



ISRAEL RISING

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THE ANCIENT PROPHECY:

Ezekiel Chapter 36

My journey began with this ancient passage. While I had read it before, it really didn't attract my attention until I began recognizing portions of the Jordan Valley changing firsthand, within a short fifteen-year time period. I began to wonder, "Could this really be connected to what Ezekiel was talking about?" I had to go back and take a closer look.

The prophet Ezekiel was part of the Jewish population of Jerusalem that was taken captive and relocated during the Babylonian conquest in 597 BC as described in the Bible. After several years of living in Babylon, he began receiving prophetic messages from God and addressed them to the Jewish exiles. Here is a portion of one of those prophecies.

"Son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel and say, 'Mountains of Israel, hear the word of the LORD. ² This is what the Sovereign LORD says: The enemy said of you, 'Aha! The ancient heights have become our possession.'"³ Therefore prophesy and say, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Because they ravaged and crushed you from every side so that you became the possession of the rest of the

nations and the object of people's malicious talk and slander,⁴ therefore, mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Sovereign LORD: This is what the Sovereign LORD says to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys, to the desolate ruins and the deserted towns that have been plundered and ridiculed by the rest of the nations around you—⁵ this is what the Sovereign LORD says: In my burning zeal I have spoken against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom, for with glee and with malice in their hearts they made my land their own possession so that they might plunder its pastureland.'⁶ Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel and say to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I speak in my jealous wrath because you have suffered the scorn of the nations.'⁷ Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I swear with uplifted hand that the nations around you will also suffer scorn.

⁸ *"But you, mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for my people Israel, for they will soon come home. ⁹ I am concerned for you and will look*

on you with favor; you will be plowed and sown,¹⁰ and I will cause many people to live on you—yes, all of Israel. The towns will be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt.¹¹ I will increase the number of people and animals living on you, and they will be fruitful and become numerous. I will settle people on you as in the past and will make you prosper more than before. Then you will know that I am the LORD.¹² I will cause people, my people Israel, to live on you. They will possess you, and you will be their inheritance; you will never again deprive them of their children.

¹³ “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Because some say to you, “You devour people and deprive your nation of its children,”¹⁴ therefore you will no longer devour people or make your nation childless, declares the Sovereign LORD.¹⁵ No longer will I make you hear the taunts of the nations, and no longer will you suffer the scorn of the peoples or cause your nation to fall, declares the Sovereign LORD.”

¹⁶ Again the word of the LORD came to me:¹⁷ “Son of man, when the people of Israel were living in their own land, they defiled it by their conduct and their actions. Their conduct was like a woman’s monthly uncleanness in my sight.¹⁸ So I poured out my wrath on them because they had shed blood in the land and because they had defiled it with their idols.¹⁹ I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered through the countries; I judged them according to their conduct and their actions.²⁰ And wherever they went among the nations they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, ‘These are the LORD’s people, and yet they had to leave his land.’²¹ I had concern for my holy name, which the people of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone.

²² “Therefore say to the Israelites, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone.²³ I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes.

²⁴ “For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land.²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.²⁸ Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.²⁹ I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you.³⁰ I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine.³¹ Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices.³² I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign LORD. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, people of Israel!

³³ “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt.³⁴ The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it.³⁵ They will say, “This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited.”³⁶ Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.’

³⁷ “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Once again I will yield to Israel’s plea and do this for them: I will make their people as numerous as sheep,³⁸ as numerous as the flocks for offerings at Jerusalem during her appointed festivals. So will the ruined cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the LORD.”

While there is much that could be said about this portion of Scripture on a variety of topics, for my own understanding, I simplified its key details into four easy

questions: (1) Who is this spoken to?; (2) Why was it spoken?; (3) What will happen?; and (4) When will it all come to pass?

WHO IS THIS PROPHECY SPOKEN TO?

We tend to think of prophecies being spoken to nations, kings, or—quite simply—people. What makes this prophecy unique is that Ezekiel is instructed to prophesy to the physical land of Israel and speak to it as an actual living being. This can be seen in the first several verses, starting with the very first sentence:

“Son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel and say, ‘Mountains of Israel, hear the word of the LORD.’” (v. 1)

“...therefore, mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Sovereign LORD: This is what the Sovereign LORD says to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys, to the desolate ruins and the deserted towns that have been plundered and ridiculed by the rest of the nations around you...” (v. 4)

“Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel and say to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys...” (v. 6)

“Listen up, you mountains, hills, ravines, valleys, and desolate places of Israel—this word is spoken to you.” We, as human beings reading these words, are simply bystanders to the message Ezekiel gave prophetically. As we read this passage, keep in mind that when we read the word “you” in the first fifteen verses, it’s talking to the physical land of Israel, not Israel as a people or nation. But why was this spoken to the land and not the people?

