

## THE FATHER OF ZIONISM: WILLIAM E. BLACKSTONE?

JONATHAN MOORHEAD\*

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, William E. Blackstone (1841–1935) made tremendous social and religious contributions as an evangelical layman. Unfortunately, this Chicago businessman’s work remains virtually unknown in the twenty-first century. Among his many achievements are writing the most important early book on premillennialism entitled *Jesus is Coming*; being the first Dean of BIOLA; preaching the sermon which influenced A. B. Simpson to establish the Christian Missionary Alliance; founding the Chicago Hebrew Mission (now Life in Messiah International); being the Honorary Commissioner for the Arbitration Memorial which called for an International Court of Justice for warring nations; founding The Jewish Era journal; and serving as the Trustee for the multi-million dollar Milton Stewart Evangelistic Fund. Perhaps his most significant contribution concerns his work on behalf of suffering Jews worldwide. At a time when Jews were seeking relief from oppression, Blackstone petitioned the U.S. President Benjamin Harrison to campaign for their return to Israel. The “Blackstone Memorial” was the first petition of its kind, which predated the work of Theodor Herzl’s *Der Judenstaat* (*The Jewish State*). The efforts of Blackstone on behalf of the Jews have resulted in some Jewish groups and even a U.S. Supreme Court Justice to name Blackstone the “Father of Zionism.” The purpose of this article is not to argue for the veracity of this appellation upon Blackstone, but to explain the history of his contribution to Zionism while appreciating his evangelical proclivities.

### I. MOTIVATION FOR ZIONISM

The words of Jürgen Moltmann find no better example than in the life of William E. Blackstone: “From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day.”<sup>1</sup> As an ardent supporter

\* Jonathan Moorhead is an instructor for The Master’s Academy International in Samara, Russia.

<sup>1</sup> *Theology of Hope* (trans. James Leitch; New York: Harper & Row, 1967) 16.

of dispensational premillennialism, Blackstone's contention for a future for national Israel in their ancient homeland, coupled with his belief in the imminent return of Christ, undergirded his every venture.<sup>2</sup>

Although he founded the Chicago Hebrew Mission in 1887 and published several articles, preached numerous sermons, and wrote *Jesus is Coming*, all in support of Zionism, it was not until his return from the Middle East in 1889 that Blackstone began promoting social action on behalf of the international Jewish community. In his diary of his trip to Palestine, Blackstone stated that he became greatly interested in Jeremiah's prophecy of the rebuilding of the city (Jer 31:38–40); that the growth of the city was a "wonderful fulfillment of prophecy"; and that the plentiful rainfall in Palestine was evidence that God was remembering the Land.<sup>3</sup> In addition to Blackstone's personal experiences in Palestine, there were events taking place in Russia that may have contributed to his increased activism on behalf of Zionism. In 1890, the Russian government once again enforced the May Laws of 1881 that prohibited Jews from public and private privileges. In a pitiless prediction of things to come, the head of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, K. Pobednostev, remarked, "One-third of the Jews will convert, one-third will die and one-third will flee the country."<sup>4</sup> On August 20, 1890, the United States House of Representatives passed a resolution requesting the President to inform the House of all news concerning the suffering of Jews in Russia. It is likely that Blackstone's visit to Palestine and the increasing persecution in Russia moved him to act.

## II. THE CONFERENCE ON THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF ISRAEL

Upon Blackstone's return from Palestine, at the age of forty-eight, he organized "The Conference on the Past, Present and Future of Israel" (November 24–25, 1890).<sup>5</sup> The conference featured Jewish rabbis and Christian

<sup>2</sup> Ariel Yaakov notes that Blackstone was "unique among early dispensationalists in America in his attempt to turn the premillennialist hopes concerning the return of the Jews to their land into reality. His efforts toward the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine by means of international consent antedated the rise of political Zionism." He goes on to write, "William Blackstone's activity on behalf of the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine was an outstanding phenomenon among early American dispensationalists. Although dispensationalists favored the idea of the return of the Jews to their land, they usually gave only passive support to the Zionist cause" ("The Zionist and Missionary Activity of William E. Blackstone," in *On Behalf of Israel: American Fundamentalist Attitudes Toward Jews, Judaism, and Zionism 1865–1945* (ed. Jerald C. Brauer and Martin Marty; Brooklyn, NY: Carlson, 1991) 1.55–56, 94).

<sup>3</sup> William and Flora Blackstone, "Our Journal: A Record of Travel in Europe & the Orient" (May 1888–April 1889) 473, 75, 507. I would like to thank the Blackstone family for sharing this unpublished journal with me.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Beizer and Daniel Romanowski, "Russia," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (ed. Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum; 22 vols.; New York: Keter, 2007) 17.536.

