

# **Who Owns the Holy Land?**

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### **(1) The Jewish Claim.**

When this series of lectures was planned we had no idea they would be delivered in the aftermath of the horrendous acts of terrorism which befell the United States on September 11. Yet I have not been wholly surprised by that shocking event. My fear of what might happen as a consequence of the general unrest in the Middle East, and of the Palestinian intifada against Israel in particular, prompted me to write an article for the Otago Daily Times early this year. There I wrote,

‘The escalating violence between Israel and the Palestinians has the potential to ignite a much larger conflict. The Holy Land is sacred to the three monotheistic faiths and is the meeting place between the Christian West and the Islamic Middle East. Conflict there can all too easily set the West on a collision course with the Islamic world, of which the gulf war with Iraq was but a forerunner. One has only to spend a little time in some Islamic countries to find out how much the West in general, and the USA in particular, is distrusted and even hated by many in the Islamic world’.

Over the last thirty-five years I have visited all the Middle Eastern countries from Egypt to Iran, some of them many times. In my earlier academic career it was my responsibility, for 16 years, to study and teach the history of the ancient Middle East over the four thousand years which preceded the Christian era. With this background I shall be trying in these lectures to look at the conflict in the Holy Land in the widest possible context, both historical and geographical. The Holy Land has probably witnessed more violent conflict in the last four thousand years than any other spot in the whole world.

The modern period of destabilization of the Middle East may be said to have begun with the Napoleonic wars. Since that time the Western imperial powers, Britain, France, Germany and Russia, and more recently the United States, have vied with one another either to conquer or to control that area of the world. The victory of the Allied powers over Germany and Turkey in 1918 left most of the Middle East in the power of

the West. Even Turkey, though remaining free, went through a Western-style revolution.

### **Islamic world stakes its political independence**

The following decades saw the resurgence of the Islamic world. This had actually begun in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the pan-Islamic movement initiated by the charismatic figure known as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-97). He was known as ‘the Afghan’ but was actually an Iranian. He advocated widespread social reforms, which would not only modernize the Islamic world but also lead to its re-unification. However, it was not until after World War I, with the collapse of the Turkish Empire followed by the abolition of the Caliphate by Kemal Ataturk, that the various Islamic countries were able to establish their political independence and reject western suzerainty. We shall take this up in more detail in later lectures. Suffice it to say now that this is the wider context in which to understand, not only the present conflict within the Holy Land, but also the growing confrontation between the Western nations and the Islamic world.

We start with the Israeli claim to the possession of the Holy Land. First, what do we mean by the Holy Land? It is a relatively small piece of territory. In ancient times it used to be called Canaan and was said to stretch from Dan to Beersheba. At Dan, the Northern boundary, the chief source of the Jordan river pours out as a large spring from the foot of the snow-capped Mt Hermon. Beersheba in the south was on the edge of the desert which stretched all the way to the Gulf of Aqaba, and joins the Sinai Peninsula. The Holy Land, including all its desert, is only one-twelfth the size of New Zealand.

### **The Holy Land’s strategic importance**

Small though it is, the Holy Land possesses a remarkable diversity of climate because of the Great Rift Valley. This is a massive geological fault that runs all the way from Turkey to Lake Tanganyika, with its lowest point in the Jordan Valley, some 1,100 feet below sea level. For this reason, tropical fruits grow down at Jericho in the Jordan Valley, while, only thirty miles away, Jerusalem and Bethlehem can be

covered with snow at Christmas. New Zealand farmers would hardly find the Holy Land a 'land flowing with milk and honey' (as it was claimed to be), yet that is how it seemed to people used to desert life.

This narrow strip along the Mediterranean coast was historically of strategic importance since it was the natural bridge between the continents of Africa and Asia. Because of the great desert which stretches from Syria to Arabia, the only way to travel between the two great river civilizations of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia was through this land. This meant that Canaan was not only on the ancient trade route but the chief military route also ran through it. Hence it has been the site of many battles and it is not surprising that its fortress hill of Megiddo gave rise to the name Armageddon, the mythical battle which will bring the world to an end.

Since special rights of ownership are accorded these days to indigenous people, we should first ask - Who were the indigenous people of the Holy Land? No one can say. Being the bridge between Africa and Asia this land was inhabited from very early times. There is a very well preserved skeleton, known as Mt Carmel Man, who lived there 100,000 years ago. The walled city of Jericho goes back to about 7,000 BCE.

### **The heritage of the Canaanites**

The earliest inhabitants of whom we have any historical knowledge were the Canaanites. They were a Semitic people, basically of the same stock as the Phoenicians, who occupied ancient Lebanon. The Canaanites and the Phoenicians constituted the Western branch of the Semitic family, the Northern being the Aramaeans, the Eastern the Assyrians and Babylonians, and the Southern the Arabs. The language known as Hebrew, originated as the language of the Canaanites.

These Western Semitic People left us a priceless heritage. They invented the alphabetic system of writing about 1400 BCE. It was the most important product ever spread by the Phoenician traders, for it became the basis of the Greek, Roman, and Slavonic alphabets as well as the Arabic. The word Bible comes from the Greek word *biblos*, which meant 'letter' or 'book'. But Byblos is the name of the Phoenician town

and port on the coast of Lebanon from which the Phoenician traders set out. What is more, the script in which the oldest manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible were written is known as the Canaanite script.

If the Canaanites were the earliest known indigenous inhabitants of the Holy Land, how are they related to the Jewish people, who now lay claim to the Holy Land as theirs by right? I am going to sketch two quite different answers to this question. There is the biblical answer and there is the historical answer.

The biblical answer runs like this, starting in the book of Genesis at chapter 12 with the story of Abraham. All Jews claim to be his descendants; so the Holy Land is rightfully theirs since it was given by God to Abraham and his descendants. Abraham belonged to the northern section of the Semitic people – the Aramaeans. The Jews long preserved this memory in the liturgy of their harvest festival, which began with the words, ‘A wandering Aramaean was my father’<sup>1</sup>.

### **Abraham seeks out the Promised Land**

The story of the Jewish people started when Abraham heard God say to him, ‘Go from your country and your kindred to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great. By you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves’<sup>2</sup>. So Abraham left Aramaea (which is today northeastern Syria) and went forth to the land of Canaan. And when he reached Canaan God appeared to Abraham and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this land’.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere in the Bible this promise is made even more explicit – ‘To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates’<sup>4</sup> That meant everything between the Nile in Egypt and the Euphrates in Mesopotamia and, today, would include both the Sinai Peninsula at one end and most of Syria at the other.

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 26:5

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 12:1-4

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 12: 7

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 15: 18

In this very secular age, many people may regard this ancient biblical material to be quite irrelevant. We need to remember, however, that all devout and religious Jews, supported by many Christian fundamentalists, take these ancient divine promises very seriously. The Jewish claim to possess the Holy Land, therefore, rests initially on a divinely given right, though few would be brave enough today to lay claim to the whole of both Sinai and Syria.

Even in the Bible, however, the process by which the descendants of Abraham actually took possession of the land of Canaan is much more complicated and is related in two successive traditions. In the first of these<sup>1</sup> we are told how Abraham and his descendants entered Canaan as semi-nomadic people, who occupied the land not being used by the Canaanites.<sup>5</sup> The Canaanites lived in walled cities and farmed the land in their immediate vicinity. For some centuries, therefore, the Abrahamic tribes shared the Holy Land with the Canaanites, mostly in peace but occasionally in conflict. There was even some intermarriage.

The second tradition starts with a time of famine, when the descendants of Abraham were forced to migrate to Egypt in search of food. By divine providence one of their number, Joseph, had already preceded them and risen to a position of prominence in Egypt from which he could welcome them and provide for them. According to this tradition the Hebrews, as they were now called, stayed in Egypt for some centuries until they were eventually reduced to slavery. They were delivered out of bondage and led back to the Promised Land by Moses.

The epic story of how this occurred dominated Jewish life thereafter. It stretches out over five whole books of the Bible – from Exodus to Joshua. This story constitutes a second tradition of how the ancestors of the Jewish people entered into possession of the Holy Land and there is a striking difference between the two. The first entry was by peaceful infiltration. The second was by military force. Moses led his people for forty years in the wilderness and lived only long enough to view the Promised Land from Mt Nebo, which is in present day Jordan. It was left to Joshua to conquer the

land from the Canaanites by force, starting with Jericho. As told in the book of Joshua, this was a quite bloody affair. Joshua and his army went from one Canaanite city to another and ‘smote it with the edge of the sword and every person in it he utterly destroyed’<sup>6</sup>. According to the Bible the Israelite ancestors of the Jews not only conquered the Holy Land by force but they also completely exterminated the Canaanite population and then proceeded to parcel out the land to their own twelve tribes.

### **What history tells us**

Was it really like that? I turn now from the biblical answer to the historical answer. The Bible is a little library of books of many genres. Its narratives can be mythical (or symbolic), legendary, fictional or historical. In the Bible we do have some genuine historiography but only from about 900 BCE onwards. What precedes that is pseudo-history, a mixture of myth, legend and tribal oral tradition and even then it is told from the point of view of the final victors of Canaan. From this it is possible to reconstruct a general account of what took place in the Holy Land before the reign of King David.

The stories of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, shadowy figures though these now are, nevertheless point to a time when semi-nomadic tribes from Aramaea began to infiltrate into the land of the Canaanite city-states. The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were not related to one another as father, son and grandson, as the Bible now portrays them. The names refer to separate tribal migrations. The Abraham migration settled round Hebron. The Isaac migration settled near Beersheba. The Jacob tribe settled near Shechem, or modern Nablus.

There is good reason to conclude that some, but by no means all, of these Aramaean settlers did go down to Egypt, even though there is absolutely no archaeological evidence to confirm their presence there. The biblical figure of Joseph is entirely fictional. Some scholars have referred to the Joseph story<sup>7</sup> as the first novel ever

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<sup>5</sup> Genesis 12-36

<sup>6</sup> Joshua 10: 39

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 37-50

written. Its purpose was to join up the patriarchal traditions with the Mosaic tradition in order to form one continuous narrative. There probably was an historical Moses, for his name is Egyptian and not Hebrew. He probably did lead a migration back to Canaan but it was relatively small, say, about five thousand people. On entering the Holy Land they linked up with their fellow Hebrews and made a tribal treaty with them; memories of this amphictyony, as it technically called, are found in the covenant described in Joshua chapter 24.

But these early tribes did not annihilate the Canaanites, as the book of Joshua implies, though there were some fierce local skirmishes. They lived in reasonable harmony with the Canaanites, occupying the pastoral stretches of land outside the Canaanite city-states. It was not until a common enemy arrived on the scene that the Israelites and the Canaanites eventually became integrated into one people.

### **The melding of the Canaanites and the Hebrews**

The common enemy were the Philistines. These were not a Semitic people; that is why they were called the uncircumcised. They were a highly cultured people of Greek origin who landed on the Mediterranean coast in the 12<sup>th</sup> century BCE. They introduced the use of iron for both weapons and farm implements; thus they took the Holy Land out of the Bronze Age and into the Iron Age. They established strong walled cities along the coast, some of whose names have survived to this day – Gaza, Ashdod, and Askelon.

