

the final chapter of Deuteronomy was added by Joshua. (Others believe that this applies only to the last eight verses which tell of Moses' death.) Ibn Ezra was also the first critic to suggest that there might be more than one author behind the book of Isaiah. This would explain not only differences in style but also the fact that the first 39 chapters reflect largely the pre-exilic period in Jewish history, 40–55 the exilic period, and 56–66 the post-exilic period. This development of Ibn Ezra's view is generally accepted by biblical scholars today. Whether it is accepted by most Orthodox Jews, however, is another matter. More crucially, Orthodoxy resists any suggestion that the whole Pentateuch was not given to Moses on Sinai. It does not make the distinction, deemed important by the non-Orthodox, between dictation and revelation generally. Orthodox belief is that Moses received the Pentateuch in some non-physical way. There inevitably follows a resistance to biblical criticism of the Pentateuch. That such criticism may become destructive of the Jewish faith is evident in the work of Baruch Spinoza (1632–77). One of the founding fathers of the rational enlightenment, Spinoza had a great influence on western ideas generally, if not on his own Portuguese community in Amsterdam. Questions about biblical authorship led to his denying the whole idea of revelation. Human reason and not God was at work in the Bible. Other major figures in Jewish thought were to engage in this debate, notably Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786), who sought to make the Bible accessible to modern readers by publishing a German translation together with a commentary of scholarly Jewish exegesis. Mendelssohn is regarded as very much the founding father of the *Haskalah* (the Jewish 'Enlightenment'). This, however, did not lead Mendelssohn, a most observant Jew, in the direction of biblical criticism.

Some, especially the Conservative movement (see Chapter 5) which broke with Orthodoxy on this very issue, feel that the logic of 'enlightened' thought means that the Pentateuch must have been received over many centuries. In a much publicised article in 1995, any Jew who denied that Moses received the Torah directly from God on Sinai was described by Britain's Chief Rabbi as having 'severed links with the faith of his ancestors'. Reform and Liberal retaliated, rightly or wrongly, that the Chief Rabbi's definition of Jewish belief would exclude at least 90 per cent of Anglo-Jewry. In this figure, they were including many Jews with Orthodox synagogue affiliation. It must be remembered, however, that under the umbrella of

Orthodoxy come many who, in both belief and practice, differ from their fellow-Orthodox. There is, however, an Orthodox perspective which finds any accommodation to the modern world whatsoever to be incompatible with the Jewish faith. From this (so-called 'Ultra-Orthodox') standpoint, modern Orthodoxy, whether represented by nineteenth century Hirsch or twenty-first century Sacks, is seen not as too traditional but as not traditional enough.

Ultra-Orthodoxy

'Ultra-Orthodox' is another label which is used by some Jews to denote those of a different (and, it is often implied, mistaken) stance. Certainly, those to whom the term is applied would not describe themselves as such. They are simply observant or traditional. Indeed, one difficulty with the terms for different Jewish movements is that the members of the different movements all see themselves as expressing the essence of what Judaism is. So, as we shall see in the next chapter, the Reform movement stresses the evolutionary nature of halakhic Judaism and claims to be in line with it. Those we are here considering under the heading of 'Ultra-Orthodoxy' demonstrate better than any other Jewish grouping the inadequacy not only of labels but of giving out, by these labels, mistaken impressions and information to those seeking to understand them.

Hasidism

In the first place, Ultra-Orthodoxy is not a homogeneous group. There are two major strands. The first is the Lithuanian tradition which stresses talmudic study in the yeshivah (or academy as described in Chapter 8). The second also stresses the Torah but in combination with what might be described as a mystical approach. This movement is known as 'Hasidism' (often transliterated Chasidism), from the Hebrew *hasid* ('pious', plural *hasidim*). The term 'hasid' had been used of devout Jews who in the second century BCE resisted opposition to their faith, but the Hasidic movement was one not so much of resistance but of revival. Its setting was eastern Europe in the eighteenth century CE, especially Poland and Lithuania and its appeal was to the oppressed Jewish peasants in these lands. It was revivalist in that it sought to deepen devotion, to offer an intimacy with the divine, through joyous expression, especially song and dance.