WHY WAS THIS PROPHECY SPOKEN TO THE LAND?

This question is best answered in two parts. Yet, both parts of the answer suggest that there seems to be something unique about the land and how it is treated. Throughout this passage, we find three different references about the ownership of the land:

*“...they made **my land** their own possession...” (v. 5)*

*“...it was said of them, ‘These are the LORD’s people, and yet they had to leave **his land.**’” (v. 20)*

*“Then you will live in **the land I gave** your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.” (v. 28)*

As God is speaking to Ezekiel, the land is called “My land, His land, and the land He gave.” This is not just any piece of real estate. It appears to be something that is extremely significant to God Himself. This being the case, it stands to reason that He cares about the land’s treatment, condition, and its ownership.

It is widely believed and accepted that Jews are “God’s chosen people.” Where that idea originated from is God’s encounter with Abraham found in Genesis 17, when God made an everlasting covenant with Abraham. Yet in that same everlasting promise, there is a second element that is often overlooked.

“⁷ I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸ The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.” (Genesis 17:7–8)

In the same conversation stating that Abraham’s descendants would be part of an everlasting covenant (repeated later to Abraham’s sons Isaac and Jacob), the promise of the land as an everlasting possession immediately follows. Quite simply, the land is part of the everlasting covenant that is inseparable from the people. Perhaps this is why there was such distain in this prophecy for how other nations had treated the land.

According to Ezekiel 36, the reason for this prophecy was because the land had not been treated well and had been stolen by invading nations.

“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: The enemy said of you, ‘Aha! The ancient heights have become our possession.’” (v. 2)

“...they ravaged and crushed you from every side so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations” (v. 3)

“...for with glee and with malice in their hearts they made my land their own possession so that they might plunder its pastureland.” (v. 5)

The invading nations took possession of and laid waste to the land. These were wrongs that needed correcting, thus the purpose of the message. But what exactly would change and happen?

WHAT CHANGES WILL HAPPEN TO THE LAND?

In its most basic elements, any land is intended to sustain a population, bring forth food, and provide materials for shelter. It is intended to be a help to those who live on it. Around the world, “good land” is soil that can be worked to feed and sustain a local population with its benefits, while arid deserts have few natural resources that can sustain life. God was speaking to a land that was made desolate, was crushed, and openly plundered. In Ezekiel’s prophecy God promised that this would all change back to His original intentions. What exactly would happen...? This is what Ezekiel told the land:

“...But you, mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit...” (v. 8)

“...you will be plowed and sown...” (v. 9)

“The towns will be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt.” (v. 10)

“I will increase the number of people and animals living on you, and they will be fruitful and become numerous.” (v. 11)

“I will settle people on you as in the past and will make you prosper more than before.” (v. 11)

This prophecy promised a physical and tangible restoration to the land, from a desolate wasteland to a lush and productive region, that would provide all that is needed for both man and animals. Yet, land does not simply produce by itself. It needs a people to plant it, to cultivate and care for it. However, this is not just any land, nor would these changes take place with just any people. Practical steps by a specific people were needed to bring about the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s words spoken over the land.

WHEN WILL THIS CHANGE HAPPEN?

This prophecy is not a general or arbitrary encouragement, but a promise with a specific time frame. For the skeptical, if a prophecy does not describe its tangible fulfillment or include guidelines, what good is it? Hearing about a potential miraculous change is great, but many want to know “when will these things happen” or what will be the tipping point that begins this process? The answer seemed as unlikely in the early 1900s as it did to Ezekiel’s hearers.

*“But you, mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for **my people Israel**, for they will soon come home.” (v. 8)*

*“...and I will cause many people to live on you—**yes, all of Israel**. The towns will be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt.” (v. 10)*

*“I will cause people, **my people Israel**, to live on you. They will possess you, and you will be their inheritance.” (v. 12)*

This prophecy states that when Israel returns to this land, the land will produce fruit again, the Jewish population will multiply, and the desolate places will be rebuilt and inhabited. Yet, verse 12 states the real tipping point. This physical change will only happen when the land becomes Israel’s possession and their inheritance once again. In other words, this prophecy states that the physical land will respond to Jewish independence and sovereignty over the region that was promised to their forefathers as an everlasting possession.