Once they were well established the Philistines began to move into the interior. From this period come the popular stories of Samson and Delilah. Because of their superior weapons the Philistines were able to make the Israelites and the Canaanites subject to their rule. It was the need to re-establish their independence, which brought the Canaanites and the Israelites together in a common cause. Under the leadership of David, the young new Israelite king, the Philistines were finally forced back to their coastal cities. There their power and influence remained until Roman times. That is why the Romans called the Holy Land *Palestina* – the land of the Philistines.



The Philistine presence on the coast, however, did not prevent David from establishing a strong and stable Kingdom, which at its height included much of modern Jordan and Syria. He also subjugated the remaining Canaanite cities, the most important of which was Jerusalem. From the time of David onwards the indigenous Canaanites and the incoming Israelites began to fuse into one people, but it took some centuries. The Canaanite language (now called Hebrew) became the common language, but the Israelite tribal traditions eventually dominated the culture of the people. Even so, the indigenous religious practices, celebrated at what were called the 'high-places', were being continually condemned by the Israelite prophets and were not finally eradicated until the seventh century.

In some ways David had established a mini-empire and his rule was looked back upon as the Golden Age. It was his son Solomon, who squandered this inheritance; he imposed forced labour in order to carry out his lavish building programme, which included the first Temple. As a result the Kingdom of David split into two on the death of Solomon. The larger section rejected the dynasty of David, took to themselves the name of Israel, and established a new capital at Samaria in the north. The smaller group, which remained faithful to the Davidic dynasty and retained Jerusalem, called itself Judah; it is from this term that we derive the word Jew.

### **Invasions by foreign powers**

From the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century until the beginning of the Christian era the Holy Land became subject to a continual series of invasions by foreign powers. The northern Kingdom of Israel lost its independence to the Assyrians in 722 BCE and never again recovered its own identity. From this stems the myth of the 'ten lost tribes' which became the basis of the British Israelite movement, which was quite popular in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The southern Kingdom of Judah was overrun by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and its royal family, its aristocracy, its priests, and its educated classes were taken off into Exile in Babylonia. Thus began the long period of the dispersion of the Jews among the nations, a fact which has lasted until the present.

Although the Persians, when they conquered Babylonia, pursued a more enlightened policy to its subject peoples and allowed the Jews to return, not all Jews chose to do so. Those who returned rebuilt Jerusalem and the Temple, but were never granted self-rule. From 586 BCE right up until 1948 CE the Holy Land was ruled by others than Jews. The majority of Jews increasingly lived outside of the Holy Land in the Diaspora, as it is called.

After Persian rule came the Greeks and finally the Romans. There was one brief interlude to foreign rule of the Holy Land. In 164 BCE the Jews revolted against their Greek overlords, who ruled from Damascus. The Jewish hero was Judas Maccabaeus, whose name is mostly remembered today because of the oratorio written by Handel. Handel wrote his oratorio to celebrate the victory of the English over Bonnie Prince Charlie at Culloden. This was hardly much of a parallel with the Jewish Maccabean revolt. It started when the Greek rulers tried to enforce Greek culture on the Jews, burning their holy writings and destroying their synagogues. The Jewish people had a temporary victory which enabled them, for a little over three years, to establish an independent state and even issue their own coinage.

The Greeks proved too powerful in the end and once again the Jewish inhabitants of the Holy Land became a subject people. Yet out of the Maccabaeans there developed a high-priestly family known as the Hasmoneans, who exerted considerable local influence in Jerusalem and its environs, provided they did not challenge their political overlords.

This period of the history of the Holy Land is very well documented but is so complex that one cannot do justice to it in a few sentences. The local and more limited rule by the priestly Hasmoneans became so corrupt that it gave rise to the ascetic puritanism of the Essenes, well known today because of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran. Greek culture had been spreading in the North and East of the Holy Land for quite some time. The ancient city of Ammon, now known as Amman, was renamed Philadelphia. It was one of the ten Greek cities known as the Decapolis.

Galilee became a very cosmopolitan area, a breeding ground for new religious and political movements.

### **Romans rule the Holy Land**

Greek rule of the Holy Land as a whole was exchanged for Roman rule with the arrival of Pompey in 63 BCE. Not long after this Julius Caesar appointed, as procurator of the province of Palestine, a man from the area called Antipater. After Antipater died of poisoning, his son Herod established himself as King of Judea and ruled the Holy Land with an iron hand for nearly forty years, with the acquiescence of the Romans. Herod the Great, like his father Antipater, was strictly speaking not a Jew but an Idumaean. The Idumaeans were the descendants of the ancient Edomites and they had been forced to adopt the Jewish religion during the time of the Hasmoneans.

After Herod the Great the Romans divided the Holy Land into separate areas of local government, known as tetrarchies, and eventually appointed their own procurator over Judea. That explains the presence of Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem, while one of the Herods ruled Galilee.

There was much diversity among the Jewish people. Some Jews were thoroughly Hellenized and Romanized; they were reasonably satisfied with the state of affairs. At the other extreme were restive activists, longing for an opportunity to re-establish an independent state. This is reflected in the Gospel records about Jesus of Nazareth, as when he answered a leading question about taxes and said, 'Pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar and God what belongs to God!'<sup>8</sup>

### **Division among the Jews**

This restiveness reached a climax some forty years after the death of Jesus in the year 66 CE. According to the first century Jewish historian Josephus, there was much division among the Jews. It amounted almost to civil war in Jerusalem, between the activist Zealots at one extreme and more peace-loving Jews at the other. One is reminded of the current conflict in Afghanistan between the Taleban and the rest. The

Zealots stormed the Temple Mount and took control. So the Roman Emperor Vespasian sent his son Titus with three legions to restore order. The Romans besieged the Jerusalem, but it was not until 70 CE that they finally crushed all Jewish resistance and expelled the remaining inhabitants. They destroyed the city and Temple on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the Jewish month of Ab, almost the exact anniversary of the destruction of the first Temple by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. It has remained a Jewish day of mourning until the present. Nothing of Herod's Temple remains today except a part of the outer wall. This has become the famous Wailing Wall, to which devout Jews turn to mourn their past and to renew their hopes for the future. It is a powerful symbol for Jewry all round the world.

### **The siege of Masada**

There is also another symbol of Jewish patriotism from that time. On a dramatic looking mountain overlooking the Dead Sea, Herod the Great had built a fortress palace in 37 BCE. The Zealots seized this from the Roman garrison in 66 CE and held out against a two-year siege until 73 CE. The sites marking the camps of the Tenth Legion are clearly visible from the top to this day. According to tradition, when Massada was finally captured the nine hundred or so defenders chose to commit suicide rather than fall into Roman hands. Today Massada is not only a great tourist attraction but the memory of what took place there long ago strengthens the resolve of all Israelis.

What happened in the Holy Land after Massada will be discussed in the next lecture. What needs to be said here is that for most of the next two thousand years only a tiny number of Jews lived in the Holy Land. In the course of time, as memories of the Roman era faded into the distant past, there were four sites in particular which became sacred to the Jewish people.

In the hills of Galilee is the quaint little mediaeval town of Safed. It became the centre in the Middle Ages of Jewish mysticism. Today it is the home of Jewish artists.

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<sup>8</sup> Mark 12:17

On the shores of the Sea of Galilee is the city of Tiberias, founded in 20 CE by Herod Antipas to honour the Emperor Tiberius. It is sacred to the Jews as the burial place of such ancient Jewish rabbis as Johanan ben Zakkai, Akiva, and Eliezer the Great, as well as the medieval philosopher Maimonides (1138-1204). Hebron is sacred because of its association with Abraham, being the traditional burial place of the patriarchs. Jerusalem, of course, remains the holy city, remembered at the celebration of every Passover, with the words, 'Next year, Jerusalem'.

### **The roots of anti-Semitism**

Throughout the Christian era the vast majority of the Jewish people have lived outside of the Holy Land. There they have been frequently discriminated against, much more in the Christian world than in the Islamic world. Although the term 'anti-Semitism' was coined as recently as 1879 to refer to this discrimination, the roots of Christian anti-Semitism are now acknowledged to go back to the first century and are even present in St. John's Gospel. By the fourth century Christians had come to regard Jews as the crucifiers of Christ and, for that reason, were judged to be condemned by God to perpetual migration.

In much of Europe during the Middle Ages, Jews were denied citizenship, barred from holding government posts, excluded from membership in the professions and denied ownership of agricultural land. From the Middle Ages came the practice of segregating the Jewish populations into ghettos and this lasted until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Forced often to become the rag and bone collectors, this industry led them later to become the great traders of clothing and footwear. Some became prominent in banking and money-lending.

The Jews' economic and cultural successes tended to arouse economic resentment among the populace and this prompted the forced expulsion of Jews from several countries, England (1290), France (14th century), Germany (1350's), Portugal (1496), Provence (1512), and the Papal States (1569). The Spanish Inquisition forced the expulsion of that country's large and old-established Jewish population in 1492. Only

Jews who had converted to Christianity were allowed to remain. As a result of these mass expulsions the centres of Jewish life shifted from Western Europe and Germany to Poland and Russia.

### **Nazi persecution and genocide**

The Enlightenment and the French Revolution brought a new religious freedom to Jews in France and Western Europe. But in Russia, widespread anti-Jewish riots, or pogroms, broke out in 1881. Jews were stripped of their rural landholdings and several million Jews migrated to the United States in the next four decades. The most brutal anti-Semitism of all time was that of the Nazis inspired by Adolf Hitler 1933-45. This took the form of deliberate genocide. An estimated 5,700,000 Jews were exterminated in such death camps as Auschwitz. The memory of this more than anything else motivated the modern Zionist movement, culminating in the establishment of the State of Israel. Though anti-Semitism still exists, this modern tragedy led to world-wide sympathy with the Jewish people.

Let me now summarize. The Jewish people claim possession of the Holy Land on these grounds:

- The land was promised and given to them by God.
- Their distant ancestors conquered the land by force.
- To this we may add from historical research (as Jews usually do not) that they have the blood of the indigenous Canaanites running in their veins.
- They lived continuously in the land for over a millennium, until they were expelled from it by force, first by the Assyrians and Babylonians, and later by the Romans.
- They have long been a people without a land of their own.
- In modern times the anti-Semitic persecution to which they have been continually subjected through the centuries, particularly by Christians, and reaching the state of genocide under the Nazis, has meant they must have a land of their own to provide for them a safe refuge from their enemies.

After nearly 2000 years the Jews have returned to the Holy Land to claim what they believe is rightfully theirs. They have a very strong claim to the Holy Land. Unfortunately for them, however, the Holy Land has long been inhabited by others. To them we turn next.

## **(2) The Palestinian Claim.**

Who are the Palestinians? When Golda Meir was Prime Minister of Israel she once said, ‘There is no such thing as a Palestinian people...it is not as though there was a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist’. That is one way to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; define one’s opponents out of existence. There was a period of years in the state of Israel when one rarely heard the word ‘Palestinian’; Israelis preferred to speak of Arabs or Muslims. Even the name of the ‘Palestinian Museum’, when it came into Israeli hands after 1967, was changed to the John D. Rockefeller Museum.

There is a half-truth in what Golda Meir said. There never has been a Palestinian nation. Until the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the word Palestinian simply referred to the inhabitants of the land called Palestine, whether they were Arab, Muslim, Jew, Samaritan, Christian or Druze. And even they did not use the term widely. Only since 1948 has the term come increasingly into use to refer to all the non-Jewish inhabitants of the Holy Land at the time of the establishment of the State of Israel. And now that includes all of their descendants also.