(Some Hasidic melodies are profoundly moving and it is remarkable how even the slow ones rouse the desire to dance.) Their rabbis, known as *rebbe*s, were charismatic figures who denigrated scholarship that lacked spirituality. The first, and thus the founder of the movement, was Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer. Given the title *Baal Shem Tov* ('Master of the Good Name', the name being that of God), he was known by the acronym 'the Besht'. He was a popular healer and his leadership passed to a succession of holy men known as *zaddikim* ('righteous ones', singular *zaddik*). Each *zaddik* carried authority by virtue of his closeness to God.

This marked a distinct shift from the traditional leadership of the rabbis whose authority lay solely in their scholarship. There consequently grew up a counter-movement, whose members were called the *Mitnagdim* ('opponents'). Its leader was Elijah ben Solomon Zalman of the Lithuanian city of Vilnius who, because of his great learning, was afforded the title (the Vilna) Gaon. He also was a master of the mystical writings of the *Kabbalah* ('Tradition') but he read it differently from the Hasidim, who drew on other sources of inspiration besides learning. Mysticism is not an easily accessible topic and is certainly not essential to a book which is designed to explain the thinking behind the main expressions of Jewish life today. Nonetheless, different forms of it have long influenced Jewish movements and individuals, and not only in Ultra-Orthodoxy.

Hasidic Jews expect their rabbis to be men of transcendent spiritual attainment, from which source they derive their inspiration as leaders. From this mystical tradition, however, they are to derive a way of living which is for the ordinary Jew and not just the leader. The revivalist element of eighteenth-century Hasidism is seen clearly in the unusual missionary outreach of a particular Hasidic group, known as Lubavitcher (from the Russian town of Lubavitch) or Habad (from the Hebrew words for 'wisdom, understanding, and knowledge') Hasidim. The Lubavitch movement stresses both Talmud and Kabbalah. It is unusual in its contact with the outside world, particularly in its educational centres and programmes. Eventually too in eastern Europe, a compromise was found between the Hasidim who emphasized mystical books and practices such as ecstasy, visions, and miracles and the Mitnagdim who emphasized rabbinic learning and piety. The breadth of Judaism and its capacity to absorb new emphases and expressions is thus demonstrated by the Hasidic movement which has proved to have the power to inspire study and

observance of the Torah. A movement of considerable originality in the eighteenth century – regarded even as heretical – Hasidism has come by the twentieth century to constitute a bulwark of Orthodoxy. It is represented in large numbers in Agudat Israel, for example, one of the most influential and important organizations within contemporary Orthodoxy encompassing Jews right across the Orthodox spectrum, including the Lithuanian community.

Orthodox affiliation today

Considering the long pedigree of Orthodox Judaism, it is perhaps surprising how small a percentage are affiliated to it in the country with the largest Jewish population in the world, namely the United States. The figure is 9 per cent, though it is growing into a steady stream, especially of young people moving away from their more radical home backgrounds. The second largest centre of Judaism, namely Israel, is unique in the complexity of its immigration. Specific attention will need to be given to it in Chapter 17. Suffice it to say here that, although Orthodoxy has considerable power in Israel, it does not represent the majority of the Jewish population. In Britain the figure is nearer to what one would expect, with approaching half of British Jews being affiliated to the United Synagogue. (The figure given by the Board of Deputies of British Jews in 2002 was 57,000 households.) This is a federation of Ashkenazi synagogues in London, established in 1870 and authorised by Act of Parliament. It appoints the Chief Rabbi and maintains the London *Bet Din* (Jewish Law Court), the importance of which will be discussed in Chapter 9. It is claimed that another 25 per cent of British Jews call themselves Orthodox, some being affiliated to Orthodox synagogues other than those belonging to the United Synagogue. (For instance, in 2002, 6,500 households belonged to the Union of Orthodox congregations and 3,000 to Sefardi congregations.) But it has to be remembered that this 'Orthodoxy' covers a very wide spectrum of observance. Some would describe themselves as Orthodox simply in the sense of not being Reform or because their family is or was Orthodox. (It should also be noted that 25 per cent of British Jews are not synagogue members.) This sometimes puzzles non-Jews making a genuine attempt to understand. They are told that Orthodox Jews will not mix meat and milk dishes together or drive to the synagogue on the Sabbath and then they find those who do. Are they the exception or are they mistaken in calling themselves Orthodox? The best

assumption to make so far as not giving offence is concerned is that Orthodox Jews do take seriously the observances outlined in the various chapters of this book.