<sup>5</sup> The official report of the conference, including papers, is found in *Jew and Gentile: Being a Report of a Conference of Israelites and Christians Regarding Their Mutual Relations and Welfare* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1890).

clergymen as speakers. It was held at the historic First Methodist Episcopal Church in Chicago and was attended by hundreds of auditors. *The Daily Inter Ocean* followed the event and described it as “the most remarkable that has ever been held in this city, and perhaps in the century or in the world. It is typical and significant of the age, and was successful yesterday far beyond the most extravagant hopes of the gentleman to whose efforts the conference is due, William E. Blackstone.”<sup>6</sup> George Magoun describes the origin and nature of the meeting as follows:

Both the inception of the Conference and its impartial and kindly spirit were (primarily) due to Mr. William E. Blackstone of Oak Park, Ill, chairman of committee. From this gentleman’s advertisement of the ‘Report,’ the following is worth copying: ‘It was a new departure as contrasted with the centuries of antipathy and ecclesiastical contention heretofore characterizing these peoples. Having the Old Testament in common, it was conceived that they could meet upon this grand fundamental rock of God’s revelation to man as co-worshippers of one God. Neither Jew nor Gentile was asked to do violence to his convictions, but all were desired to remember the meekness of the Lawgiver and the tenderness of the Author of the Sermon on the Mount.’<sup>7</sup>

From a Christian perspective, the conference was interdenominational and was attended by men of varying eschatological perspectives (E. P. Goodwin, David C. Marquis, H. J. Scott, and J. H. Barrows). Rabbis present were all from the Reformed perspective, and the speakers included Emil G. Hirsch, Bernhard Felsenthal, and Joseph Stolz. Taking into account the individuals involved, Magoun’s opening statement about the conference speaks volumes: “There was nothing more extraordinary about this unique gathering in November in the great Western metropolis than the fact that it took place.”<sup>8</sup>

As a result of the conference, the participants unanimously passed “resolutions of sympathy with the oppressed Jews of Russia,” which read, “The President of the United States is to be petitioned to confer with the Queen of England, the Emperor of Germany, the Sultan of Turkey, the President of the French Republic, and many other rulers of Europe, on the propriety of calling an International Conference to consider the condition of the Jews in modern nations and the possibility of opening a way for their restoration to Palestine.”<sup>9</sup>

Copies of the resolution were sent to the “Czar and other potentates” as an action of solidarity.<sup>10</sup> Impressed with the historical significance of this conference, Magoun writes, “From the standpoint the programme [*sic*] claims place in the pages of OUR DAY as a landmark of reform.”<sup>11</sup> The secular paper *The Daily Inter Ocean* concludes: “Looking at the matter from the stand

<sup>6</sup> *Jew and Gentile* 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 267, n. 1.

<sup>8</sup> “The Chicago Jewish Christian Conference,” *Our Day* 7 (January–June) 266.

<sup>9</sup> Anita Lebeson, “Zionism Comes to Chicago,” in *Early History of Zionism in America* (ed. Isidore S. Meyer, 155–90; New York: American Jewish Historical Society and Theodore Herzl Foundation, 1958) 166.

<sup>10</sup> Mrs. Charles F. Howe, “Mr. Blackstone’s Labors,” *TJE* 1 (January 1892) 15.

<sup>11</sup> Magoun, “Chicago Jewish Christian Conference” 266.

point of abstract reason one would say there was nothing remarkable in such a conference, but in the light of history it is certainly a new departure, quite as worthy of special observation as the burning or glowing bush seen by the lone fugitive from Pharaoh's court as he tended the flocks of his father-in-law."<sup>12</sup> However successful this conference may have been, Blackstone was unsatisfied with its limited action and was "convinced that no amelioration of the condition of these persecuted Jews could thus be affected."<sup>13</sup> Thus was set in motion Blackstone's historical Memorial to President Harrison.

### III. THE BLACKSTONE MEMORIAL

The Blackstone Memorial stands as one of the most glaring lacuna in the history of emerging evangelical fundamentalism. Discontented with the "resolution of sympathy" passed by the Jewish and Christian conference vis-à-vis Jewish suffering in Russia, Blackstone single-handedly took the initiative to pursue other avenues for Jewish support. He decided that involvement of the American government could be used to put pressure on Russia and other countries mistreating the Jews. Consequently, he carefully worded a document suggesting the solution to Jewish persecutions. The Jews would be given the opportunity to return to Palestine, their ancient homeland, where they would be at peace.

1. *Preparation.* Blackstone sent a letter to Secretary of State James G. Blaine in February 1891 to inform him of his ideas concerning Jewish restoration to Palestine. He explained his petition's popular favor, and that it did not antagonize Russia.<sup>14</sup> According to Blackstone, "Blaine evinced personal interest and promised to do whatever he could."<sup>15</sup> Consequently, feeling led by the Holy Spirit to help the Russian Jews, Blackstone drafted "Palestine for the Jews," which became more popularly known as "The Blackstone Memorial." The document read,

What shall be done for the Russian Jews? It is both unwise and useless to undertake to dictate to Russia concerning her internal affairs. The Jews have lived as foreigners in her dominions for centuries, and she fully believes that they are a burden upon her resources and prejudicial to the welfare of her peasant population, and will not allow them to remain. She is determined that they must go. Hence, like the Sephardim of Spain, these Ashkenazim must emigrate. But where shall 2,000,000 of such poor people go? Europe is crowded and has no room for more peasant population. Shall they come to America? This will be a tremendous expense, and require years.

