

The Significance of the ANZAC Contribution to the Establishment of Modern Israel



Kelvin Crombie

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Two significant ‘proclamations’ are presently being made in Australia. One is the call ‘From the river to the sea Palestine shall be free’ – which effectively is a call to delegitimise and destroy the Jewish State of Israel. The other is to discredit the British, colonial connections to the establishment of modern Australia, as summed up through the phrase ‘Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.’¹

Yet one of the key outcomes of our ANZAC heritage from both World Wars – where we sided with Britain - is the establishment of the modern State of Israel – which itself is part of Almighty God’s plan for worldwide redemption.

Almighty God’s sovereignty in creation

When Almighty God created the world He placed the land masses and waterways in certain locations. But the very heart of His plan of creation was humankind, with whom He desired a close personal relationship. This, however, all changed with the act of disobedience and treason by Adam and Hava (Eve) in the garden of Eden, which resulted in the breaking of that relationship and the imposition of the penalty of death - upon them and their descendants.

Almighty God then began His pre-determined plan to redeem and restore this relationship, centred upon the future coming of the seed of Hava (Eve), who would defeat Satan, the adversary of Almighty God. This plan also involved the spreading of humankind to all parts of the earth’s surface, hence in time Aboriginal people came to what is now Australia, and other groups including the Māoris went to what became known as New Zealand. Both these lands belong to Almighty God, who determined who would live there, and when.

The land of Israel at the centre of the world

The geographical centre of the world was the land of Israel, at the centre of which was the city of Jerusalem. Major trade routes lay in proximity to this land, and as a result major empires throughout history coveted this strategic ‘land between empires.’

Although being in the worst location for political and economic stability and peace, yet this was where Almighty God determined to bring forth His mighty plan of worldwide redemption – of bringing humankind back into a personal relationship with Himself.

Almighty God promised this very land by a covenant oath to Abram (Abraham), Isaac and Jacob (Israel) – and the children of Israel. He also promised that all people groups would be blessed through this Abrahamic covenant. The town mostly associated with these patriarchs and this covenant was Beersheba.

The promised individual seed

The seed promised to Adam and Hava (Eve) came to, and from, the people of Israel. He was Jesus. As the incarnate and perfect Son of God Jesus came to take the penalty of death which was upon all of humankind. This He did by first instituting the new covenant with Israel (Jeremiah 31:31-37; Luke 22:20), then vicariously dying on the cross – and rising from the dead on the third day, thereby proving that the penalty of death had been paid for.

He also came to fulfil the promises of the covenant with King David and to be the King Messiah of Israel - destined to reign from Jerusalem over redeemed Israel and the redeemed of the world. Yet the majority of the nation of Israel did not acknowledge Jesus as their redeemer and Messiah – so this message of redemption went also out to the non-Jewish world. The redeemed of Israel and the nations was the Church. But what would become of the Israel that did not accept Jesus as the King Messiah? Would Almighty God reject them for their national disobedience?

God-forbid – a perfect God could not break His covenant oath. One's character is dependent upon keeping their promises, sworn under oath, even when the other party disobeys. Yet many in the Gentile-led Church began to adopt the position that God had rejected the nation of Israel. Such an attitude resulted from witnessing the majority Jewish rejection of Jesus and the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD and exiling of the Jewish people from the land of covenant promise. This attitude was

enhanced after the victorious Romans in 135 AD forbade Jewish people from living in the region surrounding Jerusalem and even renaming the land *Syria Palestina* – to erase the Jewish connection to the land of Israel.

Apart from a remnant the people of Israel then underwent a long period of separation from the land of Israel. It would require a miracle for their return. This exile became more pronounced when imperialist Arab Muslims took control over the land from the year 638 AD. A core principle of Islam was that the land of Israel was part of *dar al Islam* – the region of Islam. In such a worldview there was no place for a restored Jewish national entity. This position was furthered when from 1517 the land came under the control of the Ottoman Turkish Empire – who were the custodians of Islam.

The European expansion and ‘discovery’ of Australia and New Zealand

The Ottoman Turks also monopolised all the major trade routes from the East – causing the prices of the precious commodities to increase in Europe and provoking the European powers to find alternate sea routes to the Spice Islands and India. As a result of this dynamic the European powers ‘discovered’ regions such as Australia and New Zealand, which from 1788 began to be settled by the British.