Ultra-Orthodox

Ultra-Orthodox groups represent a small but noticeable minority. Hasidism was carried to the west by the waves of emigration from the 1880s onward and to the United States and Israel (then Palestine) in the aftermath of World War II. Major Hasidic centres (in the 1930s there were several million Hasidim in eastern Europe) were all but wiped out during the Holocaust. In whatever country, they live in very tightly-knit communities, generally excluding the outside world. There is a sizable Hasidic community in Stamford Hill, North London. Together with Lithuanian Orthodox, they exist, for instance, in parts of Manchester, New York and in the area of Jerusalem called 'Meah Shearim'. The Jewish community of Gateshead (Newcastle) proudly boasts its Lithuanian roots.

When newspapers or television present a report about a Jewish matter they often show a picture of a hasid (the fact that the Hasidim do not approve of photographs of themselves does not stop them from being highly photogenic!), whose black garb (continued from medieval Polish society) and earlocks (in obedience to Leviticus 19:27 'You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard') show clearly that he is Jewish. This often applies even when the viewpoint being represented is one at odds with Hasidism, as when they were shown in connection with the establishment of an eruv in north-west London (see Chapter 12). When it comes to practices which non-Jews find difficult to understand, it is the Ultra-Orthodox communities which are likely to be to the fore, simply because they are very observant and in ways which reflect a different age. Their rigorous laws of modesty (derived from the Law Codes), for instance, forbid a man to be alone with any woman except his wife. Even mildly intimate behaviour (such as holding hands) with your wife is