Why not give Palestine back to them again? According to God's distribution of nations it is their home; an inalienable possession from which they were expelled by force. Under their cultivation it was a remarkably fruitful land, sus-

<sup>12</sup> *Daily Inter Ocean.*

<sup>13</sup> Mrs. Charles F. Howe, "Mr. Blackstone's Labors," *TJE* 1 (January 1892) 15.

<sup>14</sup> Blackstone to James G. Blaine; February 1891, Billy Graham Archive Center (BGAC) Box 7, Folder 2.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted without original reference in Marnin Feinstein, "The Blackstone Memorial," in *American Zionism, 1884-1904* (New York: Herzl, 1965) 57.

taining millions of Israelites, who industriously tilled its hillsides and valleys. They were agriculturists and producers as well as a nation of great commercial importance; the center of civilization and religion.

Why shall not the powers, which, under the treaty of Berlin in 1878, gave Bulgaria to Bulgarians and Servia to the Servians now give Palestine back to the Jews? These provinces, as well as Roumania, Montenegro and Greece were wrested from the Turks and given to their natural owners. Does not Palestine as rightfully belong to the Jews? It is said that rains are increasing, and there are many evidences that the Land is recovering its ancient fertility. If they could have autonomy in government, the Jews of the world would rally to transport and establish their suffering brethren in their time honored habitation. For over seventeen centuries they have patiently waited for such a privileged opportunity. They have not become agriculturists elsewhere, because they believed they were mere sojourners in the various nations, and were yet to return to Palestine and till their own land. Whatever vested rights by possession, may have accrued to Turkey, can easily be compensated, possibly by the Jews assuming an equitable portion of the national debt.

We believe this is an appropriate time for all nations, and especially the Christian nations of Europe, to show kindness to Israel. A million of exiles, by their terrible sufferings, are piteously appealing to our sympathy, justice and humanity. Let us now restore them to the land of which they were so cruelly despoiled by our Roman ancestors.

To this end we respectfully petition His Excellency, Benjamin Harrison, President of the United States, and the Honorable James G. Blaine, Secretary of State, to use their good offices and influence with the Governments of their Imperial Majesties-

Alexander III, Czar of Russia;

Victoria, Queen of Great Britain and Empress of India;

William II, Emperor of Germany;

Francis Joseph, Emperor of Austria-Hungary;

Abdul Hamid II, Sultan of Turkey;

His Royal Majesty, Humbert, King of Italy;

Her Royal Majesty Marie Christiana, Queen Regent of Spain;

And the Government of the Republic of France and with the Governments of Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Portugal, Roumania, Servia, Bulgaria, and Greece, to secure the holding, at an early date, of an International Conference to consider the condition of the Israelites, and their claims to Palestine, as their ancient home; and to promote in all other just and proper ways the alleviation of their suffering condition.<sup>16</sup>

In order to add credibility to the document, Blackstone personally procured the signatures of some of the most significant public figures and organizations in America. This list of the 413 signatures was perhaps the most impressive feature of the document. As Obenzinger writes, "Without doubt, the Blackstone Memorial as an originary [*sic*] document, as an initial, defining production of Zionist discourse, came fully authorized by enormous power."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> William E. Blackstone, "The Blackstone Memorials, 1891 and 1916" (BGAC) Box 6, Folder 2.

<sup>17</sup> Hilton Obenzinger, "In the Shadow of 'God's Sun-Dial': The Construction of American Christian Zionism and the Blackstone Memorial," in *Stanford Electronic Humanities Review* (February 27, 1996).

Virtually every significant public vocation was represented on the Memorial. The names included politicians, bankers, publicists, churchmen, presidents of railroads, rabbis, presidents of educational institutions, and all manner of businessmen. Among the signatories were John D. Rockefeller and J. Pierpont Morgan; Melville W. Fuller, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court; T. B. Reed, Speaker of the House of Representatives; James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore; Hugh J. Grant, Mayor of New York City; Edwin H. Fitler, Mayor of Philadelphia; William McKinley, congressman from Ohio and future President of the United States; Robert R. Hitt, chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs; and editors and publishers of ninety-three newspaper and periodicals. By listing these signatures, Blackstone "launched what might almost be called a movement, and put the leadership of America in every sphere of life on the record in endorsement of his objective."<sup>18</sup> As several commentators on this document have noted, the signatories read like a Who's Who of America in the late nineteenth century. Most of those who signed had no allegiance to Blackstone's eschatological views but were simply responding to a humanitarian crisis. Oscar Solomon Straus, a Minister to Turkey, was impressed with Blackstone's list of signatures and wrote to Blackstone, "Your unselfish devotion and indomitable energy in securing for the petition the representative men of the United States in commerce, finance, politics, in Congress, etc., is deserving of the gratitude of all men, irrespective of race or creed."<sup>19</sup> Taking into account the response to the signatures of the document, it is unlikely that the Memorial would have received the attention it did unless those signatures were affixed to it.