If these things could tangibly happen as foretold, it would be undeniable proof that such a dramatic natural change could only be seen as something “supernatural,” or an act of God. This brings us to our final question, “Why would God want to transform a land and a people?” Let’s consider this after we review the historical accounts, the photo comparisons, and the fact that it was all foretold two millennia ago.

THE HISTORY OF THE LAND

After spending some time clarifying some parameters in Ezekiel’s prophecy, I moved on to the history of the region. I wanted to know “Is there any time in history that this could have been fulfilled?”

It has been over 2600 years since the time that Ezekiel spoke these words to the land of Israel. If we take an objective look at this ancient prophecy, we must consider if there is any other time in history that this could have come to pass. Let’s review the many

historical and eyewitness accounts of the land from Ezekiel’s time until now. To follow Ezekiel’s prophetic parameters, our timeline will give special attention to the land, agriculture, and times of Israeli/Jewish sovereignty. We will also note the invention of the modern camera in this process. At that point, we can begin to see for ourselves the same land that has been chronicled throughout the centuries by eyewitnesses and decide whether or not their accounts were accurate.

YEAR	PERIOD	LAND NAME	EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS OF THE LAND
	<i>Under Foreign Rule</i>		
597–539 BCE	Time of Ezekiel; Babylon	Judea	
537–332 BCE	Return of Exiles; Second Temple	Judea	Ezra, Nehemiah
332–140 BCE	Greek Conquest	Judah	1 Macabees 1:29–39
	<i>Jewish Independence</i>		
140–63 BCE	Hasmonean Kingdom	Judah	1 Macabees 14:5–12
	<i>Under Foreign Rule</i>		
63–37 BCE	Roman Rule	Judah	
38–6 BCE	Roman Rule/Herod	Judah	
7BEC–AD 70	Roman Rule/Procurators	Judah	Flavius Josephus
71–306	Roman Rule/Expulsion	Palestine	Dio Cassius
307–614	Byzantine Empire	Palestine	Helena; Paula
615–638	Persian Empire	Palestine	Patriarch of Jerusalem
639–1099	Multiple Moslem/Arab Rule	Palestine	Carl Voss; Baladhuri; Muqaddasi
1100–1291	Crusader Rule	Palestine	William of Tyre
1292–1516	Mameluks Rule	Palestine	Webbe; De Haas
1517–1917	Ottoman Empire	Palestine	various
1918–1948	British Mandate	Palestine	various
	<i>Jewish Independence</i>		
1948–Present	Israeli	Israel	

6TH CENTURY BC

In approximately 597 BC, the Babylonians conquered Judea and carried away many of the residents of Jerusalem and surrounding cities as captives to the Babylonian empire. It is believed that after Ezekiel had been living for several years in Babylon that God began speaking to him through visions and experiences.

5TH CENTURY BC

In the book of Nehemiah, the prophet first visits Jerusalem after seventy years of exile, with the permission of the Persian king Artaxerxes I. He described the city as lying “in ruins and its gates [having] been destroyed by fire.” Nehemiah said, “You see the bad situation we are in: Jerusalem is desolate and its gates have been destroyed by fire” (Nehemiah 2:3, 17). This stirred many Jews to return to the land and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and the Temple in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, while the city was still under Persian control.

3RD CENTURY BC (Greek conquest and rule)

After the Babylonian rule of the region came the Greeks, who sought to establish Greek culture and religious influence in Jerusalem. This was accomplished through their deceitful conquest.

“...the king sent the Mysian commander to the cities of Judah, and he came to Jerusalem with a strong force. He spoke to them deceitfully in peaceful terms, and they believed him. Then he attacked the city suddenly, in a great onslaught, and destroyed many of the people in Israel. He plundered the city and set fire to it, demolished its houses and its surrounding walls. And they took captive the women and children, and seized the animals...”

“They shed innocent blood around the sanctuary; they defiled the sanctuary. Because of them the inhabitants of Jerusalem fled away, she became the abode of strangers. She became a stranger to

her own offspring, and her children forsook her. Her sanctuary became desolate as a wilderness...”
(1st Macabees 1:29–39)

This led to the rise of the Maccabean revolt, led by Judas Maccabee, who eventually defeated and expelled the Greek armies and their influence. This victory brought about the Temple rededication that is still celebrated today as the feast of Hanukkah. This victory ushered in an eighty-year period of Jewish independence in the land.

