

A Brief History
of
Aliyah

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“We wept when we remembered Zion”
(Psalm 137:1)

Aliyah is a Hebrew term that means “to ascend” or “to go up.” It is the generally accepted term for the return of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland in fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. *Aliyah* is not a new idea, nor a coincidence arising from the reformation of the state of Israel in 1948. The Scriptures clearly illustrate that God has an ongoing plan for Israel, and He is committed to them by everlasting covenant. (Genesis 15) His never-ending care for Israel is a sign of His faithfulness and holiness.

When God called Abraham, He told him that He would show him a new land that would belong to him and his generations, swearing by His own Name that this would be so. The Psalmist expresses the matter clearly in Psalm 105.

When the people of Israel entered the Promised Land under Joshua’s leadership, they were told to destroy the heathens who had previously lived there and be separated unto God. Since they failed to do this and began to follow the false gods of other peoples, the consequences were exile. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was destroyed around 720 BC and the ten tribes were exiled. The inhabitants of the Southern Kingdom, Judea, were subjected to two deportations. The first of these took place in the year 597 BC during the first conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. King Jehoiakim, together with the most distinguished men of the land and the most valuable treasures of the Temple and the palace, were taken captive and moved to Babylon (II Kings 24: 1-16) in 597 BC.

From this year, the prophet Ezekiel, who was among the captives, dates his calculations. In fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah 25:11, the southern tribes of Benjamin and Judah, along with some priests and Levites, returned after 70 years in exile. These events are recorded in the books of Ezra and

Nehemiah.

Following their failure to recognize Jesus as Messiah, they were once again dispersed following the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD and the failure of the Second Revolt in 132-35 AD. The exile, known as the Diaspora, was for almost 2,000 years throughout the whole world. God had promised that this dispersion would finally end prior to the return of the Messiah. The Burden of the Major Prophets centers upon the return and is a dominant feature within the other scriptures, ranging from Leviticus to Malachi.

There are at least 141 prophecies concerning this final, irreversible restoration of both the land of Israel and the chosen people to Israel, God's Land, with Jerusalem, God's city, as its eternal capital. Compare, for instance, Jeremiah 33:11, which predicts the restoration of both the land and the people, with Isaiah 43:5-6: *"from the ends of the earth."* Ezekiel 36:24-28 predicts that when the people of Israel are restored to their land they will also be restored spiritually, *"I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all you impurities...I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you ...you will be my people and I will be your God."* See also Deuteronomy 30:1-6 where Moses predicts this dispersion and restoration, as well as Zechariah 10:8.

Isaiah 62:1-5 illustrates how the people are married to the land; Israel the people and Israel the Land belong together.

The exile of the Jews profaned God's Name (Ezekiel 36:20) and for the sake of His own Name, God causes their return (Ezekiel 36:22). In the scripture, names are not voice labels but are descriptions of the character of the person. God is concerned for His reputation, which will only be restored when the people return.

Modern "Replacement" theology asserts that God broke His

relationship with Israel after the Jews refused to accept Jesus as their Messiah and that the Church became “spiritual Israel” to the exclusion of the Jews, who are the natural people of Israel. Such views are not only unbiblical and ignore history, but they are also atheistic in the sense that those holding them do not believe that God’s word is unchanging and that He is capable of fulfilling it!

Paul explains in Romans 9-11 that God has by no means finished with Israel, but rather that He will restore them in the last days. He promises in Romans 11:26 that “*all Israel will be saved.*” He also states that because of their disobedience, we Gentiles have the opportunity to be saved (Romans 11:11) in order to make Israel envious of our relationship with God. Paul further declares in Romans 11 that this restoration will bring a new wave of blessing to the whole world, (v15) “*for if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be, but life from the dead?*” Also v12, “*if their transgression means riches for the world,...how much greater riches will their fullness bring?*”

God also predicted that the Gentiles would have a part in this regathering of the Jewish people (Isaiah 49:22,23), and we believe that Ezra International is one of the channels in this regathering—the *Aliyah*. To make *aliyah* simply means “to go up,” and all pilgrims “go up” to Jerusalem, wherever they come from. Jews making *aliyah* are referred to as *olim*. How wonderful that we should be called to play a part in the regathering of the people to their land in the last days (Isaiah 29:22), for Jesus declares that this restoration is the herald of His coming as the restoration of all things (Acts 3:21).

The Early Movements

From the time of the exile, there has been a yearning in the Jewish heart to return to their God-given ancient homeland, as echoed in Israel’s national anthem, *Ha Tikvah*, which means

“The Hope.” The great Jewish scholars throughout history have supported the dream. The Mishna is a commentary on the Torah that records oral traditions dating from Pharisaic times (536 BC-70 AD) and was compiled around 220 AD by Judah ha Nasi. It rules that: “All may be compelled to go up [make *aliyah*] to the Land of Israel but none may be compelled to leave it.” Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, better known as Nachmanides, made aliyah from Spain in 1267. He commented that it was a commandment to live in the Land.

The Jews began to return to the Land in the late 19th century during a period of intense persecution in Europe. In addition, the period saw two new approaches to the land of Israel--the practical-political Zionism of Theodor Herzl and the cultural Zionism of Achad Ha'am (Asher Ginzberg). There was also a realization that anti-Semitism was an incurable ill worldwide and that that the only safe place for the Jewish people was in their ancient homeland.

Traditionally there are three waves of *aliyah* pre-dating the formation of the state in 1948:

The First *Aliyah* was, in the main, a direct response to persecution in Tsarist Russia, with a small number of *olim* also coming from Yemen. In all, around 35,000 *olim* reached the Land. The participants in the First *Aliyah* defined their goal as the political, national, and spiritual resurrection of the Jewish people in Palestine. The First *Aliyah* met with considerable difficulties posed by climate, inhospitable terrain, and crippling Turkish taxes. The *olim* were helped considerably by Edmund de Rothschild, a wealthy Jewish banker from France who financed communities for olim returning to the Land. He assisted with the purchase of land and the setting up of *moshavim*, which are industrial communities with residential facilities.

The Second *Aliyah* of around 40,000 persons began in

1904 and continued until 1914. The movement was made up of young idealist immigrants from Russia and Poland, many in the wake of the Kishinev pogrom during Easter in 1903. A pogrom was a violent, organized, quasi-official riot against the Jewish people. Such persecution occurred frequently during the 19th century in Eastern Europe and the Russian Empire.

Members of the Second *Aliyah*, who included modern Israel's first prime minister David Ben-Gurion, founded a number of *kibbutzim* or communal farms. They also formed the first Jewish self-defense organization, *Ha Shomer*. The Second *Aliyah* transformed Palestine. Its members founded Tel Aviv, which became the largest city in the land. They were also responsible for reviving Hebrew as a modern language. They established labor organizations and created the first long-lasting framework for the future establishment of the State of Israel.

The Third *Aliyah* was inspired by more clearly defined Zionist motives between the years 1919 and 1923. The Third *Aliyah* followed the issuing of two important documents. First was the Balfour Declaration, a personal note written in 1917 by British Foreign Secretary David Balfour to Baron Walter Rothschild, a leader of Britain's Jewish community. The note expressed the British government's favorability toward Jewish settlement in the Land. The second document was the San Remo Convention, issued by Allied nations at the end of World War I. The agreement established the British Mandate, giving Britain governance over what is today Israel and Jordan. It also provided for Jewish immigration to the British Mandate. Both of these documents may be considered the founding charters of the modern state.

The Third *Aliyah* was heralded by the arrival of the merchant ship *Roselan* in Yaffo (Jaffa) on 19 December 1919, carrying 650 new immigrants. In all 35,000 new immigrants arrived in Israel during the Third *Aliyah*, mainly from Eastern European countries. Approximately 45% came from Russia,

31% from Poland, 5% from Romania and 3% from Lithuania. The distinctive element of the Third *Aliyah* was the young pioneers who arrived in the country with a burning desire to rebuild the Land.

The Fourth *Aliyah* is of particular interest as it took place in the reshaping of Europe and the Middle East following the provisions of various treaties at the end of World War I. It witnessed the doubling of the amounts of those seeking to return, numbering around 80,000 persons, 88% from Eastern Europe and the remaining 22% from Asia, mainly Yemen and Iraq. The Fourth *Aliyah* saw middle-class families moving from Germany in the turmoil of political reconstruction.

It is interesting to note that *aliyah* prior to the foundation of the state was a hard option. The success rate of *olim* was varied and at times a good number (more than 10%) returned to the countries from which they emigrated. There was little support for these *olim* apart from personal philanthropy. Modern-day *aliyah*, by comparison, has fewer numbers of *olim* returning to their countries of origin, and those who make *aliyah* are supported by the state of Israel.

Post-War *Aliyah* In 1948 the nation was reborn and David Ben-Gurion called upon Jewish communities worldwide to return and rebuild the land. The Israeli government undertook a vigorous program of return. In 1949, the Imam of Yemen agreed to let 45,000 of the 46,000 Jews in his country leave. Operation Magic Carpet is a better known name for Operation On Wings of Eagles (*Kanfei Nesharim*), that took place between June 1949 and September 1950, the people being carried by British and American transport planes that made some 380 flights from Aden.