2. *Presentation.* Secretary of State James G. Blaine personally arranged a meeting and introduced Blackstone to President Benjamin Harrison on March 5, 1891 when the Memorial was presented.<sup>20</sup> The reaction of the President was amicable. He received the Memorial "kindly and promised to give it his consideration."<sup>21</sup> While not pushing the premillennial agenda, Blackstone tapped into the underlying religious sensitivities upon which America was founded. In a personal note of persuasion, Blackstone did include a letter to President Harrison and Secretary of State James Blaine, signed only by him.<sup>22</sup> In this letter he was more explicit about his underlying eschatological motives. Blackstone wrote, "[T]here seem to be many evidences to show that we have reached the period in the great roll of centuries, when the everlasting God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is lifting up His hand to the Gentiles (Isa 49:22) to bring His sons and his daughters from far, that he may plant them again in their own land, Ezekiel 34, etc. Not for twenty-four centuries, since the days of Cyrus, King of Persia, has there been offered to any mortal

<sup>18</sup> Rufus Lears, *Fulfillment: The Epic Story of Zionism* (Cleveland: World, 1951) 38.

<sup>19</sup> *American Hebrew* (June 23, 1916). Oscar was the brother of Nathan Straus and part of the family business that controlled the Macy's Department Store.

<sup>20</sup> T. C. Rounds, "The Blackstone Memorial," *TJE* 24 (July 1915) 93.

<sup>21</sup> "The Jews and Palestine," *The Northwestern Christian Advocate* 39 (April 15, 1891).

<sup>22</sup> William E. Blackstone, "The Blackstone Memorials, 1891 and 1916" (BGAC) Box 6, Folder 2, Page 7.

such a privileged opportunity to further the purposes of God concerning His ancient people."<sup>23</sup> His letter concluded with the words of Gen 12:3, "I will bless them that bless thee." Blackstone wanted to make it clear that the political decisions being made were of biblical proportions. Thus, America was in the center of biblical history and a key player in end-time events.

3. *Response.* Because of the notoriety of the Blackstone Memorial, the document was published in several newspapers, which resulted in a firestorm of controversy in the international press. Jewish, Christian, and secular authors debated the pros and cons of Blackstone's proposal. Peter Grose writes, "The Blackstone Memorial, as it was called, is a remarkable document: in its timing, 1891, half a decade before European Jewry heard the call of political Zionism. . . . In public discussion and editorial comment it generated more ferment in turn-of-the-century America than any other program dealing with the Jews and their fate, more even than a book published five years later called *Der Judenstaat* by Theodor Herzl, a mere café-hopping journalist in Paris and Vienna at the time Blackstone was holding forth."<sup>24</sup> Media that covered the release of the Memorial were *The New York Times*, *The New York Sun*, the *Boston Herald*, *HaPisga*, *American Hebrew*, *American Israelite*, *Menorah*, *Jewish Messenger*, *Jewish Voice*, *Chicago Israelite*, *Reform Advocate*, *Christian at Work*, *Northwestern Christian Advocate*, *Christian Register*, *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter*, *Our Day*, and others. Blackstone responded to criticism of his plan and offered a diplomatic solution to this "astonishing anomaly—a land without a people, and a people without a land."<sup>25</sup>

4. *Impact.* Because of the vigorousness of the debate, the Blackstone Memorial functioned to awaken the Jewish consciousness toward Jewish suffering and Zionism. Marnin Feinstein, who chronicles this debate better than any other, comments on the impact of the Blackstone Memorial:

Although this Memorial, its author and the sharp reactions to his proposal have sunk into oblivion, the fact remains that no 19th century document dealing with the Jewish question and Palestine, including Herzl's *Jewish State*, evoked as much editorial comment in this country as Blackstone's Memorial.

Whatever Blackstone's primary motives—and these may be justly questioned, his plan provoked heated discussions among Jews and non-Jews, eliciting reactions which, in many ways, foreshadowed the American reception accorded Herzl and his Zionism.<sup>26</sup>

The impact of Blackstone's efforts upon American policy is questionable. The timing of the Memorial was propitious and it may have had an impact upon American awareness of the increasing persecution in Russia. From 1882

<sup>23</sup> Blackstone to Benjamin Harrison and James G. Blaine; n.d. (BGAC) Box 7, Folder 3, Page 6.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Grose, *Israel in the Mind of America* (New York: Schocken, 1984) 37.

<sup>25</sup> William E. Blackstone, "May the United States Intercede for the Jews?," *Our Day* 8 (October 1891) 247.