2ND CENTURY BC (Hasmonean rule – Jewish Independence)

Years after Judas’ death, his brother, Simon Maccabeus, established the ruling dynasty in the land of Judea. From the account in 1 Macabees 14:4–12, the people and the land prospered under Jewish sovereignty.

“The land was at rest all the days of Simon, who sought the good of his nation. His rule delighted his people and his glory all his days. As his crowning glory he took Joppa for a port and made it a gateway to the isles of the sea. He enlarged the borders of his nation and gained control of the countrys...”

“The people cultivated their land in peace; the land yielded its produce, the trees of the field their fruit. Old men sat in the squares, all talking about the good times, while the young men put on the glorious raiment of war. He supplied the cities with food and equipped them with means of defense, till his glorious name reached the ends of the earth. He brought peace to the land, and Israel was filled with great joy. Every one sat under his vine and fig tree, with no one to disturb them.”

Throughout my research for quotes of eyewitness accounts of the land, this was the only example of recognizable prosperity that I could find in the last 2600 years. Ironically, it is under Jewish sovereignty.

1ST CENTURY AD (Roman Empire)

Jewish rule did not last long before the Romans entered. Tensions were high for many years with violence and pockets of revolt springing up. This boiled over in AD 70 when the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem and eventually destroyed the Temple. This is an eyewitness account of what happened to the land during the siege:

“And now the Romans, although they were greatly distressed in getting together their materials, raised their banks in one and twenty days, after they had cut down all the trees that were in the country that adjoined to the city, and that for ninety furlongs [11 miles; 17.7 km] round about [Jerusalem], as I have already related. And truly the very view itself of the country was a melancholy thing; for those places which were before adorned with trees and pleasant gardens were now become a desolate country every way, and its trees were all cut down: nor could any foreigner that had formerly seen Judea and the most beautiful suburbs of the city, and now saw it as a desert, but lament and mourn sadly at so great a change: for the war had laid all the signs of beauty quite waste: nor if any one that had known the place before, had come on a sudden to it now, would he have known it again; but though he were at the city itself, yet would he have inquired for it notwithstanding.” (Josephus, 75 C.E.)

2ND CENTURY (Roman Empire)

After the Temple's destruction, revolts continued to spring up, which led to a crushing Roman response. The following is a Roman historian's account of what happened to Judah during the Bar Kochba revolt in AD 134.

“Of their forts the fifty strongest were razed to the ground. Nine hundred and eighty-five of their best-known villages were destroyed. ...

“Thus the whole of Judea became desert, as indeed had been foretold to the Jews before the war. For the tomb of Solomon, whom these folk celebrate in their sacred rites, fell of its own accord into fragments, and wolves and hyenas, many in number, roamed howling through their cities.” (Cassius Dio, 4)

It was common for the Roman Empire to change the names of conquered land, as we will see in some of our photo descriptions. As a result of this long, costly, and frustrating conflict, Emperor Hadrian changed the name of the region to Syria Palaestina, naming the land after ancient Israel's archenemies, the Philistines, in an attempt to remove any Jewish identity or link to the land. From this time until 1948, the region was often referred to as “Palestine.”


The next 1800 years were a progression of wars and desolation that were truly devastating to the land. For more historical eyewitness accounts of Jews, Christians, and Muslims from multiple empires who recorded what they saw and experienced in this region, please find Reference #1 in the back of this book. For our purposes, we will jump ahead to the mid-1800s to two major events that have shaped much of our view of the land in this time: the invention of the modern camera and Mark Twain's travel journals through this land in 1867 that were recorded in his book *The Innocents Abroad*.