considered immodest when other people are present. To ask any other woman even to shake hands is also immodest. A refusal of an Ultra-Orthodox man to shake hands with a woman might be construed as rudeness or rejection by anyone not used to this degree and manner of observance, but it is in no way personal and, as explained, would obtain with any woman except his wife.

05

non-orthodox Judaism

In this chapter you will learn:

- about the development of a movement attempting to reform Judaism
- about the way in which key differences of belief are seen in the respective roles of women
- about other non-Orthodox movements: Conservative and Liberal.

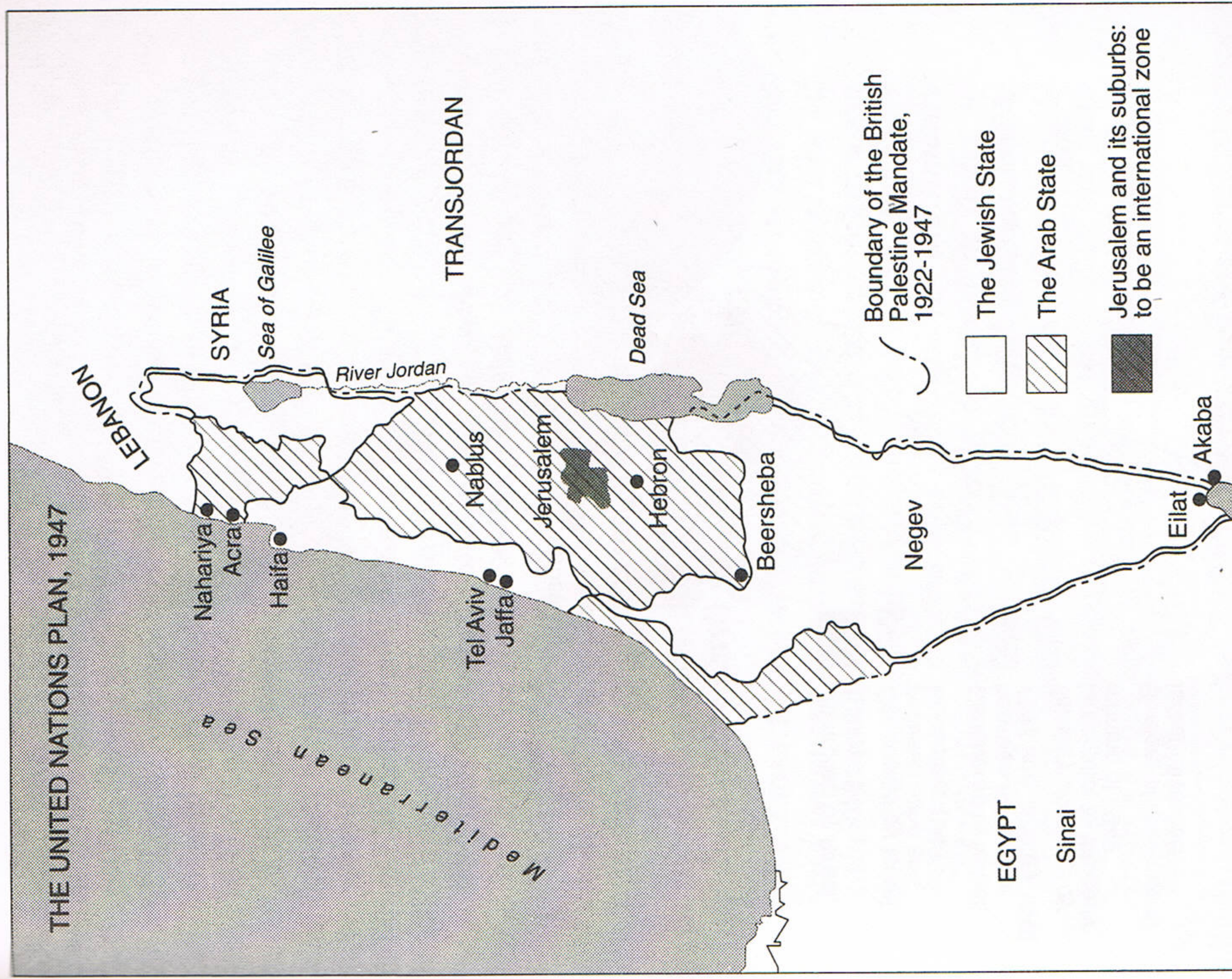
Opposition to Zionism came at first not only from the Socialist Bund and from some Ultra-Orthodox groups, but also from mainstream Orthodoxy and Reform in the USA and in Britain. Abraham Isaac Kook again played a major part in persuading many Orthodox Jews to support Zionism. Reform Jews who were enjoying the fruits of emancipation in western Europe or the USA were initially anxious about being told that their national home was really in Palestine. As we saw in the Pittsburgh Platform quoted in Chapter 5, they did not expect such a return to Palestine. Early Liberal Jewish opposition was voiced by one of Liberalism's founders, Claude Montefiore. Events, however, transformed many attitudes. Pogroms in eastern Europe were followed by attempted annihilation and it was the Holocaust which convinced Progressive Jewry. But for this, Reform Jews, especially in the USA where Zionism was at first seen as a retreat to a particularist view of Israel's role, would have retained their early opposition. For a Reform Jew to become a Zionist was a theological revolution, but this occurred and with it a transformation of the Jewish self-perception.