<sup>26</sup> Marnin Feinstein, "The Blackstone Memorial," in *American Zionism, 1884–1904* (New York: Herzl Press, 1965) 56.

to 1890, the “Pale of Settlement” forced 750,000 Jews out of St. Petersburg. Outcries against this wrongdoing were heard in England on May 23, 1891. Three weeks after Blackstone’s presentation of the Memorial, the Czar of Russia disallowed the presence of Jewish craftsmen in Moscow (March 28, Passover Eve). The following months would see over 30,000 Jews expelled from Moscow under the leadership of the governor, Prince Sergei Alexandrovich, who was the brother of the Czar. Later that year on December 9, 1891, President Harrison discussed the suffering Jews in Russia in his third annual message to Congress:

This government has found occasion to express in a friendly spirit, but with much earnestness, to the Government of the Czar its serious concern because of the harsh measures now being enforced against the Hebrews in Russia. By the revival of anti-Semitic laws, long in abeyance, great numbers of those unfortunate people have been constrained to abandon their homes and leave the Empire by reason of the impossibility of finding subsistence within the pale to which it is sought to confine them. The immigration of these people to the United States – many other countries being closed to them – is largely increasing and is likely to assume proportions which may make it difficult to find homes and employment for them here and to seriously affect the labor market. It is estimated that over 1,000,000 will be forced from Russia within a few years. The Hebrew is never a beggar; he has always kept the law – life by toil – often under severe and oppressive civil restrictions. It is also true that no race, sect, or class has more fully cared for its own than the Hebrew race. But the sudden transfer of such a multitude under conditions that tend to strip them of their small accumulations and to depress their energies and courage is neither good for them nor for us.

The banishment, whether by direct decree or by not less certain indirect methods, of so large a number of men and women is not a local question. A decree to leave one country is in the nature of things an order to enter another – some other. This consideration, as well as the suggestion of humanity, furnishes ample ground for the remonstrances which we have presented to Russia, while our historic friendship for that Government can not fail to give the assurance that our representations are those of a sincere wellwisher.<sup>27</sup>

The President did not specifically mention Blackstone and his Memorial, but the concerns of the Memorial were evident in the message. In the words of Feinstein, “While he did not mention the Blackstone proposal, there is little doubt that his reference to the Jews was a reaction to the appeal by Blackstone.”<sup>28</sup> In addition, Davis writes that the President spoke in the “spirit, if not the actual words of the Blackstone Memorial.”<sup>29</sup> Brodeur comments, “This statement would probably not have come about except for the great publicity generated by the Blackstone Memorial and the sentiment that

<sup>27</sup> James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents* (11 vols.; Washington: Government Printing House, 1817–1898, 1898) 9:188.

<sup>28</sup> Feinstein, “Blackstone Memorial” 79.

<sup>29</sup> Moshe Davis, “American Christian Devotees in the Holy Land,” *Christian Jewish Relations* 20 (Winter 1987) 5.

it brought forth for Jewish conditions in Eastern Europe.<sup>30</sup> Hyman Meites agrees and includes the Memorial's effect upon Russian policy: "Whatever may have been Blackstone's quixotic expectations as to the 'fulfillment of prophecy' through his efforts, his memorial had a direct effect in the repeal by Russia of the expulsion edicts that had driven hundreds of thousands of Russian Jewish refugees to America and elsewhere. And it also started the first Zionist efforts in Chicago and in the United States."<sup>31</sup>

Taking the document at face value, several scholars have recognized that Herzl's Jewish State, written five years after the Blackstone Memorial, contained "elements which are strikingly parallel to those set forth by the Christian, William Blackstone."<sup>32</sup> An editorial in *The American Hebrew* concludes,

It is interesting to note that the memorandum submitted by Mr. Blackstone to the President is in many places strikingly similar to the "Judenstaat," which Dr. Herzl published five years later. Herzl's book resembles it, not only in general character, but often in specific facts and sentences, and it may be that Dr. Herzl knew about the memorandum and used it in his work. . . .

Mr. Blackstone's memorandum may be regarded as the precursor of Dr. Herzl's "Judenstaat," as the source from which Dr. Herzl may have drawn his plans, and as the first step of political Zionism not only here in America, but anywhere in the world.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the similarities in argumentation, there is no correspondence or writings that prove Blackstone's influence on Herzl's Zionism. The first known interaction between the two men was when Blackstone sent a marked Bible to Herzl after the first Zionist congress of 1897.<sup>34</sup>

Blackstone would continue to write future presidents such as Grover Cleveland in regard to the Jews with mixed results. He presented revised editions of his Memorial to President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903 and privately through Zionist acquaintances to President Woodrow Wilson in 1916. He also sent the Memorial to international figures in hopes of garnering a world coalition for Israel.

#### IV. ZIONIST ACQUAINTANCES

The acceptance of Blackstone by influential Jewish leaders is one of the most remarkable stories in the history of American Zionism and Jewish-Christian relations.<sup>35</sup> His rapport with influential men such as U.S. Supreme

<sup>30</sup> David Brodeur, "Christians in the Zionist Camp: Blackstone and Hechler," *Faith and Thought* 100 (1972–1973) 294.

<sup>31</sup> Hyman Meites, "The First Great Russian Influx: 1881–1891," in *History of the Jews of Chicago* (Chicago: Wellington, n.d.) 166.