*Aerial view looking Southwest;
Date: Nov. 10, 1933*



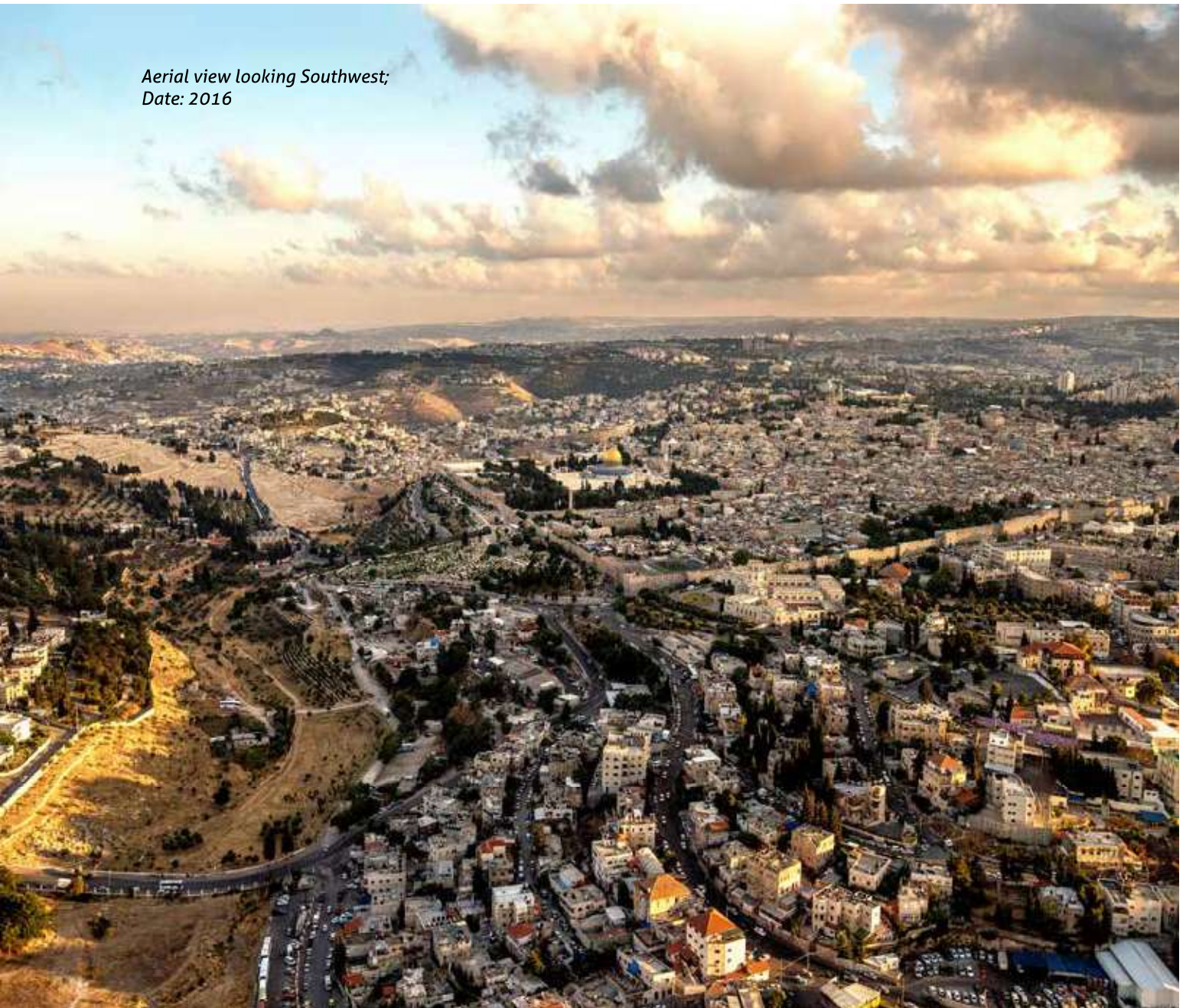
JERUSALEM

Just as the heart is the center of the human body, Jerusalem is the heart in the center of Israel. Perhaps no city on earth has captured the world's attention through the centuries like Jerusalem. Yet, it appears that that was part of the plan.

 *This is what the Sovereign LORD says: This is Jerusalem, which I have set in the center of the nations, with countries all around her."*

(Ezekiel 5:5)

Aerial view looking Southwest;
Date: 2016



“Outside of the gates of Jerusalem, we saw, indeed, no living object, heard no living sound. We found the same void, the same silence as we should have found before the entombed gates of Pompeii or Herculaneum...complete, eternal silence reigns in the towns, the highways, in the country.”

(Alphonse de Lamartine, *Recollections of the East*, Vol. 1 [London 1845])

Jews 7,120
Moslems 5,000
Christians 3,390
*Population of Jerusalem,
Turkish Census 1844*

Jews 28,112
Moslems 8,560
Christians 8,748
*Population of Jerusalem,
Calendar of Palestine 1895*

Jews 40,000
Moslems 7,000
Christians 13,000
*Population of Jerusalem,
Travel Guide to Palestine 1906*



*Temple Mount and Western Wall from Southwest;
Date: 1930–1946*



*Temple Mount and Western Wall from Southwest;
Date: 2016*



*City of David and Temple Mount from the Southwest;
Date: 1910–1920*



*Hebron road, southwest of the Old City, looking north;
Date: 1898–1907*



*City of David and Temple Mount from the Southwest;
Date: 2016*



*Hebron road, southwest of the Old City, looking north;
Date: 2016*