In the midst of political turmoil between 1949 and 1952, about 130,000 Jewish people made their way from Iraq to Israel. Many of these *olim* were encouraged by the *Halutz*, or “pio-

neer,” movement. Others came from Cyprus and Iran through Operation Ezra and Operation Nehemiah between 1950 and 1952.

The Ethiopian Jews began arriving in Israel as a community between November 24, 1984, and January 3, 1985, as part of a special mobilization known as Operation Moses, or *Meez-vah Moshe* in Hebrew. Some 14,500 Ethiopian Jews arrived first in Sudan after undergoing the most severe conditions. They spent days walking from their villages in Ethiopia, with a number of them dying in the process. From Sudan, they were flown initially to Belgium, then to Israel by Israeli aircraft. In 1991, Operation Solomon transported more than 11,000 additional Ethiopian Jews from Addis Ababa to Israel.

Christian-Sponsored *Aliyah*

Christian-sponsored *aliyah*, or at least the vision for it, dates back to the early 19th century. Christian Zionists in Britain, including Lewis Way, Lord Ashley Shaftesbury, William Wilberforce, and others with similar beliefs, began to understand the biblical plan for the return of the Jewish people, focusing on this subject in their teachings. During the 1830s, Scottish clergymen Andrew Bonar and Murray McCheyne visited the Holy Land and issued pamphlets calling upon the church to recognize God’s plan for the Jewish people.

During this period the novelist George Elliot, whose real name was Mary-Anne Crossley, wrote the novel *Daniel Deronda*, which may be considered the first Zionist-centered piece of commercial literature.

During the 1980s there was a move back to the scriptures in a number of diverse Christian areas and the whole matter of the Jews’ return to the Land came to the forefront. In this period, there were intercessory prayer journeys in and around the Soviet bloc with the task of breaking the walls of captivity and

releasing the Jewish people to return to their ancient, God-promised homeland. Not only were there prayer initiatives, but various groups formed to prepare for that event, although at the time it seemed impossible... As they say, the rest is history!

Today Christian *aliyah* facilitating agencies give aid to around 75% of Jewish people returning to the Land, working in concert with the Jewish Agency. Among these have been old and young, able-bodied and disabled, the blind and those with child, just as the scriptures predicted in Jeremiah 31:1-8. At the time you read this booklet Christians have helped return at least 200,000 people to the Land and have assisted in areas worldwide where there seemed to be little hope for the Jewish people to return to the land of Israel.

Second Wave of Christian-Sponsored *Aliyah* For its first 20 years, Christian-sponsored *aliyah* concentrated on the lands of the former Soviet Union and its satellites with a few special initiatives. Today the work continues, but with special emphasis on former Soviet Central Asia. Additionally, changing political and economic tensions now require initiatives in Latin America.

Ezra International is in the forefront of assisting with Christian-sponsored *aliyah* in the second wave. We have established a network in Argentina as a primary thrust in the region. We will also answer “Macedonian calls” from other Latin American countries until additional operational centers become a necessity in other South American nations. In Asia, there are substantial Jewish communities in India and China that need help as they return to the land of their forefathers.

Third Wave of Christian-Sponsored *Aliyah* The third wave will be the final thrust in all the countries where *aliyah* has not been a matter of urgency and survival. There has been an upsurge in *aliyah* from Europe and the United States, but it

is still quite small. The day is coming when all Jewish people will need to flee to their ancient homeland from the prosperous countries where at present they feel unchallenged.

The Fourth Wave of Christian *Aliyah* is a “going-up” from among the Gentiles, when the believing remnant from among all the nations goes up to Jerusalem to worship at the Feast of Tabernacles, as is prophesied in Zechariah 14:16.

We at Ezra International are privileged to be called to share in this fulfillment of prophecy.

About the Author

Dr. Frederick Wright and his wife, Maria, have worked with the Jewish people, with emphasis on the return, for 26 years in the former Soviet Union, former Soviet satellites, Ethiopia, and Israel. Author of a number of books and numerous academic articles on Jewish related matters, Fred is considered a pioneer and leading authority in the study of Christian anti-Semitism and post-Auschwitz theology.

About Ezra International

Since its founding in 1995, Ezra International has assisted more than 70,000 Jewish people from across the globe return to Israel, the land of their forefathers. Ezra International representatives work in Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, Kazakhstan, and other countries of the former Soviet Union, South America, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States.

Ezra International remains committed to assisting the Jewish people in agreement with the promises and prophecies of the Scriptures (Isaiah 49:22, Jeremiah 30:3, Isaiah 14:1, Jeremiah 3:18, Ezekiel 28:25, Ezekiel 37:21).

For more information about Ezra International, please visit our Website, **www.ezrainternational.org**

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