<sup>32</sup> Feinstein, "Blackstone Memorial" 60. In his work, Ariel notes the similarities and differences between the works of Blackstone and Herzl. Ariel, "Zionist and Missionary Activity of William E. Blackstone" 74.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in "A Historical Zionist Document," *TJE* 25 (July 1916) 93–95.

<sup>34</sup> At one time this Bible was on public display at the Herzl Museum, at Mt. Herzl in Jerusalem.

<sup>35</sup> Ariel comments, "Blackstone was one of the least prejudiced against Jews among early dispensationalists . . . [he] was a man with an easy and friendly disposition . . . [he] went out of

Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis,<sup>36</sup> Stephen Wise,<sup>37</sup> Jacob de Haas,<sup>38</sup> and Nathan Straus<sup>39</sup> was not only political but characterized by personal warmth.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps no other Christian leader maintained such intimate and respected friendship with the Jews as did Blackstone. Louis Brandeis and Nathan Straus agreed that Blackstone was the “Father of Zionism” because his work predated that of Theodor Herzl’s *Der Judenstaat* (1896) by five years, and the first Zionist congress by six years.<sup>41</sup> In the words of Brandeis, “that document, ante-dating as it did Theodore Herzl’s own participation in the Zionist movement, is destined to become of historical significance.”<sup>42</sup> Nathan Straus wrote, “Mr. Brandeis is perfectly infatuated with the work you have done along the lines of Zionism. It would have done your heart good to have heard him assert what a valuable contribution to the cause your document is. In fact he agrees with me that you are the father of Zionism, as your work antedates Herzl.”<sup>43</sup> Commenting further on Brandeis’s impression of Blackstone, Straus wrote, “I never heard any man praise another’s work more than

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his way to try to fight anti-Semitic propaganda” and “Blackstone was one of the few missionaries whom the Jews did not reject and despise. Zionist leaders in America kept close contacts with him” (Ariel, *On Behalf of Israel* 63).

<sup>36</sup> Louis D. Brandeis was particularly close to President Wilson and served as the chairman of the Provisional Executive Committee for General Zionist Affairs until his appointment as Supreme Court Justice on July 21, 1916. Some of Brandeis’s letters to and about Blackstone may be found in Brandeis, *Letters of Louis D. Brandeis* Volume IV (1916–1921): Mr. Justice Brandeis, 167, 96, 271, 78, 89, 90, 96, 327.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen Wise was a prominent New York rabbi who succeeded Brandeis as the chairman of the Provisional Executive Committee for General Zionist Affairs.

<sup>38</sup> Jacob de Haas was Secretary of the Provisional Executive Committee for General Zionist Affairs and the influence that caused Justice Louis Brandeis to accept Zionism in 1912.

<sup>39</sup> Nathan Straus was the owner of R. H. Macy and very involved in the Zionist movement. He was a prominent New York businessman and philanthropist. The modern city of Netanya, Israel is named after him.

<sup>40</sup> An interesting chapter in the relationship of Blackstone and Brandeis is the fact that Blackstone requested Brandeis to keep his valuables in light of the impending Rapture of the Church. Brandeis responded that he would be “glad to comply” with this request (Brandeis to Blackstone; April 25, 1917 [BGAC] Box 8, Folder 2, Page 1).

<sup>41</sup> One author writes that Blackstone was “not only [to be considered] as a friend of the Jews, but as a pioneer Zionist” (Reuben Fink, *America and Palestine* [ed. Moshe Davis; New York: Arno, 1977] 23. Brodeur agrees, “Zionist historians Barbara Tuchman and Howard Morley Sachar, Walter Laqueur, and a host of others, are quite wrong when they insist that Theodor Herzl was the founder of the Zionist Movement. It was William Blackstone. The Chicago petitioner could not even be likened to John the Baptist preparing the way for the Christ. He was not an intermediary, but made frontal assaults on four U.S. administrations with the insistence that America support a Jewish state in Palestine. Theodor Herzl arrived just in time to collect part of the debt! And he died, unfortunately, before he could savour [*sic*] any of the glory” (*Christians and Zionism: A Judeo-Christian History of Zionism* [Baltimore: David D. Brodeur, 1980] 148).

<sup>42</sup> Louis Brandeis to Blackstone; May 28, 1916 (BGAC) Box 8, Folder 2, Page 1.

<sup>43</sup> Nathan Straus to Blackstone; May 8, 1916 (BGAC) Box 7, Folder 6, Page 3. Another author commented, “Zionism humanly speaking owes its origin not primarily in the Jewish fold, but in the efforts of a Christian, one whom we all respect, and who has been a great friend of Jewish Missions, William E. Blackstone” (“Winning the Jews to Christ: Addresses Given at the First Annual Conference of the Christian Mission to Israel at Winona Lake, Indiana July 27–29, 1919” [*The Christian Mission to Israel*, 1919] 37).

he did yours."<sup>44</sup> It is widely recognized that the Zionists "treated Blackstone as a desired and honored friend."<sup>45</sup> Merkley notes, "In his own lifetime, Blackstone was honored by official Zionists more than any other American Christian friend."<sup>46</sup>

The casual observer may surmise that Blackstone's unabashed dispensationalism would cause Brandeis to shy away from public contact with him. However, the opposite was the case. In 1916, Brandeis invited Blackstone to speak at a Zionist meeting in Philadelphia (July 2–5).<sup>47</sup> Blackstone described the event to Robert Speer as follows:

I was invited by Judge Brandeis to attend the Jewish Zionist Congress in Philadelphia in July last, where I was given a very cordial reception, and requested to speak at two of their meetings. The last one being held in the Metropolitan Opera House, crowded with over four thousand Jewish people.

