

Hold On To Judea

By David Betesh

Every morning, when I read the New York Times on the web, it reads that the Palestinians are seeking to create a future state on all of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. Despite their change in leadership and despite pressure from the world at large, the Palestinian Arabs have not budged from their stand, and made no compromises to what they are willing to accept to make peace.

The reality in Israel today is that the Israeli government has officially annexed East Jerusalem, and Jerusalem as a whole, has been declared the "undivided eternal capital of the Jewish state". Realistically speaking, we don't have to worry about Israel giving up Jerusalem.

The opposite is true about the Gaza Strip. Israel, due to the worries of the Palestinians outnumbering and eventually outvoting the Jews, has decided to go ahead with the disengagement plan, and relinquish control over the Gaza Strip and its "friendly" denizens. Israel will go ahead with this, whether we like it or not and with or without opposition. That leaves us with the future of the West Bank, also referred to as Judea and Samaria.

I am writing this article now to express the importance of this valuable territory. The West Bank, lost to Israel in the 1948 Independence War and regained from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War, is extremely important to the Jews historically, religiously, archeologically, economically, socially, militarily, and politically.

Allow me to explain each of the above.

Historically. The West Bank is where all of our history took place. The setting of the Bible primarily took place in the prominent cities of Shechem (modern day Nablus), Beth-El (modern day Ramallah), Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, and their surrounding suburbs. Much of our history as a people, as a nation and as a religion took place in these cities.



During the time of the Kings, Jerusalem was the capital of Judea (the Southern Kingdom) and Samaria was the capital of Israel (the Northern Kingdom). In Genesis, when Abraham first entered the Holy Land, he settled and built alters in Shechem and then in Beth El. Later on, when Sarah passed away, Abraham bought the Cave of Machpela in Hebron for her burial and for the burial of the entire family.

The holy monument built by King Herod on top of the cave still stands today, and it is constantly under threat. In the Book of Joshua, Joseph's bones were later brought and buried in Shechem, since this was the location of the tribe of Menashe and Ephraim, Joseph's descen-

dants, during the time of the Judges and throughout history. In 2000, at the beginning of the Second Intifada, the Palestinians destroyed Joseph's Tomb, located in Nablus. Hillel Lieberman, the son of our Rabbi Z. Lieberman (Beth Torah), was brutally murdered trying to defend this holy site.

Beth-El is where Jacob had his famous dream and revelation. Throughout the history of the Northern Kingdom, Beth-El was a place of worship and of importance. As for the southern kingdom, David, Jesse, Boaz and their entire family were all from the city of Bethlehem. The Tomb of Rachel is located on the way to Bethlehem, and is under constant threat by the Arabs.

Jerusalem is the site of the Holy Temple, and many other holy sites to many other religions. Even after the destruction of the Second Temple, Jews continued to live in communities in Jerusalem, Hebron, Beth-El, and etc. It was not until the 1929 massacre in Hebron that the Jewish presence was erased and effaced.

Another historically important city is Jericho, the City of Dates, a city miraculously conquered by Joshua and then illegally rebuilt during the days of Omri and Ahab, Kings of Israel.

Religiously. Because all of our history took place in this region and because G-d promised the Israelites this land, it is therefore important to the Jews in a religious sense. Unlike the Gaza, the Sinai, or the Golan Heights, the West Bank is the heart of the land, not the border or the out-

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skirt. It would be a religious offense to give up this land, especially after this land was miraculously captured during the Six-Day War.

Archeologically. Due to the fact that so much history took place in the land, and also that there have been many communities inhabiting this land throughout the ages, this area is rich archeologically. The proof of the perpetual Jewish existence in the land is buried under the rubble of the area. There are ruins of Jewish history from times as early as the First Temple. Giving this area to foreigners will allow them to defile our holy sites, our yet-to-be discovered artifacts, and our historical connection to the land. We are currently watching what the Jordanian "archeologists" are doing to the rumble that they find on Temple Mount. In an attempt to further deny the Jewish presence in Jerusalem and on Temple Mount, they are totally disregarding their findings and are throwing them away. Our archeological sites cannot be trusted in their hands!

Economically. Since there are so many archeological digs and ancient ruins of synagogues and cities, the West Bank proves to be a valuable place for tourism. The tourist sites of Israel help boost the economy. The economy can also be boosted by the fact that Israel has more free uninhabited land to perform some of Israel's basic jobs and needs. For example, empty land can be used for agriculture, factories, or new malls. Israel needs this extra land so that its population can grow and so that Israel doesn't have to resort to cramming or skyscrapers.

Socially. With a growing pop-

ulation, Israel needs more homes for new couples to live in. There are many people who don't want to live in crowded Tel-Aviv or Haifa, or just can't afford it. For that reason, there are cities in the West Bank such as Ariel, Gush Etzion, or Ma'ale Adumim, where one can purchase a very large house with a garden for a very reasonable price. The new housing projects that are being built in East Jerusalem and Ma'ale Adumim are mostly going to benefit the Israeli middle class, who chooses to live in large homes for a normal price. As Ma'ale Adumim is becoming more like a suburb to Jerusalem, normal families, not necessarily ideologically-oriented, are growing less and less scared of moving there and raising their children there.

Militarily. It would be suicide for Israel to give up the West Bank from a security and military point of view. This is even more the case if your next-door neighbors aren't necessarily fond of you. It would be impossible for Israel to defend its borders if the border was the West Bank, because the surface area of the West Bank would be much larger than that of the current Jordan River border. It would require much more money and many more soldiers to maintain these borders.

The security fence does make the situation better against suicide bombers, but if the enemies would like to shoot missiles at us, the fence would not help at all. If Israel were to go back to the 1948 borders, then Jerusalem would be cornered by the West Bank on three sides making it very vulnerable. Also, the northern border of the West Bank gets extremely close to Tel Aviv, and this would make

it an easier target.

Politically. Last but not least, there would be a major civil war between the religious and the secular Jews if Israel were to give back portions of the West Bank. The religious could never agree to any withdrawal from any of the holy sites, and they would never allow it without a major fight or war. A civil war of this nature would undoubtedly create a huge rift between the different Jewish factions and would ultimately destroy the morale of the nation of Israel and the Jews around the world. The religious Jews of Israel would feel totally abandoned by their own government and this would cause them to either leave the country or simply not support it ideologically.

Under the so-far successful Road Map, President Bush recognizes that the existing West Bank settlements have the right to remain, but no new settlements are allowed to be built in the future. In the upcoming years, Israel plans to make the existing 120 West Bank settlements larger and stronger. More settlements will be on the Israeli site of the security fence and this helps fortify those areas.

It is important for us that we vocally express opposition to thoughts or plans of giving up any territory in this area, including the "four small settlements" in Samaria that are expected to be given away this summer. There should be no tolerance to talks of giving back any portion of the West Bank with or without peace agreements. As shown above, Judea and Samaria are essential in maintaining the Jewish character of Israel. □

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