Although the British didn’t always treat the local inhabitants in a dignified manner, yet they did introduce the message of Jesus – allowing the first inhabitants to receive pardon from the original sentence of death, and receiving a restored personal relationship with their Creator, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Napoleon, the Suez Canal and Jewish restoration begins

The establishment of these new sea connections between Europe and the East meant the ‘land between empires’ lost its economic and geo-political significance. This changed, however, when the French under Napoleon invaded Egypt and the land of Israel in 1798-99, aiming to reach India and oust the British. They failed, but their endeavour provoked Britain into being aware of the importance of

the 'land between empires'. These events also provoked countless Christians in Europe, especially Britain, to pray for and proclaim that the time was nigh at hand for Israel's restoration – to their Messiah and to the land of Israel.

Then over the following decades more Jewish people began to take up this call of restoration and the number of Jewish people returning increased. By 1897 these Jewish endeavours resulted in the formation of the Zionist movement. All the while Britain's concern for the connection to India increased, especially after the French built the Suez Canal in 1869. Britain later took control over the Canal, as well as Egypt. The east side of the Canal mostly remained under Turkish control.

Germany and the First World War

From 1898 Germany became increasingly involved in the Eastern Mediterranean, and when the First World War broke out in 1914, the Ottoman Empire joined with Germany against Britain, France and Russia. Soon after Australian and New Zealand troops (the ANZACs), arrived in Egypt. Russia then requested Allied assistance, and so preparations began for a campaign to break open the strategic Dardanelles-Gallipoli waterway.

Then in March 1915 the Russians informed Britain and France that once this strategic location, plus Constantinople and the Bosphorus Straits, were captured they were to be surrendered to the Russian Empire. The Russians also informed Britain and France that they could take control of other areas of the Ottoman Empire. Although Britain had no desire to control the land of Israel, they did not want France to control the east (Sinai) side of the Suez Canal. The British Government now began to consider the future of what was then Turkish-occupied Palestine. Meanwhile the land assault at Gallipoli began on 25 April 1915.

The defeat at Gallipoli and conquest of the land of Israel

The Allies were ultimately defeated at Gallipoli, and the victorious Ottoman Turks now aimed to seize the Suez Canal. A British-led force, spearheaded by British-ANZAC horsemen (the Australian Light Horse and New Zealand Mounted Rifles) was formed and captured the Sinai region in 1916. Then in early 1917, following a decision from prime minister David Lloyd George, this force crossed into Turkish-occupied Palestine. The first battles were at Gaza, where the British- ANZAC force suffered two major defeats. The military objective later focused on capturing the town of Beersheba - associated with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Then in mid-1917 the Jewish Zionist movement presented a proposal to the British government that when the land of Israel was liberated from Turkish occupation that Britain would endorse the establishment there of a Jewish national home.

The Allied attack on Beersheba began on 31 October 1917, and following British and New Zealand successes, victory was finally gained by the gallant charge of the Australian Light Horse. On that same day the British War Committee meeting in London promised to establish a Jewish national home in the land of Israel – once the land was fully redeemed from Turkish-Islamic occupation. This decision was later known as the Balfour Declaration.²

This campaign was fought with geo-political factors in mind - the land of Israel was sandwiched between Britain (and Europe) on one side and India and the empire including New Zealand and Australia, on the other. This factor again reveals that a sovereign God had determined exactly where the physical boundary lines would be established and when certain people groups would be where. God knew exactly what He was doing when He placed the land of Israel at the centre of the world – and when He sent the British to settle in Australia and New Zealand!³

Redemption of the land from Islamic control took another major step on 9 December 1917 when British-led forces including ANZAC horsemen captured Jerusalem.⁴ On 11 December the official surrender

ceremony occurred on the steps of the Citadel or Fortress of Jerusalem – opposite Christ Church – at which New Zealand and Australian soldiers participated.

By 31 October 1918 the Ottoman Turkish Empire was defeated. At subsequent peace conferences Britain and France were offered mandates to prepare these liberated regions for local sovereignty. The Mandate for Palestine was offered to Britain in 1922 by all member states of the League of Nations - to prepare the land for a future Jewish national home. The League of Nations recognized the historic connection of the Jewish people to the land of Israel and this endorsement became enshrined into international law. This act vindicated that Almighty God honours His covenant oaths and promises. Islamic control and occupation over the land of covenant promise was being repealed.

In the vast territory captured mostly by British, Australian, Indian and New Zealand soldiers, the Arabic-speaking nations of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan were ultimately formed. A very small part of that captured region was to become the Jewish national home.