It is quite false, however, to infer from Golda Meir’s statement that the Holy Land was unoccupied when the Jews returned to establish Israel. Yet that inference was nevertheless commonly drawn, as instanced by the much-used slogan, ‘A land without a people for a people without a land’.

### **A land always populated**

The Holy Land has never been a ‘land without a people’. Even back in 1920 the Holy Land was more densely populated than New Zealand is today. So who are the people who have long inhabited it and whose descendants are now called the Palestinians? To answer this we must go back to the first century and take up the story of the Holy Land from the time the Romans expelled the Jews from Jerusalem. The Jews were not excluded from the Holy Land as a whole. Indeed there has never been a time when there have not been at least small numbers of Jews living in that country.



After the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE a legion was stationed on the site to prevent the Jews from returning. Then Rome began to stamp its own character upon the land by colonizing it with Romans. First, the governor's residence at Caesarea became a Roman colony. The rank of the provincial governor was raised from procurator to legatus Augusti. Then a new pagan city, Neapolis (now known as Nablus), was founded at the ancient Canaanite site of Shechem.

In 132 CE the emperor Hadrian began to build a Roman colony on the site of Jerusalem. This provoked much Jewish resentment and provoked a further Jewish revolt, led by Simon Bar Kokhba. His title means 'Son of the Star' and he was hailed by some as a Messiah or military deliverer. At first he enjoyed some success. He recaptured Jerusalem and even struck his own coinage. He held out for three years until Julius Severus was recalled from Britain to take charge of the operations. Severus ruthlessly quelled the revolt and, according to some accounts, destroyed almost 1,000 villages, killing more than half a million people. In Judaea proper the Jews seem to have been virtually exterminated, but they survived in Galilee, which appears to have held itself aloof from the revolt.

The province of Judaea was renamed Syria Palestina and was later simply called Palestina. But no Jew was thenceforth allowed to set foot in Jerusalem or the surrounding district. Some time later this prohibition was relaxed to permit Jews to enter Jerusalem on one day a year, a Day of Mourning. This ban was officially still in force as late as the 4th century CE.

### **Jerusalem becomes a Graeco-Roman city**

Hadrian proceeded to convert Jerusalem into a Graeco-Roman city - with a circus, an amphitheatre, baths, and a theatre, and with streets conforming to the Roman grid pattern. He also erected temples dedicated both to Jupiter and to himself on the very site of the destroyed Jewish Temple. Since his clan name was Aelia, he called Jerusalem Aelia Capitolina. To repopulate the city, he brought in Graeco-Syrians from the surrounding areas. The urbanization and Hellenization of Palestine was continued

by the emperor Septimius Severus (who reigned 193-211), except in Galilee, where the Jewish presence remained strong.

Evidence of Hadrian's Jerusalem has been remarkably demonstrated by modern archaeology. In an ancient church in the village of Madaba in Jordan there is a wonderful Mosaic floor from the sixth century, which portrays a map of the Holy Land. Jerusalem is depicted as having a long double colonnade of pillars running from North to south. This always puzzled modern historians who assumed it must have been the figment of the ancient artist's imagination. Since 1967 archaeologists have found this very colonnade under the surface of the Old City. It is called 'The Cardo', has been re-opened and is now the site of some very high-class shops.

The repopulation of the Holy Land by non-Jewish residents in the second century meant that it followed the fortunes of the Roman Empire thereafter. When the Emperor Constantine adopted Christianity as the state religion round about 312 CE, Christian interest began to focus on Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth. The emperor himself built a magnificent church on the site of the Holy Sepulchre, the most sacred of Christian holy places. His mother, Helena, built two others - at the cave of the Nativity at Bethlehem and the site of the Ascension in Jerusalem - and his mother-in-law, Eutropia, built a church at Mamre (near Hebron). The church of the Nativity at Bethlehem became the residence for the scholar Jerome, who was given the task by Pope Damasus of translating the whole of the Bible into Latin, from the original Hebrew and Greek. Thus out of fourth century Palestine came the Vulgate, which remained the standard version of the Bible in the Western world for more than 1000 years.

### **Pilgrims flock to Palestine**

Palestine began to attract floods of pilgrims from all parts of the Roman Empire. It also became a great centre of the early monastic life; men flocked from all quarters to become hermits in the Judaeian wilderness, which was soon dotted with monasteries. It began a new era of prosperity for Palestine. When Constantine added part of Arabia,

the enlarged Palestine was divided into three provinces: Prima, with its capital at Caesarea; Secunda, with its capital at Scythopolis (Bet She`an); and Salutaris, with its capital at Petra.

After the Fall of Rome in 410 the seat of Roman rule not only shifted Eastward to Constantinople, built on the old Byzantium, but the Roman Empire became increasingly Christian. The Holy Land became an important religious centre of the Byzantine Empire, and the majority of its inhabitants by this time were Christian. The bishop of Caesarea was metropolitan of the province. Then the bishop of Jerusalem began to claim a special prerogative by virtue of where he came from. At the time of the ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451, Juvenal, the then bishop of Jerusalem, was recognized as a patriarch.

Palestine, like Syria and Egypt, was troubled by the theological controversies then dividing the church throughout the empire. The Monophysite Controversy was one in which Christians debated whether the person of Jesus Christ comprised two natures - one human and one divine - or only one nature. When Juvenal the Bishop of Jerusalem returned from the Council of Chalcedon, which defined the orthodox position which he had agreed to, he found the monks of Palestine rose up and elected another bishop, and military force was required to subdue them. After that, Palestine became a stronghold of orthodoxy, whereas Egypt adopted monophysitism, eventually becoming the Coptic Church.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century disaster struck the Holy Land. First came the Persian invasion in 611. Jerusalem was captured in 614, many churches throughout the land were destroyed and the Persians carried off what had had been claimed to be the True Cross. In 628 the Byzantine forces recaptured Palestine and even restored the True Cross to Jerusalem. Only ten years later, in 638, Jerusalem fell to the Muslim Arabs.

### **Islam reshapes the Holy Land**

Thus for the four hundred years after the expulsion of the Jews from Jerusalem, the Holy Land was first Romanized and then Christianized. The arrival of the new religion

of Islam brought a dramatic change which was to shape the Holy Land for the next fourteen hundred years.

The new religion of Islam founded by Muhammad spread with lightning speed. Within the short space of forty years it dominated the whole of the Middle East from Egypt to India. This new movement was destined, not only to change the character of the Holy Land but to play an important role in human history from then right up until the present.

Too little is known about the nature of Islam in the post-Christian West, so let me give a brief description. It is quite misleading to judge it by the actions of today's Muslim terrorists. The original success of Muhammad rests on the fact that he successfully brought the warring tribes of Arabia into a unified people. Islam is, by its very title, the religion of peace, seeking to bring all nations and peoples into one world-wide brotherhood by a common allegiance to one simple and basic truth – submission to the one and only true God, whose divine will is revealed in the Qur'an.

Islam was not an entirely new religion. It is closely related to both Judaism and Christianity and claims to be the fulfilment of both of them. Muslims assert that Abraham was the very first Muslim, that Jesus was a true prophet in succession to all the Israelite prophets, and that Muhammad was the last of the succession. All Muslims believe in the Virgin birth of Jesus; indeed the Qur'an has a lot more to say about the Virgin Mary than the New Testament does.

Moreover, Muhammad taught the Arab people to regard themselves as the descendants of Abraham through his son Ishmael, just as Jews have long seen themselves as the descendants of Abraham through his son Isaac. Thus Islam is actually closer to Judaism than it is to Christianity. A Jewish scholar has put it this way:

“Islam is Judaism transplanted among the Arab people, whereas Christianity is Judaism transformed for the Gentile people.”

It is because of these close connections with Christianity that Islam made deep inroads into Byzantine Christianity. Many Christians converted to Islam and not

necessarily because of force, though that did play a part, as we shall presently see. The reason why Christians converted to Islam, as numbers do even to this day, is that Islam is very simple to understand and simple to practice. It has high ideals for social life and asserts that all people of all nations and of all classes are equal.

This new faith swept out of Arabia like a whirlwind, led by Omar (634-644), the second Caliph or successor to Muhammad, but soon met with resistance. The first battle took place at Wadi al-'Arabah, south of the Dead Sea. The Byzantine defenders were defeated and retreated toward Gaza but were overtaken and almost annihilated. By 634 all of Palestine lay open to the Arab invaders.

In the meantime, the Byzantine emperor mustered a large army and dispatched it against the Muslims. But he lost the decisive battle which took place in 636 on the Yarmuk river, which flows from the East into the Jordan and is currently the northern boundary of the Kingdom of Jordan. By the year 640 the whole of the Holy Land, including Jerusalem and Caesarea, was in Muslim hands. Omar now ruled the whole of Syria and Palestine from his seat of government in Damascus. He divided Palestine into two administrative districts; Jordan included Galilee and Acre on the coast and extended eastward into the desert, Palestine, with its capital first at Lydda, covered the region south of the Plain of Esdraelon.

### **The importance of Jerusalem to Islam**

Omar lost no time in demonstrating the intense interest which Islam has in the Holy Land. For Islam, Jerusalem is still the third most holy spot in the world, next to Mecca and Medina. At the very beginning of Islam it held the number one slot. Muhammad, following Jewish practice, taught his followers to turn towards Jerusalem when they prayed. Only as late as 623, did Muhammad himself change the qibla (or direction) to Mecca, in disappointment that the Jewish people had not accepted him as the last of their prophets. So when Omar visited the Temple mount in Jerusalem, and found it sadly neglected, he joined his followers in clearing it with his own hands in order to turn it into a sacred place of prayer.

Some fifty years later, in 691, the caliph 'Abd al-Malik erected the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount on the very site where once stood the Temple of Solomon. In late Jewish tradition this site became associated with Abraham and the story of how he almost sacrificed Isaac his son. This Abrahamic tradition influenced Muhammad also. It eventually gave rise to the popular Islamic tradition that it was from this spot that Gabriel took Muhammad on his famous Night-journey into heaven, to view for himself all that had been revealed to him in the Qur'an. The Dome of the Rock is the oldest Muslim monument still extant. It is not a mosque but a monument commemorating past holy events. Nearby, and also on the Temple Mount, is the al-Aqsa mosque, built by 'Abd al-Malik's son, al-Walid I.

This is how Palestine became incorporated into the Islamic world and how Jerusalem became for Muslims a holy city. During the next 150 years the whole area of the Middle East embraced the Arabic language and became shaped by Islamic culture. An example of how this process worked is to be found in the famous Umayyad mosque in Damascus. This building incorporated and enlarged the fourth century Christian church standing there. They even left intact the Christian baptismal font, and the mausoleum containing the head of John the Baptist. The Umayyad Dynasty ruled the whole Muslim Empire from Damascus.

However, the Umayyad caliph 'Umar II imposed humiliating restrictions on his non-Muslim subjects, particularly the Christians. That is why many Christians in the Holy Land converted to Islam. These conversions to Islam, together with a steady tribal inflow from the desert, changed the religious character of Palestine's inhabitants. The predominantly Christian population gradually became predominantly Muslim. Some Christian communities, however, remained steadfast in their allegiance and have survived to the present. During the early years of the Muslim control of the city, a small permanent Jewish population returned to Jerusalem after a 500-year absence.

