conflict with Israel. On September 13, 1993, the joint Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles (DOP) was signed.

In May 1994, the Palestinians were granted self-rule in the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area. In February 1997, this area of self-rule was expanded to include all the cities in the West Bank.

On September 28, 2000, Israeli political leader Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount with a strong security force. The next day, riots broke out in the area. Unrest soon spread across the country, sparking an intifada ("rebellion").

In June of 2002, Israel began building a wall around the West Bank. The barrier reached more than 400 miles in length. Israel built the separation barrier to protect its citizens from suicide bombings and other attacks; Palestinians claim that the wall stole their land and oppresses their people.

In April 2003, the "road map" for peace was released. Supported by the US, the European Union, Russia, and the UN, it called for an independent Palestinian state. The first step was for Palestinian authorities to dismantle terrorist capacities and infrastructures and restrain terrorist attacks against Israel. The second step was for Israel to dismantle settlements established after March 2001 and remove its army from Palestinian areas occupied after September 28, 2000. However, Palestinian authorities were unable or unwilling to prevent terrorist activity against Israel. They claimed that Israel's continued settlements made it impossible for them to prevent such opposition to the Jewish state.

In 2005 and 2006, Palestinian elections resulted in Hamas's control of Gaza and Fatah's control of the West Bank. Conflict between Hamas and Israel erupted in 2006, 2008–9, and again in 2014. Direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians were attempted again in 2010 and in 2013–14. Each time, the major impediments to peace could not be overcome.

The settlements and the UN vote

UNSC 2334 introduced a new element in the two-state solution.

This was not the first time America has supported (or chosen not to veto) resolutions critical of Israel. Such resolutions have commonly been adopted under previous administrations: seven under Lyndon Johnson, fifteen under Richard M. Nixon, two under Gerald Ford, fourteen under Jimmy Carter, twenty-one under Ronald Reagan, nine under George H. W. Bush, three under Bill Clinton, and six under George W. Bush.¹³ By contrast, the Obama administration had vetoed every such resolution over the last seven years. However, as we will see, UNSC 2334 introduces elements that are significantly different regarding the peace process.

The resolution came in opposition to Israel's continued settlement project in the West Bank. Some 630,000 Israelis now live in 123 government-authorized settlements and about 100 unauthorized outposts in the West Bank and twelve major neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. Israel views these settlements as security measures to protect its people.

Many nations consider the settlements to be illegal. They are also seen as a major impediment to the two-state solution. Critics claim that Israel is stealing land Palestine needs for its state. However, Israel has consistently offered to give Palestinians land equal in size and value to the areas used for its security settlements (a proposal known as "land swaps"). Many Palestinians reject this proposal, arguing that the land they would receive is less desirable or strategic and that the areas Israel would maintain are disruptive to their autonomy and statehood.

US Secretary of State John Kerry made a speech on December 28, 2016 defending America's decision on UNSC 2334 and harshly criticizing the Israeli settlements in the West Bank.¹⁴ According to him, the US was obliged to allow passage of UNSC 2334 in order to preserve the possibility of peace. In his view, the resolution simply "makes clear that both sides must act now to preserve the possibility of peace." He claims that the vote was "about preserving the two-state solution."

Mr. Kerry noted that under Barack Obama, the US has offered significant military and intelligence cooperation. American assistance for Iron Dome has saved countless lives; the US stood with Israel during the latest Hamas conflict. More than half of America's Foreign Military Financing goes to Israel. Last fall the US concluded a \$38 billion package that surpasses any military assistance given to any country at any time in the nation's history.

Mr. Kerry also observed that significant growth in West Bank settlements has occurred in recent years. These settlements are located in places that make a contiguous Palestinian state difficult to build. Israel has not allowed significant Palestinian development in areas of the West Bank that are supposed to be available to them. And Mr. Kerry noted the lack of progress toward peace with the Palestinians.

My view of UNSC 2334

However, I respectfully disagree with the Obama administration's decision to permit UNSC 2334, for four reasons.

One: It affects historically Jewish and Christian areas.

UNSC 2334 declares all Israeli settlements and buildings in the West Bank and east Jerusalem to be illegal. America has vetoed all such previous resolutions.

As Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz notes, UNSC 2334 applies not only to the settlements but also to historically Jewish areas taken by Jordan in 1948 and liberated by Israel in 1967. The Western Wall, the Temple Mount, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Jewish Quarter of the Old City are all part of East Jerusalem and thus under the scope of the UN resolution. Since it demands that the Jews "completely cease all settlement activity," it would forbid renovation or even maintenance of these areas.¹⁵

In my view, this is a very significant issue, one that is receiving little attention in media coverage.