Religious responses to Zionism

Anti-Zionism

'Religious' responses to Zionism within the State of Israel cover a wide range. At one end of the spectrum are those who reject Zionism altogether. Members of the *Haredi* ('fearful', in the sense of religiously devoted) movement, for example, descended from the ghettos in Europe, believe that the land was given to the people of Israel by God and that it was taken from them because of their unfaithfulness to the covenant. When Jews again obey the Torah, they believe, God and only God will usher in the Messianic Age which will involve the restoration of the land to his people. They strongly oppose the notion that by settling in the territories Jews are in any way precipitating the redemptive age. Rather, they say, this shows an impatience with God's timing and competence to ingather the exiles.

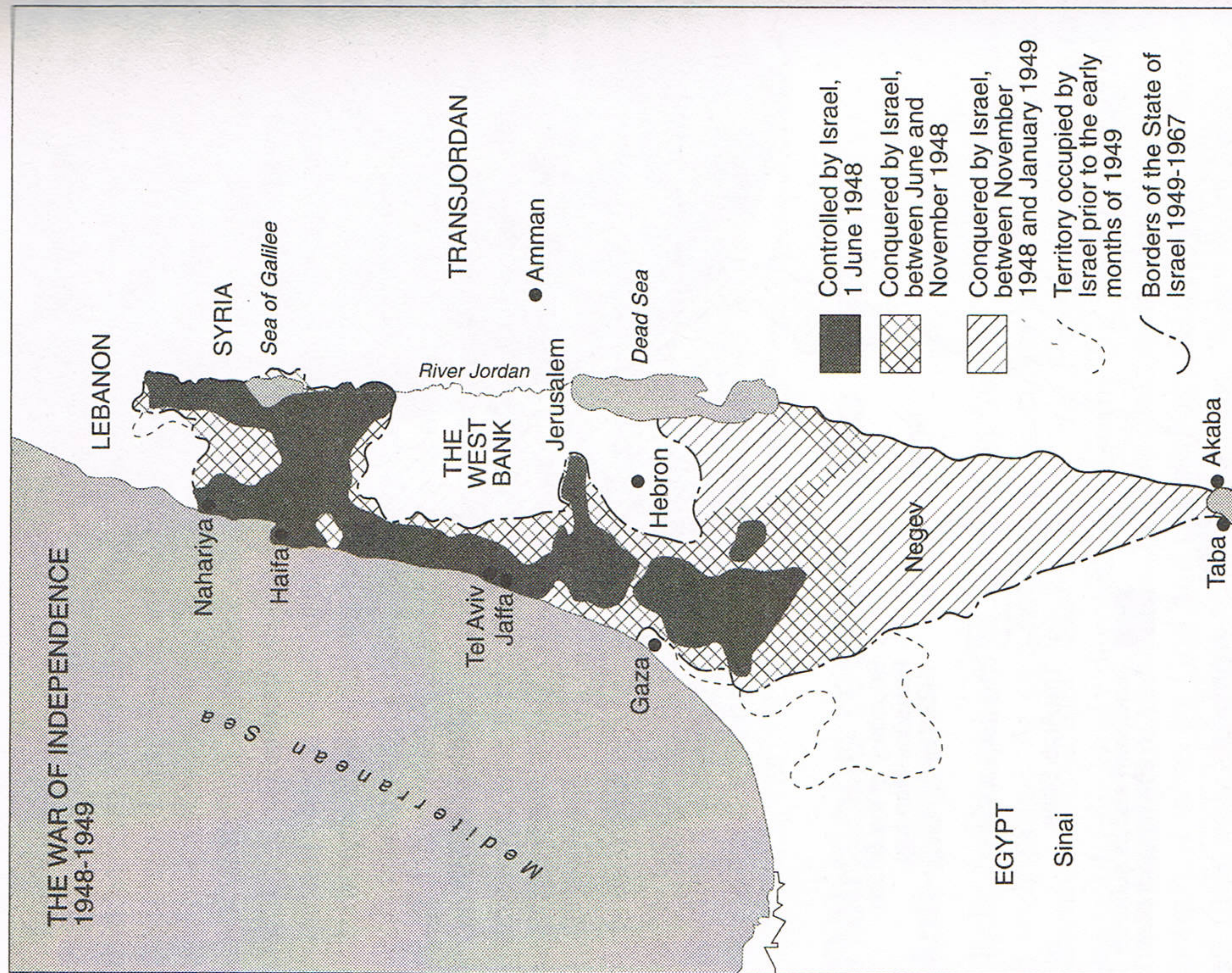
The judgement of their early Zionist critics that, given time, the Haredim would emerge from their mediaeval ghettos and blend into modernity with everyone else was clearly unfounded. The Haredim used to be found only in traditional neighbourhoods such as Mea Shearim in Jerusalem. Today, however, their flourishing communities are to be found throughout Israel. Their



in November 1947, the United Nations General Assembly voted to partition Palestine

the Jews accepted the proposed boundaries for a Jewish State

the Arabs rejected the proposal for an Arab State and attacked Jewish settlements



events surrounding the establishments of the State of Israel

growth in numbers and power of organization led them to win, in the 1996 elections, a record number of seats. Political allegiances – how far they are determined by religious conviction and how far by attitudes to peace with the Arabs – are very complex in Israel. Denying the legitimacy of the State, the Haredim, one might think, would not vote at all. Their main interest in the Knesset, however, is to capture public money to sustain religious schools and yeshivot. This they find to be

consistent with their belief, held even more strongly than by Zionists, that the Jewish people has exclusive God-given rights in its biblical homeland. So, in 1996 by voting for the parties of United Torah Judaism and Shas, the Haredim, combined with the National Religious Party (a distinctly Zionist group), won 23 seats in the Knesset, not far short of the 32 seats of the winning party, Likud. Nonetheless, the 'religious', whether Zionist or anti-Zionist, retain great power by being able to bring down the government which, whatever its colour, always has to perform a delicate balancing act of coalition in order to retain power, given Israel's system of proportional representation. Whilst supported by some Haredim voters, Shas does not reject the legitimacy of Israel itself. Unlike the other Ultra-Orthodox groups in Israel, many of its leaders and most of its supporters have done military service. It deplores Israel's lack of religious observance and in this it stands alongside the anti-Zionist Haredim.

Even more adamantly anti-Zionist is the group Neturei Karta ('Guardians of the City') who say:

The Zionist State denies the Jewish people its essence and uniqueness, transforming it into a nation like all other nations, whose existence is not dependent upon the observance or abnegation of the Torah. The State before us was created as a substitute for the sanctity and Godliness of the People of Israel in order to transform its unique, deeply rooted essence into a territorial, gentile political one. The Zionist State represents total heresy uprooting the soul of our faith from its root and violating the covenant which God made with us in Horev.