## **The rise of the Fatimid dynasty**

A significant change came from 750 onwards. The rule of the Umayyad dynasty from Damascus was replaced by the rule of the Abbasid dynasty in Baghdad. The next four centuries were to witness the development and flowering of an Islamic civilization which stretched from Spain to India. But the very size of it meant that it could not be wholly ruled from one centre – Baghdad. A new Shi'ite dynasty, known as the Fatimids, rose to power in North Africa, seized Egypt, Palestine and Syria and even threatened Baghdad itself. Once, again, as so often in the past, Palestine became a battlefield and suffered much hardship. The behaviour of the Fatimid ruler was at times erratic and extremely harsh, particularly toward his non-Muslim subjects. He reactivated earlier discriminatory laws imposed upon Christians and Jews and added new ones. In 1009 he even ordered the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Then a new invader came on the scene from the East – the Seljuq Turks. In 1071 the Seljuqs captured Jerusalem, and for a while, in spite of great political instability, the Holy Land prospered as pilgrimages to it by Jews, Christians, and Muslims increased. The Fatimids recaptured the city in 1098 only to relinquish it a year later to a new enemy, this time from the West. These were the crusaders from Western Europe, who came at the call of the Pope to rescue the Christian holy sites from the infidel.

## **The Crusades leave their mark**

There is general agreement today among Christian historians that, however romantic the crusades may appear from a distance, the whole idea of them was a disastrous mistake. Though the period of the Crusades was less than 200 years, it nevertheless left a permanent mark on the Holy Land. One of the biggest surprises I received when I first visited the Middle East was to find the Crusader castles dotted round the countryside, some of them, such as Kerak in Jordan and Krak des Chevaliers in Syria, are in remarkably good condition. The crusaders built a chain of castles to protect the Holy Land from eastern invasion and they intended their buildings to last.

The crusaders captured Jerusalem in 1099 and on Christmas Day 1100 they established the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem. Thereafter they expanded their sphere of influence with no effective check occurring until the sultan Saladin arrived to wage a relentless war against them. In 1187 he dealt the crusaders a crushing blow at the decisive battle of Hattin. Most of Palestine was once again Muslim.

In the meantime the world scene had been radically changing. The Turkish-speaking Mamluks had seized power in Egypt and the Mongol invasion arrived from the East. The crusaders found themselves as the meat in the sandwich between two opposing forces more powerful than themselves. To make matters worse, there were incessant quarrels among the crusaders themselves. In 1260 the Mamluks defeated the Mongols in a battle waged in Palestine and thereafter harassed the crusaders until the last of them were driven out of Acre in 1291.

That brought another chapter in the history of Palestine to an end. Yet crusader influence remained. The blood of the crusaders still flows in the Christian communities round Bethlehem and Nazareth. H.V. Morton, the very popular travel writer between the two world wars, wrote a best-seller on Palestine in 1934, called *In the Steps of the Master*. When he visited Bethlehem he said:

“Here the Crusaders are still alive. Although they call themselves Christian Arabs, their faces are Flemish and French and perhaps English. The dress of the Bethlehem woman, which is unique, is also a memory of the Crusades. The married women wear a high headdress covered with a flowing veil. It is the headdress worn by princesses in European fairy tales.”<sup>9</sup>

As we noted in the first lecture, Palestine was the natural bridge between Africa and Asia. So it was rarely free for very long from invasions, chiefly from the East. After the Crusaders left, Palestine prospered for a while under the Egyptian Mamluks, especially in Jerusalem.

Then came a second wave of Mongols. It made the name of Tamerlane a symbol of destruction and plunder. Although Palestine was largely spared the pillage of his hordes, it could not escape its disastrous repercussions as the Mamluks moved through in a vain attempt to defend Damascus against the invader. Tamerlane himself died



while attempting to conquer Ming China with an army of 200,000, but he so weakened Iran in doing so, that the way was now open for the next wave of Turks from the East - the Ottomans.

In 1516, the Ottoman sultan routed the Mamluk armies and Palestine began its four centuries under Ottoman domination. This was the period in which Suleiman the Magnificent (1494-1566) built the main walls which exist today round the Old City of Jerusalem. It was he who had the Dome of the Rock faced with the glorious blue and turquoise tiles that make it such an attractive sight.

### **No common ethnic origins**

It has been necessary to sketch this history of the Holy Land over the last 1800 years to make clear just who the Palestinians are in order to establish the grounds on which they claim possession of the Holy Land. It is true, as Golda Meir said, there is no such people as the Palestinian people. The Palestinians do not have a common ethnic origin or a common religion. What joins them together is simply the fact that they and their ancestors have lived in the land of Palestine from as far back as any of them can record. In their veins run the blood of the ancient Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Crusaders and Turks.

It is somewhat ironic to find that if we go back three thousand years we find a very similar phenomenon. As I showed in the first lecture the people of ancient Israel at the time of King David had many antecedents other than the Hebrew patriarchs. The people of Israel resulted chiefly from the fusion of the indigenous Canaanites and the incoming Aramaean tribes, but there was a sprinkling of other ethnic groups as well. There were pockets left from the retreating Hittite Empire, as the story of Uriah the Hittite so clearly illustrates.<sup>10</sup> And did not Solomon boast of his many foreign wives? In both the case of the ancient Israelites and that of the present day Palestinians, it was land possession which gave them their unity.

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<sup>9</sup> Morton, H.V.(1934) *In the Steps of the Master*. London, Rich & Cowan, 1934, p120

<sup>10</sup> 2 Samuel 11:3

It must be fully conceded that the Palestinians are a very mixed group of people. Although the Palestinians all speak Arabic that is simply because that has been the language of the whole area from Egypt to Iraq from about the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Each group of Palestinians traces its ancestry over differing lengths of time. The majority of Palestinians, of course, are Muslim and date their occupation of the land from the Islamic conquest onwards.

### **Palestine and its minority peoples**

But going even much further back are the Samaritans. They claim to be the descendants of the ancient Kingdom of Israel, which established their capital at Samaria. When the Jews returned from the Babylonian Exile there was a century or so in which the returning Jews developed an association with them, just as they did with the Jewish peasantry round Jerusalem, who had never gone into exile. This is shown by the fact that the Samaritan Bible consists simply of the Pentateuch or Five books of Moses, which was at that time the sum-total of the Jewish Holy Scripture. The Samaritans also have synagogues and celebrate the Passover.

But in the fourth century BCE a schism developed between the Jews and Samaritans. That is why we read in the New Testament that ‘the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans’<sup>11</sup>. It is this fact that adds poignancy to the famous parable of the Good Samaritan. It is quite strange that this group have been able to retain their identity all through the Roman, Byzantine, Crusader and Muslim periods right down to the present even though they now number only about 500. This is partly because they live in semi-isolation, marrying only within their own community. They are mainly to be found at Nablus but also reside just south of Tel Aviv.

A much larger minority group of Palestinians are the Christians. They are chiefly around Bethlehem, Nazareth and in the northern villages. Altogether they may make up about ten per cent of the Palestinian population. Christians of every variety are now there. Some, as we have seen, have the blood of the crusaders in their veins. But the

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<sup>11</sup> John 4:9

oldest of them trace their ancestry back to the Byzantine period when the whole of Palestine was Christian. Little pocket communities can survive for many centuries in spite of foreign invasions and changes of rule.

About thirty miles from Damascus, hidden away in a picturesque mountain valley is the village of Maloula. The local people still speak Aramaic, the language of Palestine in New Testament times. They belong to the Greek Catholic church and some of their buildings date from the Byzantine period.

Another interesting minority of Palestinians are the Druzes. These belong to an offshoot of mainline Islam which formed in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. There are about 200,000 altogether and although they are confined to a relatively small geographical area, they now find they are separated from one another by being forced to be citizens of four different countries – Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Israel. This is simply because the present national boundaries were placed there by western powers after two world wars.

What joins all these disparate groups together is the fact that they are descendants of people who have long inhabited the Holy Land and they now find that they have been dispossessed of the land which they took to be rightfully theirs.

### **Palestinians displaced and dispersed**

When the Jews were at last able to return from their Dispersion to establish the new state of Israel, it should have been something to rejoice in. The sad and painful irony is this: the overcoming of one dispersion was at the expense of causing another - that of the Palestinians. Many wealthy Palestinian merchants from Jaffa, Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem fled to Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan, while the middle class tended to move to all-Arab towns such as Nablus and Nazareth. The majority of peasants ended up in refugee camps. More than 350 Arab villages just disappeared, along with all Arab life in Jaffa and along the coast. Before 1947 there were about 1,300,000 non-Jewish Palestinians in Palestine. 150,000 remained in the state of Israel. The West Bank swelled from 400,000 to 700,000. About 190,000 fled to the Gaza Strip. About

300,000 left Palestine altogether, 100,000 going to Lebanon, 100,000 to Jordan, 80,000 to Syria, 8,000 to Egypt, and 4,000 to Iraq.

Since the June war in 1967 the plight of the Palestinians has grown much worse. Natural increase has raised their number to about 3 million. Some remain in forced exile abroad. Some are in refugee camps in Jordan in quite intolerable conditions. Some live within Israel but often complain of being treated as second-class citizens. The majority live in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip under conditions of occupation by a foreign power. The Palestinians now feel they have been completely dispossessed in the land to which they thought they had a natural right by birth and ancestry.

How did this situation arise? How is it that two peoples – Israelis and Palestinians – are now in competition for possession of the same piece of territory, each believing its rights are both legitimate and strong? Who, if anybody, must bear chief responsibility for this almost insoluble conflict? That is what we shall explore in the next lecture.

### **(3) The British Responsibility**

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the whole of the Middle East underwent widespread changes. They really began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the European nations were creating their world empires. First on the scene in the Middle East was Napoleon. Between 1798-1801 he attempted to carve out for himself a Middle Eastern Empire. After conquering Malta and Egypt he turned to Palestine, which was then administered from Acre by a Governor appointed by the Ottomans. Napoleon was repulsed from Acre because the British came to the aid of the Sultan. After the Battle of the Nile, followed later of course by Waterloo, the way was at last open for the British to bring the Middle East into their sphere of influence.

From that time right up until 1948 the British took an increasing interest in the Holy Land, but it was an interest which displayed an uneasy mixture of both religion and politics. The political interest of Britain was to open up and guard a more direct route to India, and this it achieved with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1875. The religious interest of Britain in the Holy Land arose out of the Evangelical revival, which was then still gathering momentum in English religious life. This gave rise to all sorts of missionary organisations, such as the Church Missionary Society (1799), and the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804).

Of particular interest for our topic today was the founding, in 1808, of 'The London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews'. It was commonly referred to as 'The Jews' Society'. By 1822 it was large enough to hold its annual meeting at Mansion House with the Lord Mayor presiding. By 1841 nearly all the English bishops were patrons of it. By 1850 it employed 78 missionaries, all working to convert Jews to Christianity.

#### **Planning for Christ's Second Coming**

The Jew's Society, along with all evangelical Christians, encouraged the return of Jews to the Holy Land and had an ulterior motive for doing so. They saw it as the

divinely planned forerunner of the Second Coming of Christ. They arrived at this conviction from their interpretation of the Bible, or what they called biblical prophecy.

Incidentally, it is for the same reason that the return of the Jews to the modern state of Israel has been strongly supported by many conservative Christians today. Christian fundamentalists in America, particularly from the Bible belt, have been giving both financial and moral support to Israel. Moreover, for some years plane loads of them have been flying to Israel each year, not only to tour the Holy Land but more particularly to visit Megiddo, where they expect to take place very shortly the final battle which will bring the world to an end. This has been the message preached by the American tele-evangelists, such as Jerry Falwell and Oral Roberts. It has been so widespread in USA that even Ronald Reagan was influenced by it.

But let us return to 19<sup>th</sup> century, when this expectation first surfaced. The President of the Jew's Society was the well-known philanthropist, the **Earl of Shaftesbury**. He attended every annual meeting until his death 37 years later. Shaftesbury was an evangelical Anglican, who, to use his own words, believed that 'The Bible is God's word written from the very first syllable down to the very last'.

Christian interest in the Holy Land began to flourish during the next 40 years, producing a flood of books, which Shaftesbury read eagerly. Not only did Shaftesbury want the Jews to return to the Holy Land in order to hasten the return of Jesus Christ, but he wanted to make sure that there was a sufficient welcoming body already there when they arrived in order to convert them all to be good Anglicans!

### **Anglican bishopric created in Jerusalem**

So the crowning achievement of the Jews' Society, largely promoted by Shaftesbury, was the creation of an Anglican Bishopric in Jerusalem. They foresaw the ancient kingdom of Israel becoming a diocese of the Church of England. The creation of a bishopric without a diocese was a very odd thing to do, and, in any case, it required a special act of Parliament. Very appropriately, a converted Jew was consecrated as the first Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem and he set off bravely on his

mission. A few years later a traveller observed that he had a total congregation of eight converted Jews and two tourists. This early venture was misconceived and quite unsuccessful and yet it was the forerunner of the present Anglican Cathedral and Hospice in Jerusalem, known as St. George's.

The return of the Jews to the Holy Land did not take place, as the Jews' Society expected. That was to occur a century later – this time chiefly by Jewish effort. But even this was made possible by Britain and, by a strange set of circumstances, Shaftesbury was indirectly connected with it. Another British philanthropist was also interested in the return of the Jews to Palestine but for very different reasons. This was Sir Moses Montefiore (1784-1885), a practising orthodox Jew and an acquaintance of Shaftesbury, who later proposed him for a peerage.

Between 1827 and 1875 Montefiore made seven journeys to Palestine and was instrumental in rescuing Jews in Damascus who had been falsely accused of a ritual murder. He obtained from the Sultan what he called a 'Magna Carta for Jews in Turkish lands'. On his return home he was knighted by Queen Victoria for his exploits. He subsequently dined with Lord Palmerston, the British Foreign Secretary, and because of his concern for his persecuted fellow-Jews in Poland and Russia, he proposed a scheme for Jewish settlement in Palestine. At the same time Shaftesbury had a word in the ear of Lord Palmerston, being his step-son-in-law.

So in 1840 Palmerston wrote a letter to the Sultan in Istanbul suggesting that, as the Jews were dispersed through Europe, it would be a good idea for the Sultan to encourage them to return and settle in Palestine. They would bring much wealth into the Sultan's domain and they would be a check on the evil designs of Mohammad Ali of Egypt, whom the British and the Sultan regarded as their common enemy. The Sultan evidently took this suggestion quite seriously, for as late as 1871 newspapers in the United States were referring to the extraordinary offer of the Sultan to sell the Jews the Muslim Dome of the Rock so that they could rebuild their Temple on the historical site!

The concept of a Palestinian home for the Jews was becoming quite widespread in Britain. This is reflected in the last novel written by George Eliot, who by the 1870's was recognized as the leading English novelist. In *Daniel Deronda* (1876) she portrayed as her leading character a man who eventually discovered he was of Jewish birth and who decided to devote himself to the cause of establishing a centre for the Jewish people.

### **Sowing the seeds of Zionism**

Now while these ideas were surfacing in Britain, the seeds of Zionism were being sown in Eastern Europe. In response to the increasing number of Russian pogroms, a group called 'Lovers of Zion' was formed to promote the re-settlement of Jewish farmers and artisans in Palestine. The earliest of these Zionist agricultural settlements in Palestine took place in 1882.

Then came an event which speeded up the cause. In 1894 a French Jewish army officer named Alfred Dreyfus was falsely accused of giving secrets to the Germans. His trial so impressed an Hungarian Jewish lawyer and journalist named **Theodor Herzl** (1860-1904) that in 1896 the latter issued a pamphlet entitled *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State). He advocated the establishment of an autonomous Jewish state, preferably in Palestine, in order to deal positively with continuing anti-Semitic persecution. 'The Jewish state is essential to the world. It will therefore be created', he said, 'Let sovereignty be granted to us over a portion of the globe large enough to satisfy the rightful requirements of a nation; the rest we shall manage for ourselves.' Two years later, he himself went to Palestine to investigate its possibilities and, possibly, to seek the help of the German Kaiser Wilhelm II, grandson of Queen Victoria (1859-1941). The Kaiser was then making his spectacular pilgrimage to the Holy Land; indeed one of the gates of the Old City had to be widened to let in his entourage.



## **First Zionist Congress**

So in 1897 Herzl organised the first Zionist Congress at Basle. Herzl has since been likened to Moses, a man leading his people to the Promised Land but never able to see the fruits of his labours himself. Actually Herzl burned himself out within a few years. He went to England to see Joseph Chamberlain, who was head of the Colonial office and regarded as the most powerful man in Britain. Joseph Chamberlain was not really interested in the Jews but he was keen to extend the British Empire. So they discussed a possible home for the Jews, including even Sinai and East Africa.

Herzl did not find his mission all plain sailing. Many of his fellow-Jews were strongly opposed to political Zionism. The Reform section of Jewry, then strong in Western Europe, completely rejected it. The Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, attended the conference at Basle but later became critical of political Zionism. Although he ended his days in Israel he became unpopular with many Israelis because of his insistence on open dialogue with the Palestinians with a view to creating a shared state.

## **The movement for spiritual Zionism**

Most interesting of all was the response of a young Hasidic Jew from the Ukraine called Asher Ginzberg (1856-1927). He joined the 'Lovers of Zion' movement at the age of 22 and became known thereafter by his pen name, Ahad Ha'am ('one of the people'). In 1889 he published his first essay, '*Lo ze ha-derekh*' ('This Is Not the Way'), where he emphasised the spiritual basis of Zionism. He called for a renaissance of Hebrew-language culture, which came to be known as 'Cultural Zionism'. He did support the creation of a Jewish national homeland in Palestine, but this was to be no more than a centre for the Jewish life of the Diaspora. He believed that the goal of re-creating Jewish nationhood required spiritual rebirth rather political pressure. So in 1897 he severely criticised the political Zionism of Theodor Herzl, believing that a Jewish state should be the end result of a Jewish spiritual renaissance rather than the

beginning. It was due to his efforts that the Hebrew University was founded in Jerusalem in 1927, some twenty years before the State of Israel.

It was World War I which drastically changed the history of the Holy Land and opened the way for an eventual Jewish State. Palestine once again in its long history became the scene of fierce battles. In addition to the destruction caused by the fighting, the population was devastated by famine, epidemics, and the punitive measures taken by the Turks against the Arabs. Jerusalem was captured by Allied forces under General Allenby in December 1917 and the remaining area was occupied by the British by October 1918.

But while this was taking place the Allies were already making decisions concerning the future of Palestine without much regard to the wishes of its normal inhabitants. By May 1916 Britain, France, and Russia had agreed that Palestine should be internationalised. To make matters worse, Britain made two independent promises which were in conflict. It is this which lies at the root of the present discord between Jews and Palestinians.

### **British promises in conflict**

The British made a commitment to the Arabs in return for their support against the Ottomans. An exchange of letters between the British High Commissioner in Egypt, and the Emir of Mecca in 1915-16 shows that the Arabs, including those in Palestine, were led to believe that Britain was promising them independence.

But in November 1917 Earl Balfour, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, addressed a letter to Jewish financier, Lord Rothschild. It expressed sympathy for the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, on the understanding that 'nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.' Unfortunately Balfour had little knowledge of the nature and number of the 'existing non-Jewish communities' and thought Palestine was virtually unpopulated.

This letter is now known as the Balfour Declaration. It was not prompted by any great stirring of conscience over the bitter fate of the Jewish people; rather, it was intended to encourage American Jews to influence the U.S. government to support British post-war policies, as well as to encourage Russian Jews to keep their nation fighting.

The Balfour Declaration was made public by the Zionist leaders in London, Chaim Weizmann and Nahum Sokolow. It actually fell short of the Zionists' expectations. They had asked for the reconstitution of Palestine as the Jewish national home, but the Declaration specifically stipulated that nothing was to be done to infringe the rights of the existing inhabitants.

At the end of the war the future of Palestine was still problematic. At the peace conference in 1920, the Allies divided up the territories formerly ruled by the Turks. Syria and Lebanon were mandated to France, and Palestine was mandated to Britain. The Balfour Declaration was endorsed by the Allied powers, but Britain was still expected to secure international sanction for their occupation of Palestine.

### **Western powers undermine harmony in the Holy Land**

Up until World War I Muslim, Christian and Jew lived in complete harmony in the Holy Land. Within the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem each had their own Quarter, and each had their own holy places and respected those of the others. Even the Russian migrants had been accepted in the 1880's without any protest. The decision made by the Western conquerors undermined that harmony.

In February 1919 a Palestinian Arab conference, which united both Muslim and Christian associations, passed a resolution rejecting the Balfour Declaration. An attempt was made to form an Arab Palestine within a Syrian federation of states but this collapsed, along with any hope of an independent Palestine. The Palestinian Arabs spoke of 1920 as an an-nakba, or 'year of catastrophe'.

Arab disappointment led in 1920 to anti-Zionist riots in the Old City of Jerusalem, resulting in many casualties among both Jews and Arabs. The British replaced the

military administration with a civilian administration, appointing as the first high commissioner Sir Herbert Samuel, a Zionist. Although Samuel was a liberal statesman and philosopher, it was hardly a very diplomatic move on the part of Britain. The new administration proceeded with the implementation of the Balfour Declaration, announcing in August a quota of 16,500 Jewish immigrants for the first year.

The Palestinians became even more alarmed when land purchased by the Jewish National Fund led to the eviction of Arab peasants. In 1921, anti-Zionist riots broke out in Jaffa, in which many Jews and Arabs were killed and wounded. An Arab delegation of notables visited London, demanding that the Balfour Declaration be repudiated and proposing the creation of a national government with a parliament democratically elected by the country's Muslims, Christians, and Jews. If that had been done the future of the Holy Land would have been very different.

The British government rejected it but, alarmed by the extent of Arab opposition, issued a White Paper declaring that Britain did 'not contemplate that Palestine as a whole should be converted into a Jewish National Home, but only that such a Home should be founded in Palestine'. It further decreed that immigration should not exceed the economic capacity of the country to absorb it.

### **Mandate for Palestine approved**

In 1922, in the very next month, the League of Nations approved the mandate for Palestine, incorporating the Balfour Declaration into its preamble and stressing the historical connection of the Jews with Palestine. It spoke of the establishment of the Jewish National Home but in such a way as ensured the rights of other sections of the population. Palestine thus became a distinct political entity for the first time in centuries and yet it created problems for Palestinian Arabs and Zionists alike. It was much less than the Zionists wanted and it was much more than the Palestinians were willing to concede.

The British rule of Palestine was very efficient; it developed public works, laid water pipelines, expanded ports, extended railway lines, and supplied electricity. But it

failed to solve the growing tension between Jew and Palestinian. Indeed, Britain itself was strangely ambivalent. Chaim Weizmann, president of the World Zionist Organisation remained in London, close to the ear of the British government, which tended to side with the Zionists. British local authorities in Palestine, however, being more aware of local conditions, sympathised with the Palestinian Arabs.

Aware of this uncertainty, the Jewish community in Palestine, led by David Ben-Gurion, set up in self-defence its own military organisation called the Haganah. An even more militant group of Jews formed a unit called the Irgun Zvai Leumi, which did not hesitate to use force against the Arabs. Violence broke out from time to time, particularly in 1929, when a dispute concerning religious practices at the Western Wall flared up. There were violent clashes in Jerusalem, Zefat, and Hebron, where the killed and wounded on both sides ran into the hundreds.

Britain set up a royal commission to study the situation. It was finally acknowledged that Britain's specific obligations to the Zionists under the Balfour Declaration clashed with its general obligations to the Arabs. As a result, the Passfield White Paper of 1930 gave some priority to Britain's obligations to the Arabs and called for a halt to Jewish immigration. But when the Palestinian Jews and London Zionists protested, the British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, nullified the White Paper. This convinced the Arabs that recommendations in their favour made in Palestine could too easily be annulled by Zionists in London.

### **Momentum gathers for a Jewish national home**

But already there was occurring in Europe the succession of events, which was to make the establishment of a Jewish national home a necessity. The Nazi rise to power in Germany in 1933, followed by its widespread persecution of Jews, gave a great impetus to Jewish immigration to Palestine. It jumped to 30,000 in 1933, 42,000 in 1934, and 61,000 in 1935. By 1936 the Jewish population of Palestine had reached almost 400,000, or 30 percent of the total. This new wave of immigration provoked major acts of Arab violence against both Jews and the British. The Arab political

parties collectively demanded an end to Jewish immigration and the prohibition of land transfer. They proclaimed a boycott of Zionist and British goods.

Then came the Arab Revolt of 1936-39, beginning with violence and a general strike in Jaffa and Nablus. The British were taken aback by the intensity of the revolt and shipped more than 20,000 troops into Palestine. By 1939 the Zionists themselves had armed more than 15,000 Jews in their own militia. According to some estimates, more than 5,000 Arabs were killed, 15,000 wounded, and 5,600 imprisoned. The traditional Arab leaders were either killed, or deported, leaving the rest dispirited. The Zionists, on the other hand, were united behind Ben-Gurion, and co-operated with British forces in their attacks against Arabs.

A further British Royal Commission, presided over by Lord Robert Peel, declared the mandate to be unworkable since Britain's obligations to both Arabs and Jews were mutually irreconcilable. The White Paper recommended that Palestine be partitioned and that an independent Jewish national home should be established. The Zionists were enraged because they were being allotted only a part of Palestine, even though it was immensely larger than their present land-holdings. The Arabs not only objected to the loss of their land but were horrified to hear there would be an enforced transfer of Arab population to Transjordan. Although the White Paper was opposed by both the Zionists and the Arabs, it succeeded in freezing the situation for the duration of the war.

### **Britain and Zionism in conflict**

Britain had long lost the trust of the Arabs. The outbreak of World War II now brought Britain into conflict with Zionism. The Zionists sought an immediate increase of Jewish immigration to Palestine, while the British sought to prevent it, regarding it as illegal and a threat to the stability of a region.

Ben-Gurion declared on behalf of the Jewish Agency: 'We shall fight with Great Britain in this war as if there was no White Paper and we shall fight the White Paper as if there was no war'. British attempts to prevent Jewish immigration to Palestine in

the face of the terrible tragedy befalling European Jewry led to the disastrous sinking of two ships carrying Jewish refugees, the Patria (November 1940) and the Struma (February 1942). In retaliation, the Irgun, under the leadership of Menachem Begin, and a small terrorist splinter group, known as the Stern Gang, embarked on widespread terrorist attacks on the British, culminating in the assassination of Lord Moyne, British minister of state in Cairo, in November 1944.

The neighbouring Arab countries then began to take a more active interest in Palestine. In October 1944 Arab heads of state met in Egypt, and set out the Arab position in the Alexandria Protocol. They made it clear that, although they regretted the bitter fate suffered by European Jewry as a result of European dictatorships, the Jewish problem should not be solved by inflicting injustice on Palestinian Arabs. The Arab League, formed in March 1945, re-asserted the Arab character of Palestine, and declared a boycott of Zionist goods. The pattern of the post-war struggle for Palestine was now beginning to emerge.

### **Zionists seek support from the United States**

The Holocaust had confirmed for the Jews that the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine was absolutely essential. Having lost the support of Britain, Zionists turned to the United States. Already in May 1942, at a Zionist conference in New York City, Ben-Gurion gained American support for the establishment of Palestine as a Jewish commonwealth, with unrestricted immigration and its own army to protect it. An increasing number of pro-Zionist statements came from United States politicians. In August 1945 President Harry Truman requested the British Prime Minister Clement Attlee to facilitate the immediate admission of 100,000 Jewish Holocaust survivors into Palestine.

Truman's request marked an important dividing line. From this time onwards USA increasingly took over the role previously played by Britain in determining the destiny of Palestine. The two powers had very different agendas. The primary goal of British policy was to secure British strategic interests in the Middle East, and for this the co-

operation of the Arab states was considered essential. Therefore the British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin opposed Jewish immigration and the foundation of an independent Jewish state in Palestine. Truman, on the hand, presided over a country which had the largest concentration of Jews to be found anywhere in the world. He was determined to listen to them and ensure that all Jews displaced by the war were permitted to enter Palestine.

Jewish immigration to Palestine was the major issue between 1945 and 1948. The Jews were determined to remove all restrictions to Jewish immigration and to establish a Jewish state and the Arabs were just as determined that no more Jews should arrive and that Palestine should be granted independence as an Arab state. Zionist pressure against British authority in Palestine was intensified, first by unauthorised immigration of refugees on a grand scale and, secondly, through acts of terrorism by their underground forces. It reached a culmination in July 1946, when the Stern Gang blew up a part of the King David Hotel containing British government and military offices, with the loss of 91 lives.

### **UN plans for partitioning Palestine**

World War II had left Britain victorious but exhausted. The British had no will to remain any longer in the Middle East and they referred the Palestine question to the United Nations. The UN recommended the partition of the country into an Arab state and a Jewish state, with Jerusalem and its environs to be declared an international city. At that stage Arabs still outnumbered Jews by two to one. (There were 1,269,000 Arabs and 678,000 Jews then living in Palestine).

In 1947 the UN plan for partitioning Palestine was adopted by a two-thirds majority but all the Islamic Asian countries voted against it. The competence of the General Assembly to partition a country against the wishes of the majority of its inhabitants was then referred to the International Court of Justice, but the appeal was narrowly defeated.



The Zionists welcomed the partition proposal, both because it recognised a Jewish state and also because it allotted 55 percent of Palestine to Israel. The Arabs fiercely opposed it, both in principle, and because a substantial minority of the population of the Jewish state would be Arab. Britain was unwilling to implement a policy that was not acceptable to both sides. So it set May 15, 1948, as the date for ending the mandate.

By January 1948 volunteers were arriving from the Arab countries to help the Palestinian Arabs, but they were soon overwhelmed by the Zionist forces. Confusion and disorder broke out. Many atrocities were committed on both sides. By May 13 the Zionist forces had secured full control of the Jewish share of Palestine and had already captured important positions in the areas allotted to the Arabs.

### **The British leave Palestine**

On May 14, the Union Jack was lowered in Jerusalem, and the British high commissioner, General Sir Alan Cunningham, sailed from Haifa at 11.30 p.m. that night. But already at 4 p.m. that day Ben Gurion proclaimed the state of Israel. Within 24 hours the United States recognised Israel as a legitimate state and the Soviet Union quickly followed suit.

On the following day, troops of the Transjordanian army, the Arab Legion, and their counterparts from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq entered the country and occupied all the areas which were not yet controlled by the Jews. The new State of Israel came to birth amid racial conflict and spent the first six months of its existence at war with its neighbours, in what is now called the War of Independence.

What happened from there on will be discussed in the next lecture. In this lecture we have been dealing with the British responsibility for the present instability in the Holy Land. It is in the thirty-year period of the British rule of Palestine, 1918-1948, that we find the sources not only of the continuing conflict between Israeli and Palestinian but also for the growing confrontation between the Western world and the Islamic world.

The Western Powers have dominated world affairs for so long that they have rendered themselves blind to the way they are perceived in the Islamic world. Until World War II it was Britain that was the dominant power. Then that role was taken over by USA. The power of the West has been secretly admired, and even coveted, but it has also fuelled resentment, distrust and hatred.

It is altogether too superficial to believe that world security will be restored by the elimination of Osama Bin Laden and his terrorist network. We in the West need to understand what lies behind such shocking acts of terrorism. They are only the symptoms of something much more deep-seated. Indeed, we do well to listen to what Bin Laden himself said, 'There can be no peace between the Islamic world and the Western world until the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is healed'. The British failed to do that. Can the United States now do better?

#### **(4) Who Resolves the Conflict?**

In 1998 Israel celebrated fifty years of statehood. Jewish aspirations had come a long way in the century since Herzl called the first Zionist Conference. There were great celebrations throughout Israel, seen worldwide on television. But there was a strong cautionary undertone indicating that conditions in the Holy Land were far from happy. The Palestinians in the occupied territories even declared the day al-nakhbar – ‘a year of catastrophe’. Israelis were very aware of their insecurity.

The insecurity has been there from the beginning – even from 1920. The State of Israel came to birth in the midst of armed conflict and that has continued in one form or another ever since. How is that conflict to be resolved?

When the War of Independence broke out in 1948, the United Nations stepped in to make peace, as it should have done, since the United Nations had imposed the partition plan. They appointed Count Folke Bernadotte to mediate between Israel and the Arab states. After arranging two very brief cease-fires, he was assassinated by Jewish terrorists. No truce was observed faithfully by either either side until July 1949, when the UN mediator secured separate armistice agreements between Israel and each of Egypt, Lebanon, Transjordan, and Syria.

For the next twenty years Israel lived in the state of an uncertain armistice with its Arab neighbours. The UN supplied a peace-keeping force to watch over the danger spots at the no-man’s land separating Israel from the Arab countries. This narrowed down to only a few yards at the point where the wall of the Old City of Jerusalem met the new Jewish city of West Jerusalem. That is how it still was when I first visited Israel in 1964.

Israel then had sovereignty over about four-fifths of Palestine, which was significantly more than had been intended in the original partition plan. Egypt controlled the Gaza strip, now largely populated by Palestinian refugees. The West Bank, including the Old City of Jerusalem, was taken over by Transjordan, which then became the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Palestine, as such, had disappeared.