It was wonderful to see how intently they listened to my plain statement that true Zionism was founded upon the plan, the purpose and the fiat of the eternal and ever-living God, as stated in the prophecies in His Holy Word. And I then quoted to them from the Scriptures, God's great and mighty promise that if any of them were driven out unto the utmost parts under heaven, "From thence will I fetch them and plant them in their own land, and do better with them than at the beginning; their rulers shall be of themselves, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land, which I have given them, saith the Lord God almighty."

You could have heard a pin drop in the audience, as I went on to say, "But this is not coming with ease, but through the greatest of affliction. Terrible as are the present conditions with seven hundred thousand Jews in the armies of Europe, fighting each other, more intense trouble is coming, as stated by the Prophet Jeremiah, thirtieth chapter: 'Why do I see every man's hands on his loins, like a woman in travail with child, it is the day of Jacob's trouble, and there is none like it.' Then I said there would be no hope, save for the next sentence. 'But they shall be delivered out of it; a nation to be born in a day.'"

Oh, Brother Speer, if you could have seen those people look at me and heard their acclaim, as I took my seat, I am sure you would believe that God Himself opened the way for me to give such a testimony.<sup>48</sup>

On January 27, 1918, Blackstone was invited to speak at a Zionist meeting at Clune's Auditorium in Los Angeles.<sup>49</sup> According to Blackstone, over 2,500

<sup>44</sup> Nathan Straus to Blackstone; May 16, 1916 (BGAC), Box 7, Folder 6.

<sup>45</sup> Ariel, "A Neglected Chapter in the History of Christian Zionism in America: William E. Blackstone and the Petition of 1916," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 7 (1991) 75.

<sup>46</sup> Merkley, "William Blackstone and the Blackstone Memorial," in *The Politics of Christian Zionism: 1891–1948* (London: Frank Cass, 1998) 60.

<sup>47</sup> Brandeis to Blackstone; June 23, 1916 (BGAC), Box 8, Folder 2. It was here that Brandeis supposedly openly called Blackstone the "Father of Zionism" (Brodeur, *Christians and Zionism* 152). Davis also attests to this, saying that it was a "popular view" ("American Christian Devotees in the Holy Land" 5).

<sup>48</sup> Blackstone to Robert E. Speer; December 12, 1916 (BGAC) Box 8, Folder 4, Page 2.

<sup>49</sup> The invitation to Blackstone requested that he sit on the platform with the other speakers (Anonymous invitation to Blackstone; n.d. [BGAC] Box 3, Folder 9). Merkley writes of the 1918 meeting, "It is an extraordinary testimony to the respect that Blackstone's name and work had won among the Zionists that the assembly on that occasion sat courteously before him while he

people were turned away because of the enormous crowds.<sup>50</sup> This meeting is all the more remarkable because of Blackstone's address and the response from the audience. In one of his most memorable speeches, Blackstone informed the audience that there were only three courses open to every Jew, and that God's plan for them was their repentance and conversion to Christianity.

These Jewish leaders continued to work with Blackstone, particularly with the preparation of the 1916 edition of the Memorial. The endorsement of denominational bodies was an addition to the 1916 Memorial that was more effective than individual names. Of particular importance was gaining the support of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. The Zionists knew that President Wilson was the son of a Presbyterian minister and so felt that it was essential to receive the denomination's endorsement. W. H. Roberts of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. wrote that the "petition to the President, in behalf of the Jews, was duly presented" and that the President "acknowledged the note in a very kindly manner."<sup>51</sup> Although this presentation was not public, it is not clear if the Zionists planned the meeting. Regardless, the concern of the President's denomination was not detrimental. Other endorsements came from the Presbyterian Ministerial Association of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Baptist Ministers' Conference, and the Methodist Ministers' Meeting of Southern California. Although not a vital part of the Memorial's revival, Blackstone did pursue individual signatures as he had done in previous Memorials. He garnered the support of eighty-two people in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Ithaca (New York). These endorsements came from men such as Shailer Mathews (University of Chicago), Andrew D. White (President of Cornell University and former ambassador to Russia), Newton W. Thompson (Governor of California), and John Wanamaker (United States Postmaster General).