Two: It will not promote peace.

Susan Rice, the current National Security Adviser, noted when she was serving as UN ambassador in 2011 that it is "unwise for the [UNSC] to attempt to resolve the core issues that divide Israelis and Palestinians."¹⁶ The UN is famously aligned against Israel and has been so for many years. That's why the US has never attempted to use the UN to broker peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

UNSC 2334 is likely to escalate antagonism between Israel and its opponents. Relations with the US are obviously at their lowest point in years. Israel has reprimanded countries that supported the UN vote. Further diplomatic tensions are likely. And following the UN vote, Israel vowed to expand its West Bank settlements.¹⁷

Three: It sets the stage for further animosity against Israelis.

The UN resolution did not include coercive measures or sanctions for those who violate it, so it functions only as a diplomatic message that sets international consensus on the settlements. However, it is possible in the future that the International Criminal Court could prosecute Israelis living in the settlements as war criminals. Those living in the settlements or making improvements in the Jewish Quarter could be tried at The Hague for violating international law.¹⁸

Four: It sends the wrong signal to Israel's enemies.

Seven minutes after the Provisional Government of Israel proclaimed the creation of a new State of Israel in 1948, US President Harry Truman recognized the new nation and its government. From then to now, American support for Israel has been vital to the Jewish state and its security.

Any suggestion that American support for Israel is wavering could embolden Israel's enemies. With ISIS making advances in Egypt and Syria, the growth of Hezbollah's military ambitions in Lebanon, and the continued threat of Hamas from the Gaza area, these are problematic times for Israel.

The path forward

I believe that the US should work for a solution that provides peace and security both for Israel and for a Palestinian state. Both peoples are loved by God and deserve to live in security.

However, Mr. Netanyahu is convinced that a two-state solution would not work within present realities. His explanation:

Abu Mazen [Mahmoud Abbas], the Palestinian leader, refuses to recognize the Jewish state and has made a pact with Hamas that calls for the destruction of the Jewish state. And every territory that is vacated in the Middle East is taken up by Islamist forces . . . We want that to change, so we can realize a vision of real, sustained peace. And I don't want a one-state solution. I want a sustainable, peaceful two-state solution. But for that, circumstances have to change.

[A Palestinian state] would become a terrorist state. Iran says that they will arm the West Bank the way they arm Gaza. We withdrew from Gaza. We got—just a few months ago; not ancient history, but a few months ago—thousands of rockets . . . on our heads . . . We don't want it to happen again. . . . if you want to get peace, you've got to get the Palestinian leadership to abandon their pact with Hamas and engage in genuine negotiations with Israel for an achievable peace. We also have to make sure that we don't have ISIS coming into that territory. [Islamic State is] only two dozen miles from our borders, thousands of miles away from yours. So we need the conditions of recognition of a Jewish state and real security in order to have a realistic two-state solution.¹⁹

The geopolitical analysis organization Stratfor concludes: "If it were possible to implement a two-state solution in the last twenty years, it would have happened. Implementation demands that both Israelis and Palestinians assume risks that neither can accept."²⁰

What would such a solution entail? Let's begin with the Palestinian side.

First, Palestinians must create a unity government. They are split between Hamas in Gaza and Fatah in the West Bank. They have not democratically elected a leader since Mahmoud Abbas in 2005. They must create a single government that recognizes Israel's right to exist and publicly denounces all acts of violence and terrorism against Israel. Otherwise, Israel risks allowing Hamas to take over control of the West Bank and use it to stage attacks against the major Jewish population centers.

Second, the arms and tunnels buildup Hamas is currently staging in Gaza must stop. Israel must have assurances that Hamas will not use a peace treaty to recreate the means of attacking the Jewish state.

Third, Palestinians must accept a symbolic "right of return" rather than insisting that homes they lost in the 1948 Jewish War for Independence be returned to them.

Fourth, Palestinians must accept the fact that Jerusalem is and must be the Jewish capital. Any negotiation that requires Israel to give up East Jerusalem and its sacred sites cannot succeed.

What must Israel do to enact a two-state solution?

First, it must agree that the Palestinians deserve a homeland. Some elements within Israeli leadership today dispute this claim.

As we have seen, some want the government to annex much of the West Bank and force the Palestinians there to live under Israeli control or leave. Others want Jordan to assume control of areas not annexed by Israel and Egypt to take control of Gaza. Many in the settler movement insist that the land "from Dan to Beersheva" (Judges 20:1) must belong to Israel. This would exclude an independent Palestinian nation. As noted above, political leaders who support Israel's continued settlement of the West Bank comprise an essential element in the current Netanyahu government.