The accusation is that Zionism has changed the original concept of the promised land into one of nationalism, with land and language enabling people to be Jews without God.

Contrasting interpretations of religion

At the other end of the religious spectrum are those referred to as extremists or fundamentalists by their opponents. The *Gush Emunim* ('block of the faithful'), for instance, financed some of the first Israeli settlements on the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) and the Gaza Strip after Israel had captured the territories during the 1967 War. They maintain that they have come back to certain areas to promote Jewish life and that this

will hasten the arrival of the Messiah. Somewhere in between the Neturei Karta and the Gush Emunim are those who generally support the government but who do not see it in religious terms. The establishment of the State of Israel is not, in their view, a sign of the Messianic redemption. These groups, which include the Lubavitcher, support settlements and have opposed giving back parts of the West Bank. Indeed, they are particularly vociferous about this, but in what may be called ancient Zionist terms rather than political ones. Besides being concerned about security, their tenacity for the land rests on the religious belief that the land itself is holy, that is, given to Jews by God and, therefore, not theirs to hand over. It is their fierce opposition to handing back land which affords these groups their political clout in Israel, especially with right-wing politicians.

Also in between, but with very different attitudes to the land as God-given, come what may be called mainstream religious Zionists. One of their leaders, Rabbi Maimon (1875–1962) asserted: 'The Hebrew State must be established and conducted in accordance with the principle of the Hebrew Religion, that is, the Torah of Israel. Our conviction is clear: as far as we, the nation, are concerned, religion and state require each other.' The closeness of this perspective to the dominant biblical concept (that being given the land by God requires continued obedience to God) is undeniable. The conviction is that there is something divine, something transcendent in the way in which thousands of exiles have been 'ingathered' but that this entails living in accordance with Israel's moral mandate. This amounts to a reminder that Jews cannot have it both ways. Either the Jewish State is significant religiously in how its people live, or if they choose to live like any other people then their State becomes like that of any other people with no more claim on God's gift or purpose. In a sense, they believe that God's promises are his business. The Jew's business is to live in accordance with his requirements. This constitutes a warning against misusing the Bible as an Israeli charter for unending possession of 'the Greater Israel' with its widest biblical boundaries or indeed of any part of the land. It is no surprise that people of this persuasion have been among the fiercest critics of Israeli policy especially on human rights issues. This is not confined to them, of course. A member of one of the Knesset's entirely political parties is on record as saying:

Israel is duty-bound to preserve the basic Jewish moral lesson: what was hateful to us when we constituted a minority, what is bad for the Jews when they are scattered, will be hateful to us and harmful to us, even today, following our attainment of freedom and independence.

From different religious understandings of what it is to be a Jew, people draw different political applications of how to behave in a Jewish State. The understanding of the religious Zionist is reflected in the Declaration of Independence's reference to 'the prophets of Israel' as teaching what 'freedom, justice, and peace' mean. Yet it is striking that from a land which gave monotheism to the world comes a document in which the word 'God' never appears. The nearest to 'God' is 'faith in the Rock of Israel', a term which, it was judged, would not exclude the atheist, Ben Gurion himself included. The verbal gymnastics are clearly evident, however, when phrases such as 'the Ingathering of the Exiles' are combined with 'the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants'. An Arab who is an Israeli citizen might be excused for wondering how the one could lead to the other, even if, as is pointed out by many Jewish settlers, they have developed the land to mutual benefit – particularly in the provision of water – in a way never attempted by the Arab population.

The whole question of settlements (especially those for immigrants) is still a vexed one. It is hard for Palestinians to take seriously the Israeli government's commitment to a peace process whilst continuing expansion. Why, they ask, have scores of settlements been built on disputed territory? Successive Israeli governments have been ambiguous in their attitudes, sometimes with pressure from the USA to halt settlements, yet between 1982–1992 there was a ten-fold increase. The Labour Government elected in 1999 drastically reduced budgets for settlements, but the Likud government of 2001 reversed this decision.

Identity in a Jewish State

As Israel approached 50 in 1998, much time was devoted in the world's media to an assessment of its birth and anniversary. A former member of the Knesset and a leader of the Israeli Peace Block, Gush Shalom, wrote: