

# Israel “facing dictatorship ... civil war ... war with Iran”

May 2023

We learn from the Bible that God still has a purpose for the Jewish people, namely, a massive turning to Christ. As a major step in God’s plan, the State of Israel was re-established by the UN in 1948, after 2000 years of exile. Paul writes “Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:25-26). Israel is vulnerable to attack, including spiritual attack, because of God’s special purposes for her. The nation is currently going through a very dangerous time. So, we Christians need to be informed and to pray in depth for Israel at this time.

It is experiencing huge and sometimes violent political street demonstrations which are seriously threatening its security. In addition to the on-going often violent conflict with the Palestinians, it is facing a definite threat of war with Iran (which is on the brink of developing nuclear weapons). People are predicting civil war in Israel and devastating attack from Iran and its allies.

Ex Prime Minister Ehud Barak said Israel is in “immediate danger” from an impending dictatorship, because of the actions of its right wing government. Another former prime minister, Naftali Bennett, warned that the government is bringing the country “to the brink of civil war.” Talk of civil war has been very prominent in the Israeli media. Leaked Pentagon papers suggest that Mossad (Israel’s spy agency) is seeking to overthrow Netanyahu, the prime minister of Israel.

Yaakov Amidror, former head of Israel’s National Security Council, warned of war with Iran: “We must prepare for war, and it is possible that Israel will arrive at a juncture whereby it will have to attack Iran without America’s help.”

## War with Iran

Dr. Mordechai Keidar a leading Israeli expert on Middle East affairs, says he has been informed that Iran intends to attack Israel in the very near future. He says the Iranians have enough missiles to ensure that Israel’s Iron Dome system of defence against missiles will run out of interceptor missiles very quickly. Iran also believes the current division in Israel will hinder its military defence against an attack. Terror groups such as Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and Hezbollah believe the serious turmoil in Israel shows that the Israeli state is collapsing.

In addition, Iran notes Israel’s deteriorating relationship with the US (which disagrees with Israel’s negative reaction to Iran) and it believes Western nations will be reluctant to intervene in another war, being so involved with Ukraine. Also, the UN has not proved reliable. After the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war. UNIFIL (UN Interim Force in Lebanon) should have followed the UN Security Council Resolution 1706 and kept Hezbollah (Iran’s terrorist comrades) out of Southern Lebanon. But they did not do so.

Experts believe that Iran has orchestrated recent terrorist attacks against Israel to check out Israel’s defence weaknesses.

Iran will probably not itself attack Israel but will use its foreign militia and terrorist allies. Hezbollah is one such in Lebanon. Iran has ensured it has 140,000 missiles which have been placed in Lebanese schools, hospitals, mosques and homes. President Raisi of Iran has recently spoken with leaders of Algeria, Syria, Turkmenistan and Turkey, calling for a united front against Israel.

However, one very serious threat is from Iran’s progress towards having nuclear weapons. It seems likely that Iran will want to have a nuclear weapon before they attack Israel. The International Atomic Energy Agency has discovered that Iran has now enriched uranium hexafluoride up to 84% - just below the 90% which can cause Iran to be a nuclear power. Iran may well have been secretly developing nuclear warheads. On March 1st 2023 US Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kahl said Tehran could produce enough fissile material for a nuclear bomb in under two weeks.

## The controversy in Israel

For three months there have been massive, sometimes violent demonstrations in Israel. Israel’s Economy Minister was attacked by protesters. Police estimated that one anti-government demonstration involved 90,000 people. Eventually, a

pro-government demonstration involved 200,000 (but, in both cases, some estimates were higher than this). Many claim that they are the biggest demonstrations in the modern history of Israel, but this is contradicted by some historians. However, the demonstrations are continuing for a lengthy period and feelings are running very high indeed. Yuval Diskin, the former head of the Israel Security service, said in early March “In just a few weeks we will plunge into a civil war.” Jewish historian, Simon Schama, spoke of the “complete disintegration of the political and social compact” that underpins the state of Israel and warned that Israel was at risk of becoming a “nationalist theocracy.”

The dispute at the heart of the controversy is about the position of Israel’s Supreme Court and the appointment of judges. Israel is one of the few democracies where the Attorney General is also the government’s chief legal counsel, which means the judge’s decisions are binding, not recommendations. The new government started to bring about legislation which would change this, limiting the power of the supreme court to appoint judges and to reverse decisions made by the government. Hence the government could overrule the supreme court by a simple majority, and could handpick the judges. Israel has no written constitution and no second political chamber. So, there would be no checks or balances on the government.