Second, Israel must decide whether it will insist that it is a "Jewish state" or it will extend democratic and religious recognition to the Arabs Muslims and Christians living in its nation. Remember that one-fifth of current Israeli citizens are Arabs.

Third, it must achieve an equitable solution to the West Bank settlements and "right of return." When Israel left Gaza in 2005, it dismantled all settlements in the area. Perhaps it could do the same regarding settlements that prevent a contiguous Palestinian state while executing land swaps for settlements on its border. It should also provide compensation and permanent homes for the five million Palestinians and their descendants who were made refugees by Israel's independence.

Fourth, it must accept the fact that Palestinians claim Jerusalem for their capital. Any negotiation that excludes them from the Temple Mount area or rejects their claim on the city cannot succeed.

As you can see, these requirements conflict with existing Israeli and Palestinian metanarratives. The leaders of the two peoples must decide that an enduring peace is worth its cost and more.

Seven reasons to support Israel

I am convinced that the Palestinian people deserve a homeland of their own. Many Palestinian families trace their lineage in the land for centuries. The Holocaust was not their fault. Many want to live in peace alongside an independent Jewish State.

In addition, by far the largest percentage of Christians in the region are Palestinian. For instance, Bethlehem, a Palestinian city, is led by a Christian mayor who estimates that as many as 38,000 of her city's residents are Christians.²¹ The security wall that protects Israelis from terrorists also cut off Bethlehem from Jerusalem and makes tourism and economic development in the ancient city much more difficult. I have visited Bethlehem over twenty times and have been saddened by the obvious effects of the wall on the city and her people.

Palestinians living in the part of the West Bank that is under exclusive Israeli control (known as Area C) have limited access to water, electricity, schools, and other services

made available to Jewish settlers in the region. Israeli authorities have demolished hundreds of Palestinian homes in areas designated for future settlement construction. In addition, checkpoints and the security wall make movement of Palestinians into and out of East Jerusalem and the West Bank difficult. This fact affects their employment and financial stability.²²

God loves all nations as much as he loves the Jewish people: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:28–29).

At the same time, I believe that there are significant reasons why we should support the Jewish people today. Anti-Semitism is rising in America to levels not seen in decades.²³ Europe is witnessing a similar escalation in hostility against the Jews.²⁴

In addition to the fact that Israel and the Jews deserve to live in security, we should consider their significance to America and the West. In 1808, former president John Adams wrote a letter to a friend in which he stated,

I will insist the Hebrews have [contributed] more to civilize men than any other nation. If I was an atheist and believed in blind eternal fate, I should still believe that fate had ordained the Jews to be the most essential instrument for civilizing the nations. . . . They have given religion to three-quarters of the globe and have influenced the affairs of mankind more and more happily than any other nation, ancient or modern.²⁵

Was he right?

I have visited Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem, many times. Each time, I enter the "Children's Memorial," where a single candle is reflected thousands of times by mirrors in a round structure while the names of 1.5 million children murdered during the Holocaust are read. It is always my most moving experience in Israel.

Next I visit the museum itself, which tells the story of anti-Semitism across the ages, culminating in the rise of Nazism and the annihilation of six million Jews. Each time I visit, I leave with a renewed admiration of the Jewish people and their remarkable courage and character.

Abandoned and isolated, they forged a nation in a land surrounded by enemies devoted to their destruction. Fighting against armies with vastly larger numbers and resources, they have defended their nation time and time again. The people of Israel are among the most courageous I have ever known. They matter to America and the West for at least seven reasons.

First, ***Israel has a historic right to the land.*** Jewish people have lived there for four millennia, a fact proven conclusively by archaeological research. While the State of Israel was created only in 1948, other nations in the region are of recent origin as well. Saudi Arabia was formed in 1932; Lebanon became an independent nation in 1943, Syria and Jordan in 1946, Iraq in 1958, and Kuwait in 1961. Jews have populated Israel since the time of Abraham and have the strongest historic claim to the land.

Second, ***the Jewish people deserve a homeland.*** The Holocaust proved that anti-Semitism could destroy the Jewish race. Threats against their survival continue today in Iran and other jihadist regimes. The Jewish people need and deserve a land in which to live and a government to support and defend them.

Third, ***Israel is the only true democracy in the Middle East.*** Her neighbors are led by monarchs or dictators, or they exist as proxies for foreign powers that control their governments. Israel, by contrast, is a genuine democracy. As we have seen, her parliament is composed of 120 members from multiple parties. Every stratum of Israeli society is represented in her governance.