## **Israel joins the United Nations**

The new state of Israel received world-wide moral support. The grim discovery of the Nazi death camps at the end of World War II led to widespread sympathy with the Jewish people. Soon after 1948 Israel was recognised by more than 50 governments and it had joined the United Nations.

But Israel felt far from secure. It seemed to be a little island amid a sea of large, hostile Arab nations. After 1948 the Arab world in general, and the Palestinians in particular, quite openly declared it was their aim to destroy the state of Israel, drive the Jewish immigrants into the Mediterranean sea, and regain the land unlawfully taken from them. In 1964, as I looked from the outskirts of Jerusalem to distant Bethlehem across the no man's land, even venturing into it by mistake on one occasion, my sympathies were all with Israel.

In 1965 I went to Jordan, visiting Bethlehem, Hebron, and the Old City of Jerusalem. I also saw the refugee camps, and my perspective began slowly to change. In 1949 the UN established a total of 53 refugee camps in Jordan, the Gaza Strip, Lebanon, and Syria, in order to shelter the 650,000 Palestinian refugees. Initially the refugees lived in tents, often several families to a tent. It was ten years before these were replaced by small houses of concrete blocks with iron roofs. Conditions were extremely harsh because of the extreme temperatures in winter and summer. As recently as 1999 I drove past some of those camps. They are still there after fifty years. Most people living in them now have known no other life.

## **Arab Palestinians persecuted**

After 1948 the Palestinian Arab-speaking community, widely dispersed and quite demoralised, just ceased to exist as a social entity. About one-eighth of it remained in Israel. Although Israel had agreed, under UN pressure, to 'uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of religion, race or sex', this was far from what became the reality. Continuing Arab presence was regarded by Israel as a serious threat to internal security. Some Palestinian land was confiscated

and the owners were forced to abandon agriculture and become unskilled wage labourers. Some three hundred villages were razed to the ground. Archival evidence (only recently released) has shown that David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973), the first Prime Minister, was particularly anti-Arab and was of the view that all Arabs should migrate to the Arab countries. Not only were they encouraged to do so, but over the first few years many thousands of Palestinians were forcibly transported to the borders.

For the West Bank Palestinians it was different. The Jordanian monarchy tried to integrate Palestinians into its population and thereby create a new Jordanian nationality. Indeed, about two-thirds of all Palestinians became Jordanian citizens. However, tensions soon developed between the original Jordanian citizens and the better-educated, more skilled newcomers.

For the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip it was worst of all. During the 20 years the Gaza Strip was under Egyptian control (1948-67), it remained little more than a reservation for refugees, where Egyptian rule was brutal and repressive. The Gaza Strip, which is only 25 miles long and 4-5 miles wide, became one of the most densely populated areas of the world. Poverty, unemployment and social misery became characteristic of life in the region.

The uneasy armistice between Israel and its Arab neighbours was too fragile to last indefinitely. It broke in 1956 when President Nasser of Egypt nationalised the Suez Canal. This so directly challenged Franco-British interests, that France hatched a secret plot with Britain and Israel. Israel was encouraged to attack Egypt and then France and Britain would intervene on the pretext of keeping the peace. The plot went badly astray. Eisenhower was furious that he had been kept in the dark. The British Prime Minister Anthony Eden was forced to resign. Nasser was left stronger than ever. France still remained a strong supporter of Israel and even enabled it to go ahead and build a nuclear warhead. Only after the 1967 June war did President de Gaulle distance himself from the Jews and Israel.

## **Israel defeats its Arab neighbours in six days**

In early 1967 the Syrian bombardments of Israeli villages from the Golan Heights began to intensify. When Israel shot down six Syrian MiG planes in reprisal, it quickly found itself at war with Syria, Egypt and Jordan. Israel so quickly overcame the combined forces of all three Arab states with its air force, that it was all over in 6 days, leaving Israel in complete command of the Old City of Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula. The Jewish joke of jubilation that went round New York at the time was the declaration, 'This was our finest hour, or did it take that long?'

Israel's victory gave rise to a further displacement of Palestinians, with more than 250,000 people fleeing to the East Bank of Jordan. But about 600,000 Palestinians remained in the West Bank and 300,000 in Gaza. That is how Israel, with 3,000,000 Jews found itself at last in possession of the whole of the Holy Land, but there were now 1,200,000 Palestinians, living under Israeli rule.

Further sporadic fighting led once again into a full-scale war in 1973. On October 6, the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur, Israel was attacked by Egypt across the Suez Canal and by Syria on the Golan Heights. Although the Israeli army this time suffered heavy casualties, it nevertheless pushed its way further into Syrian territory and even established a bridgehead west of the Suez Canal.

## **Parallels between Nazi and Zionist expansion**

In West Jerusalem there is an extensive memorial to the Holocaust, known as Yad Vashem. It is the most moving memorial I have ever visited. Crowds of people walk slowly and silently through the display, which documents and portrays many scenes from the Nazi programme for exterminating the Jewish people. When last there, I watched with interest a video demonstration of the successive steps by which Hitler expanded his domination of Europe between 1933-45. I was suddenly struck by the parallel with the way in which Israel, step by step, though on a smaller and much less gruesome scale, has expanded its domination of what was once Palestine.

At first Israel had only a precarious foothold in the Holy Land. Then the UN awarded it 55% of Palestine in its partition plan, but by 1948 it had conquered 80%. During the June War of 1967 it captured 100% of Palestine, as well as the Sinai from Egypt. Then it captured the Golan Heights from Syria. In 1980, it unilaterally annexed East Jerusalem, including the Old City, to form one permanently united Jerusalem. Six months later Israel unilaterally annexed the Golan Heights, thus making this Syrian land a permanent possession of Israel. Since then, Israel has increased its presence in the so-called occupied territories by establishing about 150 new Jewish settlements, one of the last of them being at Har Homa, a hill between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. This process is known as the ‘creeping transfer’ of Jews to the West Bank. The parallel between Nazi expansion and Zionist expansion is unmistakable.

Now it is quite offensive to Jews, for obvious reasons, to compare the Zionists with the Nazis. Knowing such a comparison would be dismissed as just another example of Gentile anti-semitism, I would not have mentioned it here, if it had not already been made by a Jewish philosopher in Israel. Before he died a few years ago, at the age of 91, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, having refused the highest awards Jewry could offer him, made a most devastating criticism of Israeli expansionist policy. Like a prophet of ancient Israel, he warned that the continued occupation of the Gaza strip and the West Bank would eventually spell the end of the State of Israel and bring a catastrophe to the Jewish people as a whole. It was he who referred to Israelis as ‘Judeo-Nazis’. He posed the question, ‘Who will want to be known as a Jew in 100 years, unless we stop doing to another people what was done to us?’

### **The birth of Palestinian consciousness**

So what was happening to this other people? Golda Meir, as we have seen, said there was no such people as the Palestinians. It is quite ironic that the dispersion of the inhabitants of Palestine, caused by the creation of the state of Israel, has had the long term effect of welding the Palestinians into a people, a people who now refuse to be

set aside and ignored. This happened at first only very slowly, for they were so scattered and demoralized.

After the 1967 war the Palestinians were scattered into three main groups:

- First, there were those who, in 1948, had remained to be citizens of Israel. They remained quiescent the longest until they began to feel they were second-class citizens, who were treated as a potential threat to Israeli security.
- Secondly, there were those in the occupied territories. They felt just like the French and the Dutch did when they lived under Nazi occupation. They lacked the freedom and citizens' rights we take for granted in an autonomous state. They have become increasingly restive.
- Thirdly, there were those who live as exiles in other lands, from which many wish to return and where, even in Jordan, they have not always been welcome.

Out of this dispersion situation there began to emerge something like a Palestinian consciousness. Let me illustrate it with anecdotes. A few years ago in Jordan I met a daughter of a former NZ Cabinet minister. She lives in Amman, married to a Christian Palestinian who was born in Bethlehem. She told me how her teenage sons so identify with the Palestinian cause that they wanted to go and join their Bethlehem cousins, and be throwing stones at Israeli soldiers along with them. Then one tends to come across exiled Palestinians almost anywhere today. I heard one get up at a lecture in Oxford and challenge what the speaker, a local rabbi, had been saying about Israel.

By the 1960's a new class of educated, mobile and vocal Palestinians was beginning to emerge, even though fewer than half of them lived in the occupied territories. They were working in the oil companies, civil services, and educational institutions of Arab states in the Middle East, and further afield. They began the process of developing a Palestinian consciousness, from which a new nation was struggling to be born.



## **Liberation movements formed**

First the Palestinians formed a secret organisation known as Fatah. This word is formed from the initials of the Arabic for ‘The Palestine National Liberation Movement’. They began the training of guerrilla units to carry out raids on Israel. Then in 1964 an Arab summit meeting in Cairo led to the formation of the more public movement known as the PLO (‘Palestine Liberation Organisation’. This soon claimed to be the sole representative of all Palestinian people. Among the principles of its charter were the right of all Palestinians to an independent state, the total liberation of Palestine, the return of the refugees to their homeland, and, as a necessary precursor, the destruction of the State of Israel.

In 1969 Yasir 'Arafat, the leader of Fatah, became chairman of the PLO and has remained the titular head of the Palestinian people ever since. As the aim of the PLO has been the total liberation of Palestine, they recognized that this could be achieved only through armed struggle. In this way terrorism became a key component in the Palestinian struggle against Israel.

## **Understanding the root causes of terrorism**

Since September 11 the whole world has suddenly become acutely aware of terrorism and this now global phenomenon has rightly come under universal condemnation. But there has been too little understanding of what gives rise to terrorism, whether in Ireland, the Holy Land or New York. At the root of the more serious acts of terrorism are three main ingredients:

- There is a long-term grievance in which people believe they have moral right on their side.
- These people find themselves to be relatively powerless in the face of an overpowering enemy.
- They find that the world at large, including international organisations such as UN, either ignores their grievance or is unable to do anything effective about it.

Under such conditions patience becomes exhausted and the most activist wing of such people concludes that only the most drastic measures possible will ever achieve any change. This does nothing at all to justify terrorism morally, but it does help us to understand it psychologically. The only long-term method of dealing with terrorism, therefore, is to go to the root cause – the original grievance.

In the case of the Palestinians the long-term grievance is that they have been dispossessed of the land which had long been theirs. Secondly, such few arms as they possess has left them quite powerless against the well-equipped army and air force of Israel, which, in any case, can further rely on the United States, the most powerful nation on earth. Thirdly, even the United Nations cannot help them, for although the UN General Assembly has several times ordered Israel to withdraw to the 1967 boundaries, Israel simply ignores the UN, knowing it has the support of USA.

The only tactics left for the Palestinians, as they saw it, was terrorism. The more moderate Palestinians claimed that, while they aimed at dismantling Israel and purging Palestine of Zionism, they also sought to establish a non-sectarian state in which Jews, Christians, and Muslims could live in equality. Of course, most Israelis doubted the sincerity or practicality of this goal and have viewed the PLO simply as a terrorist organisation, committed to destroying not only the Zionist state but also Israeli Jews. The very long period in which Jews have suffered anti-Semitic persecution, culminating in the Holocaust, only serves to confirm their belief that the Palestinians are simply one more anti-Semitic enemy, which they must resist absolutely.

### **Palestinians establish themselves in Lebanon**

The guerrilla tactics which the PLO began to plan soon got them into trouble with their own fellow-Arabs in Jordan. In September 1970 it erupted into a brief but bloody civil war, which became known as ‘Black September’. In 1971 the Jordanian army crushed the Palestinian military and forced them to go to Lebanon. From there, Palestinian guerrillas carried out attacks on Israel. Israel countered with raids into

southern Lebanon. The whole saga of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Lebanon has been a long and sorry one, as we shall see.

Before it ended, however, the first real step towards peace in the Middle East came from Egypt. In 1977 President Sadat made an historic and courageous visit to Jerusalem to present his peace plan before the Knesset (or Israeli Parliament). This enabled the U.S. president, Jimmy Carter, to negotiate peace between Israel and Egypt in 1979. Under the Camp David Accords Israel and Egypt signed a treaty that formally ended the state of war that had existed between them for 30 years. Israel returned the entire Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, and Egypt recognised Israel's right to exist. This was the first peace treaty between Israel and any Arab nation. President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin of Israel were jointly awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace. While Sadat's popularity rose in the West, it fell dramatically in the Arab world. Egypt was expelled from Arab League. Then Sadat was assassinated by Muslim extremists while reviewing a military parade in October 1981.

The 80's were fully taken up with increased tension between Israelis and Palestinians in Lebanon. Israeli jets bombed Beirut and southern Lebanon, where the PLO had a number of strongholds. This led to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, a drawn-out civil war in Lebanon, and the brutal massacre of more than 18,000 Palestinians.

### **The first intifada**

It is little wonder that hardening Palestinian feeling led to the first intifada (or uprising) in the occupied territories in December 1987. A whole generation of Palestinian youth had grown up under Israeli occupation, for some 70 percent of Palestinians were under 25 years of age. Their political status was uncertain, their civil rights minimal, and their economic status low. The growth of Palestinian population by natural increase now constitutes a demographic time-bomb. The total number of Palestinians throughout the world is now estimated to be about four and a half million.

The intifada took the form of a mass popular protest with most shops closing. Israel responded with university closings, arrests, and deportations. Large-scale riots and demonstrations broke out in the Gaza Strip. A new and more militant group now emerged, known as Hamas - an acronym for the Islamic Resistance Movement. It is an underground armed wing of the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood, and it rejects any accommodation with Israel. This first intifada lasted until 1993 and during that time over 1,400 Palestinians were killed, and some 16,000 imprisoned.

In 1989 the PLO proclaimed the 'State of Palestine', and its governing body, the Palestine National Council, regarded itself as a kind of government-in-exile of the new quasi-state, with Yasir 'Arafat as president. Although this declaration was largely rhetoric with no substance to it, within a short time 25 nations, including the Soviet Union, but excluding the United States and Israel, had extended recognition to the government-in-exile.

Of much more importance was the PLO's acknowledgment of Israel's right to exist. It officially condemned terrorism as a deliberate policy, abandoned its long-standing goal of eliminating Israel and accepted the goal of separate Israeli and Palestinian states. This was a tremendous step forward for which they have received little credit from Israel, first because there is so little trust between the two sides and secondly because Israel does not want a Palestinian state. As recently as 1998, Israeli Government spokespersons were insistent that an independent Palestinian state would constitute too much of a danger to have on their borders.

### **The Declaration of Principles is signed**

A change of Israeli government in 1992 led to the signing in Washington, by both PLO and Israel, of the historic 'Declaration of Principles'. Prominent among the Palestinian negotiators was Hanan Ashrawi, daughter of one of the founders of the PLO. She grew up in an Anglican family and earned a doctorate in English literature in USA. She became a Professor at the Palestinian University of Ramallah, and frequently appears on television programs. She convincingly articulates the new spirit

of Palestinian pragmatism and, in my view, is much more able than Yasir Arafat; but, being a woman in Arab society, she has not been universally accepted as the natural leader that she is.

The new Principles included mutual recognition and a plan by which some functions of government would be progressively handed over to a Palestinian Council. Palestinian self-rule was to be granted in Gaza and six large West Bank towns. These areas are now under the control of the Palestinian Authority (PA), which has assumed local control of education and culture, social welfare, health, tourism, and taxation. Security for these areas rests with the Palestinian police, although Israelis are guaranteed freedom of movement. For this significant advance, Peres, Rabin and ‘Arafat were jointly awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1994. But in 1995 Rabin paid for it with his life. He was assassinated by a Jewish zealot. It all goes to show that there are fanatics and terrorists on both sides and although each side thinks itself the less violent, it is hard for a neutral observer to judge either one better than the other.

### **Netanyahu sets the peace process back**

The peace process initiated by Shimon Peres was known by the slogan ‘Land for Peace’, since security from further acts of terrorism was all that the Palestinians had to offer in return for some land they could call their own. The process received a setback when, in 1996, Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of the right-wing Likud Party, was elected Prime Minister of Israel. He made clear from the outset what he intended for Palestinian independence. There was to be no Palestinian state and the present borders of Israel were not to be pulled back. Indeed the maps now appearing in Israel no longer show the West Bank as occupied territory but as part of Israel. Netanyahu provocatively stated that he would never allow Israel to become a ghetto. But what he did was to draw a number of little circles within the occupied territories, seemingly blind to the fact that they looked remarkably like a series of Palestinian ghettos within Israel. Israelis had free movement everywhere but Palestinians had to show their work pass to move out of their home town. It is quite ironic that a people, who had, for so

many centuries in the past, been forced by anti-Semitic Christendom to live in ghettos, should now seriously contemplate a similar type of existence for the Palestinians.

The quest for peace began to look decidedly more promising when Ehud Barak became Prime Minister in a landslide victory in 1999. Barak was elected on a platform that promised a clear peace with Israel's neighbours, primarily the Palestinians, Syria and Lebanon. He met Yasir Arafat in Oslo on November 2, this marking the fourth anniversary of Yitzhak Rabin's assassination. An ambitious but rather tight programme was worked out in order to bring the peace process to a speedy conclusion. President Clinton offered to hold a Camp-David-type summit the following year.

### **Ehud Barak's peace plan**

By May 2000 Barak had withdrawn all Israeli troops from Southern Lebanon. He planned to make peace with Syria by handing back most, if not all of the Golan. Barak was prepared, not only to offer Palestinians autonomy over more of the occupied territories than any leader before him, but also to dismantle most of the Jewish settlements on the West Bank. Barak had promised his people they would have a referendum and he believed he could carry a solid majority of the Israeli public with him if, by his negotiations, he could offer Israel a permanent peace.

Then things began to go badly wrong. Israel became deeply divided about the Golan and the dismantling of Jewish settlements on the West Bank. Barak's popularity declined rapidly in the opinion polls. Finally, 'Arafat disappointed not only him but also many others by refusing to sign the agreement; he knew he could never get the Palestinian Authority to accept such a reduction of its aims. Barak, who had staked his prime ministership on the deal, was losing so much Israeli support that it is most improbable that he could have won the promised referendum. But that was the nearest the peace process ever got to a settlement, and President Clinton greatly regretted he could not add it to his list of achievements. The peace process then ground to a halt.

## **Second intifada declared**

It is therefore not surprising that, as a result, a second intifada was declared. This was triggered off by Ariel Sharon, when he made a provocative visit to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Sharon is already well-known to both Jew and Arab as an impulsive, uncontrollable and dogmatic man and his visit was provocative on two counts. Sharon leads the Likud Party, whose Manifesto asserts that the State of Israel has an eternal and indisputable claim to sovereignty over all the land West of the Jordan. It opposes the granting of any concessions to the Palestinians in exchange for peace.

Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount was provocative, secondly, because he was the principal architect of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon and even Israel enforced his resignation, when it was shown he could have prevented the dreadful massacres of the Palestinian refugees and failed to do so.

Now that Ariel Sharon is in power, the peace process is not only stalled but in reverse. The gap between Israeli and Palestinian expectations is so great, it is difficult to see how any compromise can ever be reached.

The Israelis:

- Want to retain military control over the whole of the Holy Land.
- Refuse to surrender the Golan Heights to Syria.
- Refuse to see Jerusalem again divided.
- Do not welcome an independent Palestinian state on their borders.
- Are opposed to the return of Palestinian refugees.

The Palestinians:

- Want a completely independent Palestinian state.
- Want East Jerusalem as their capital.
- Want all Jewish settlements in the occupied territories disbanded.
- Want free entry for the return of Palestinian refugees and exiles.

Who can resolve this conflict over the possession of the Holy Land? Israel and the Palestinians cannot do it on their own. After more than fifty years they seem further apart than ever. Extremists on both sides make it impossible to reach a compromise. The British tried and failed. The UN then took over and should even now be the chief mediator, for it was for this purpose, among others, that the UN was established. But the UN's role has been increasingly usurped by USA, and with Jimmy Carter it had a certain amount of success. But USA cannot be a neutral mediator, for in the eyes of the Palestinians the USA is simply Israel's big and powerful brother. Moreover, when it suits them, both Israel and USA simply ignore the United Nations. Failure to heal the conflict in the Holy Land has the potential to escalate into a wider and even more serious international conflict.

### **The looming threat of an all-out war**

In April of this year [2001], I said on Radio New Zealand,

In many ways the peace process in the Holy Land was doomed from the start. Unless Israel is prepared to make concessions far in excess of what most Israelis are willing to offer, there is no way to overcome Palestinian grievance and provide peace and security for both Israeli and Palestinian. The best days of the brave new State of Israel may well be over. Perhaps there will be peace in the Holy Land only when Palestinians and Israelis become incorporated into one, religiously neutral state, in which equality of citizenship and opportunity is guaranteed to all. Unfortunately, an all-out war may have to be fought before that goal can be reached.

Six months after that broadcast we are nearer to that all-out war than we were then. Indeed that war may have already begun, starting with Afghanistan in October 2001.

Director of the Harvard Institute of Strategic Studies, Samuel Huntington, warned us of this in 1996, when he said that the patronising superiority of the West is bringing us into a clash of civilisations. He referred to what he called the major fault lines in the earth's 'civilisation plates', two of which are the Islamic world and the western world.



In the nineteenth century it was the European empires which dominated the globe, none more so than the British. The twentieth century ended with the United States dominating the globe. In both cases the Islamic world developed resentment against the chauvinistic arrogance of the West.

This resentment gave rise to several reactionary movements, the most common of which is simply referred to today as Muslim fundamentalists. They have tried to seize power in several Islamic countries, including Afghanistan. In their eyes the only adequate response to a dominating global superpower, such as USA, is a global jihad. This is why Bin Laden refers to USA as the big Satan.

As we move into the twenty-first century, within a process of rapid globalisation, the Western world has to learn the hard lesson that though domination by force may quell violence, and appear to restore order, it does not bring peace. That point was made more than two and a half thousand years ago by a prophetic voice which came out of Jerusalem. Jeremiah the prophet proclaimed, 'They are saying peace, peace, when there is no peace'<sup>12</sup>. It is not for nothing that the Holy Land is regarded as the religious centre of the world by nearly half of humankind. Jerusalem remains to this day a powerful symbol for the world. In many ways it is a microcosm of the world at large, and of the international tensions within it. In particular, there runs through this city the major fault line between two of the earth's 'civilisation plates', Islam and the West. When we have found a way of establishing peace in the Holy Land we shall have some chance of creating a stable global peace.

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<sup>12</sup> Jeremiah 6:14

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