Some, especially those politically to the right, have defended this idea, pointing out that the government is democratically elected. Also, the Supreme Court is seen as having a left wing bias. Others, especially those politically to the left, have responded saying this could make Netanyahu a dictator. Extremists have spoken about the possible necessity of assassinating Netanyahu.

Another very important factor is that the new Israeli government is the most right wing, and, by far, the most religious modern Israel has had. Many members of the government are Orthodox Jews who are strongly committed to preparing the whole Land of Israel, including Judea and Samaria, in readiness for the Messiah (not Jesus) and the restoration of his Kingdom in Israel. So, a very important part of this conflict is the strong disagreement between religious and secular Jews. Simcha Rothman of the Religious Zionism Party, chair of the parliament’s Constitution, Law and Justice Committee, said that the opposition protests aren’t really about judicial reform but are a clash about whether Israel should be a secular state or a Jewish state.

The secular Jews regard this government’s aims as a threat to democracy. Almost 50% of Israelis now think that their country’s democracy is in grave danger. The previous Prime Minister, Yair Lapid, called the new government “the most extreme and insane government in our history.” He also made a statement to the government saying “You have torn Israeli society apart.” Because of the dispute Lapid, and other Ministers, declined to attend the national Memorial Day ceremony which commemorates Israel’s war dead and offers support to relatives.

So Israel is experiencing strong conflict between secular Jews and religious Jews. One rabbi reported that many religious Israelis are now afraid to wear their kippah (skullcap) at their workplace because of the “forceful and violent” rhetoric from secular Israelis.

Jonathan Freedland, a Jewish journalist in the UK, said that Israel “is facing what many regard as the greatest threat since its founding 75 years ago. A government with unlimited power, with no supreme court standing in its way, would face no obstacle if it moved towards theocracy, as some in the coalition wish, or if it decided to annex the West Bank while granting no citizenship or rights to the millions of Palestinians who live there. Those scenarios sound extreme, but this is a government packed with extremists.”

Eventually, the prime minister was forced to freeze the legislation, with a view to bringing it back in the summer session.

## **Conflict with the Palestinians**

One of the main clashes between Israelis and Palestinians recently has been at the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. The basic problem is, of course, that Islam regards the mosque as on the third most holy site in Islam and the Jewish people know it is the site of the old Temple.

The precipitating factor this year has been the breaking of the rule that Muslims cannot sleep at the mosque during Ramadan so that Jewish people can visit the mount (but not pray on it) early in the morning. This year, Muslims barricaded themselves in the mosque to prevent this happening. The police became involved and were attacked. Hence, they responded strongly, some say too strongly.

Another complication is that the Jewish Temple Institute believe it is their responsibility to seek to start building the Third Temple on the mount, which is a great threat to the Muslims. The Muslims also responded very strongly to a visit to Temple Mount by the Israel National Security Minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir.

In 2022 there were more than 5000 Palestinian terror attacks, including car-rammings, shootings, stabbings and bombings targeting innocent civilians on the streets of Israel. A Palestinian drove his car into a crowded bus stop, killing three people, including two brothers aged six and eight. There are fears of an all-out Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hezbollah has fired the largest number of rockets from Lebanon into Israel since 2006. Gaza has also fired rockets

Support for the two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians has fallen to its lowest level since the early 2000s.

Netanyahu's government made it clear that it supports settlements in "Judea and Samaria" (the West Bank). In December 2022 it published a statement saying "The Jewish people has an exclusive and inalienable right to all parts of the Land of Israel. ... This government will promote and develop the settlement of all parts of the Land of Israel—in the Galilee, the Negev, the Golan Heights and Judea and Samaria." This is condemned as illegal by the UN, disapproved of by President Biden and encourages antagonism from the Palestinians.

## **Conclusion**

Pray for Israel's protection, from harmful effects of the civil unrest and from attacks from Iran and its allies. Pray also that God will hasten the day when there is the predicted massive turning to Yeshua Hamashiach (Jesus the Messiah). Pray also for the people of the surrounding Arab countries, including Iran and the Palestinians, that they will not suffer from war.