Although the Memorial of 1916 was never publicly presented because of international conflict, there is no doubt that the President expressed interest in the Memorial and even suggested changes to the document. By November 1917, amazing events began to take place in Israel. The Balfour Declaration, stating Britain's approval of a national home for the Jews in Palestine, was the first event that sent shockwaves around the world. A month later on December 9, the commander of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, General Edmund Allenby, captured Jerusalem from the Ottomans without firing a shot. Zionists were ecstatic that everything was falling into place to allow a Jewish return to Israel.

As with the Blackstone Memorial, a great deal of political posturing was required to determine whether or not the President should endorse the

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delivered a passionate sermon, calling for their repentance and conversion" ("William Blackstone and the Blackstone Memorial" 61). It is reported that Blackstone was called the "Father of Zionism" in this 1918 meeting as well (Joel A. Carpenter, ed., *The Premillennial Second Coming: Two Early Champions* [New York: Garland, 1988] 7).

<sup>50</sup> Blackstone to Justice Brandeis; February 8, 1918 (BGAC) Box 8, Folder 2; Blackstone, "A Word to Zionists," *TJE* 27 (April 1918) 44–46.

<sup>51</sup> W. H. Roberts to John Willis Baer; August 28, 1916 (BGAC) Box 8, Folder 3.

Balfour Declaration. A letter stating Wilson's approval of the document was not sent to Stephen Wise until August 31, 1918. Despite expressing his satisfaction that the British Government was aiding the Jews through the Balfour Declaration, President Wilson did not give his full public endorsement until after the war. The worth of that declaration of endorsement is seen in Merkley's words, "Without that declaration, most scholars agree, the British Cabinet would never have adopted the Balfour Declaration."<sup>52</sup>

As a figure in the emerging evangelical fundamentalist movement, it must be acknowledged that Blackstone played a unique role in American politics on behalf of political Zionism. It is significant that Blackstone and the Zionist party were influencing Wilson for over a year prior to the release of the Balfour Declaration. While it is impossible to know the extent to which the Memorial played in Wilson's decision to endorse the Balfour Declaration, there is no doubt that he carefully considered the document and entertained figures from the Zionist movement. Merkley writes, "While it would be reckless to claim that we can trace a clear line of cause and effect from Blackstone's Memorial of 1891 to the Creation of the State of Israel in 1948, it is not at all far-fetched to say that the Memorial is the place to go to find the clearest expression of the motivation that won President Woodrow Wilson, and which would continue to be the surest, the most constant source of American Christian Zionism."<sup>53</sup> Regardless of his influence, Blackstone considered the American endorsement of the Balfour Declaration to be the zenith of his efforts. Unfortunately, the international flavor of the Blackstone Memorial was unsavory to the British, who were taking a lead role in the oversight of Palestine. Consequently, despite the tireless efforts by Blackstone to formally present the Memorial to President Wilson, the event never took place. In retrospect, this was probably a detriment to the Jews because of the eventual failure of Britain to uphold the Balfour Declaration.

## V. CONCLUSION

The Blackstone Memorial is one of the most remarkable historical documents in American Zionist history. At the time of its appearance, it was more than just a document; it was a practical step toward the realization of the ideal of Zionism. As a result, American Zionism may count its existence from the day on which the document was conceived. Jewish and Christian scholars who have dubbed Blackstone as the "Father of Zionism" have confirmed his exceptional role in the movement.

Despite Blackstone's exceptional contributions to Zionism, "Historians of the Zionist movement have rarely been aware of his efforts and contributions."<sup>54</sup> This ignorance in the history of premillennialism is all the more

<sup>52</sup> Merkley, "Son of the Manse" 92.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Ariel, "Neglected Chapter in the History of Christian Zionism in America" 72–73. This is true for his contributions to the premillennial movement. Historian George Marsden writes, "Jesus is Coming . . . was the most popular book associated with the [premillennial] movement through World

baffling since “William Blackstone’s petitions were the earliest examples of a dispensationalist attempt to influence the American government to support the Zionist cause.”<sup>55</sup> Not only was the Memorial the earliest attempt by a dispensationalist to influence the American government toward Zionism, it also “may justly be considered as marking the first real instance of political Zionist action in this country.”<sup>56</sup> In addition, the Memorial of 1916 was a key tool of the Zionists to persuade President Wilson to accept the Balfour Declaration. Ariel writes, “Blackstone’s initiative [of 1916] is a neglected chapter in this history of both American Zionism and American Christian support for Jewish restoration.”<sup>57</sup> Blackstone stands as a highlight in the evangelical tradition of one who maintained his conservative theology with tact, enjoyed genuine relationships outside of evangelicalism, and displayed his beliefs in works, not words alone.

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War I” (*Fundamentalism and American Culture* 238). However, Blackstone remains anonymous to most in the present-day premillennial movement. In fact, despite these accolades, Blackstone is not included in the *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* (Mal Couch, *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996]).

<sup>55</sup> Ariel, “Neglected Chapter in the History of Christian Zionism in America” 79.

<sup>56</sup> Abraham Duker, “Reverend William Blackstone – Zionist,” *The New Palestine* 31 (March 7, 1941) 9.

<sup>57</sup> Ariel, “Neglected Chapter in the History of Christian Zionism in America” 68.