As a democracy, Israel has voted with the United States in the United Nations more than England, Canada, France, Germany, or any other country in the world.²⁶ She is our best friend in the region and one of our most strategic allies in the world.

Fourth, ***Israel is the most humanitarian nation in the region.*** Vice-president Hubert Humphrey once issued this credo: "The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the aged; and those who are in the shadows of life—the sick, the needy and the handicapped."²⁷

In the November 2012 conflict, Hamas imbedded offensive military weaponry within highly populated civilian areas, intending to provoke Israel's forces to unintentionally kill civilians. It used human shields, in clear violation of the Geneva Convention.²⁸ And it sought the destruction of Israel. Many Palestinian children study maps of the Middle East on which the State of Israel does not appear.

By contrast, Israel has supported a two-state solution in which Palestinians would have their own nation. Israel supports women in leadership and freedom of speech for all its citizens, Jews and Arabs. It embraces immigrants from around the world and provides a generous health care and educational system. Few of its neighbors offer such services to their people.²⁹

Fifth, ***Israel has blessed the world.*** God promised Abraham that "all people on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3). The Jewish people have blessed the world in a variety of ways.

At least 187 Jews have been awarded the Nobel Prize, accounting for 22 percent of all individual recipients worldwide and 36 percent of all US recipients between 1901 and

2012. (Note that Jews make up 0.2 percent of the global population and 2 percent of the US population.)

Consider some of the Jewish individuals whose contributions have changed history:

- Albert Einstein, physicist
- Jonas Salk, created first polio vaccine
- Albert Sabin, developed oral vaccine for polio
- Galileo, discovered the speed of light
- Gabriel Lipmann, discovered color photography
- Baruch Blumberg, discovered origin and spread of infectious diseases
- Briton Epstein, discovered first cancer virus
- Maria Meyer, discovered structure of atomic nuclei
- Julius Mayer, discovered laws of thermodynamics
- Sigmund Freud, father of psychotherapy
- Joseph Pulitzer, creator of "Pulitzer Prize" for achievements in journalism, literature, music, and art.³⁰

How different, and impoverished, would our world be without the Jewish people?

Sixth, ***Christians are indebted to Israel***. Christians are part of a family begun by Abraham and continued through the Jewish people across forty centuries. As Paul noted, "the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings" (Romans 15:27). The Jewish people have given us the Old Testament, our Messiah, his apostles, and the foundations of our faith.

Seventh, ***God loves the Jewish people***. Our Father loves the world (John 3:16), whether Jew or Gentile. Even though the Jewish people rejected Jesus as their Messiah, the Lord has not rejected them. The Apostle Paul said, "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles come in" (Romans 11:25). This "hardening" is spiritual, that hardening of the arteries of the soul that comes from refusing the gospel.

Because the Jews rejected Christ, his followers turned to the Gentiles. His church took the gospel to the Gentile world. With this result: the "full number of the Gentiles," meaning the entire Gentile world, could "come in" to God's kingdom.

God used the Jewish refusal of Christ, but Christ has not refused them. "And so all Israel will be saved," Paul continues (v. 26). "All Israel" here does not mean that every Jew will be saved apart from Christ—Paul spoke in Romans 9:2 of his "great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart" over the lostness of his Jewish nation. The apostle meant that the entire race of the Jews would have opportunity to come to salvation, just as the Gentiles now have that privilege.

How? Through the Gentiles, God offers salvation to the Jews. Paul said it this way: "I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them" (Rom. 11:13–14). The apostle hoped that the Jews would see the

Gentiles coming to salvation, become jealous, and come to Christ as a result. Then God could fulfill his covenant to "take away their sins" (v. 27).

Here's the point: despite all they have endured, all the failures and slaveries and pain they have faced, "they are loved" (v. 28). Verse 29 promises that God's "gifts" (the word means his "grace") and call are "irrevocable"—he will never take them back or regret them. One day he hopes to "have mercy on them all" (v. 32).

Conclusion

God's word commands us to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Psalm 122:6). Here is what we are to ask God to do for this people: "May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels" (vv. 6–7). Have you prayed for the peace and security of Jerusalem, the Jewish people, and the Middle East today?

Let's give the last word to Mark Twain. Writing for *Harper's* magazine in 1899, Twain observed:

If statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one percent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous dim puff of stardust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly the Jews ought hardly to be heard of, but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his commercial importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk. His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are also away out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers.

He has made a marvelous fight in this world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished.

The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?³¹

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