The full restoration of Israel was now drawing nearer, whereupon 'all Israel' would come to know God in a personal way through the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-37). This reconciliation, Paul wrote, would be 'like life from the dead' (Romans 11:15) and would be closely associated with the physical return of Jesus to Jerusalem.⁵ But most Jewish people living in the land of Israel at the time (and still today) were not inclined to consider turning to Jesus. It would be nothing short of a miracle for the nation to turn en-masse to accept Jesus as Messiah.

Unfortunately, most of the local Muslims and Christians did not understand Almighty God's plan for the redemption of the world, and opposed Israel's physical restoration. Satan knows that when Jesus returns to Jerusalem and establishes His reign over the redeemed of Israel and the nations, he will be bound, therefore he will do everything possible to hinder this return and the associated spiritual restoration of Israel.

Then from 1933 following Nazi persecution in Germany thousands of Jewish people came to the land of Israel. Once again the Arabic-speaking leaders resorted to violence. The British proposed to partition 'Palestine' in 1937, into a very small Jewish State and a much larger Arab State. The Arab leadership rejected this offer outright. For them there could be no Jewish State at all.

The second ANZACs and total genocide averted

The plight of all Jewish people in Europe then deteriorated when Germany invaded Poland in 1939, plunging the world into another War. In early 1940 the first of tens of thousands of soldiers from New Zealand and Australia arrived in Egypt and the land of Israel. While persecution of Jewish people intensified in Europe these soldiers fought all over the Eastern Mediterranean endeavouring to stop the combined Italian and German forces from taking control over the region, especially the Suez Canal.

Then in 1942 the Nazi-leadership officially decreed their plan to murder eleven million Jewish people in Europe and surrounding regions – including in the land of Israel and the Middle East. The quest to murder the 700,000 or so Jewish people in the Middle East would be conducted together with local collaborators.

Thankfully the attempt upon the lives of the Jewish people in the land of Israel and the Middle East was stopped, due mostly to the Allied victory at the battle of El Alamein in Egypt in late 1942. Tens of thousands of Allied forces, including many Australians and New Zealanders, were involved in this strategic victory.⁶ The Jewish people living in the Middle East were physically saved. Unfortunately, however, some six million Jewish people were murdered in what became known as the Holocaust.

The State of Israel established – a modern-day miracle

Following the end of the War and with hundreds of thousands of Holocaust survivors desperate to leave Europe, the British closed the gates to 'Palestine'. Ultimately, they relinquished the Mandate to the United Nations, which voted on 29 November 1947

to partition 'Palestine' into a Jewish State and an Arab State. Australia and New Zealand voted for the establishment of both Jewish and Arab States.

While the Jewish leadership accepted this offer, the regional and local Arab leadership refused to accept the United Nations decision. The collective Arab leadership refused the opportunity to form their own sovereign state – preferring instead to destroy the Jewish State.

The outcome of our involvement

There is absolutely no doubt that the soldiers from New Zealand and Australia, the majority of whom were of British heritage, played a pivotal supporting role in this physical restoration of Israel. In these turbulent times, therefore, let us be determined to carry on the legacy of these long ago heroes, lest we forget!

But this physical restoration is but only one part of God's great plan of worldwide redemption. This plan still anticipates the collective nation of Israel accepting Jesus as Redeemer and King – and of Jesus' ultimate return to Jerusalem-Zion, where He will reign over redeemed Israel and over the redeemed of the nations.

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Cover picture. Official surrender ceremony, Jaffa Gate Jerusalem 11 December 1917. From collection of Conrad Schick Library, Christ Church, Jerusalem.

Endnotes

- 1 I am an Australian of part-Aboriginal and mostly British heritage and have numerous family members who served as Australian soldiers, with deaths associated with the Gallipoli, Tobruk and El Alamein battles; and a part-Aboriginal relative who served briefly in France in 1918. I also lived in Israel for twenty-five years as a committed follower of Jesus - the Jewish Messiah. I therefore do not endorse the sentiments in either of these two proclamations.
- 2 My own research and involvement in this period is found in *Anzacs, Empires and Israel's Restoration; Journey to Beersheba; Anzacs & Israel; Gallipoli – The Road to Jerusalem*.
- 3 Deuteronomy 32: 8-9 ; Psalm 104: 5-9 ; Acts 17: 24-26.
- 4 On this occasion one ANZAC unit was involved – the 10th Light Horse Regiment from Western Australia.
- 5 Matthew 24: 30-31; Acts 1:6-9; Zechariah 9: 3-4a.
- 6 My own research on this subject is found in: *El Alamein – Halting an Impending Holocaust in the Middle East* (Mundaring: 2012).

