



A Brief History of Palestine

In Point Form and Pictures

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Catholics for Justice and Peace in the Holy Land
CJPHL.com



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Any history cannot help but be influenced by bias, both current and historical. The history of the Holy Land has almost exclusively been told in the West from the viewpoint of biblical texts interpreted by Christian Zionists. In the descriptions below some of that history is traced but with the reminder always that the stories of many of the peoples of the region have not been told to the world through their own voice.

This schematic history is limited like all histories, and it serves only as a launching board for those who would like an introduction to the rich past of this region. It offers a way to understand the lead-up to the current situation and offer solidarity to the people of the Holy Land as they search for a just future that ensures the freedom and dignity on equal footing of all.

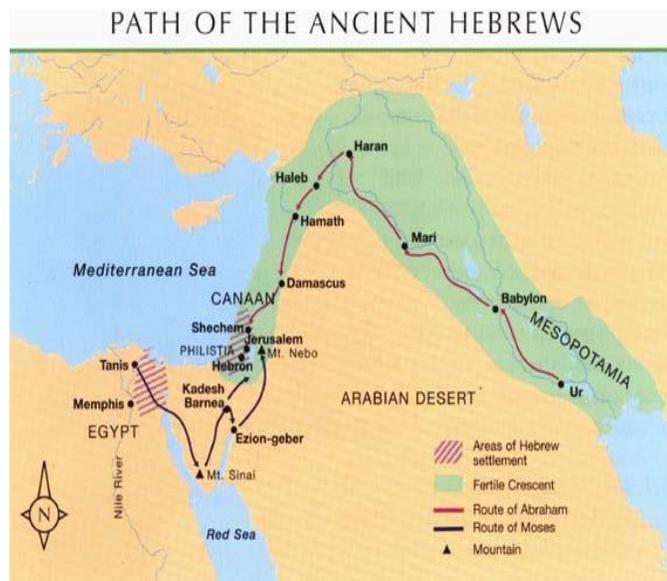
The Biblical Era

- Archeological evidence indicates that humans occupied the region for thousands of years. The city of Jericho is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world.



[This Photo](#) of excavations at ancient Jericho by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#)

- By **1550 BCE** (approximately) the empire of Egypt was in control of the indigenous Canaanites and their lands. Around **1290 BCE** the ancient Hebrew people are believed to have escaped Egypt under the leadership of Moses (proposed dates vary). Archeological evidence demonstrates that in the meantime the Canaanites had an established community at Jerusalem at least 400 years before this.



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- Moses' successor Joshua leads the Hebrew people's attack on the peoples of ancient Canaan to retake what they see as God's 'Promised Land' to them.
- In **1000 BCE** (approximately), David becomes King of the united Kingdom of Israel and establishes Jerusalem as his capital.
- In **940 BCE** King Solomon - son of David - has the First Temple built in Jerusalem. The cost almost bankrupts the nation.



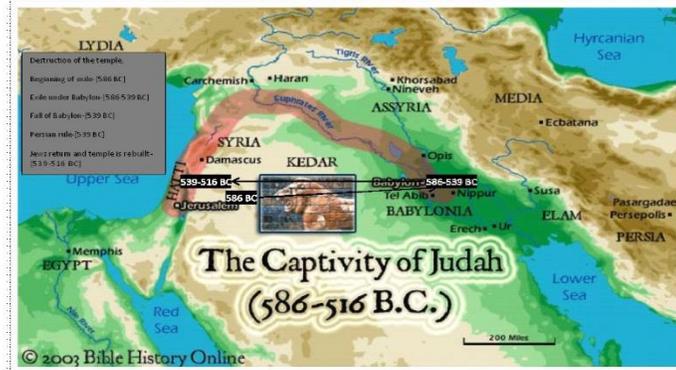
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- Around **930 BCE** the kingdom splits into two, with the Kingdom of Israel in the north and the Kingdom of Judah (with Jerusalem) to the south.



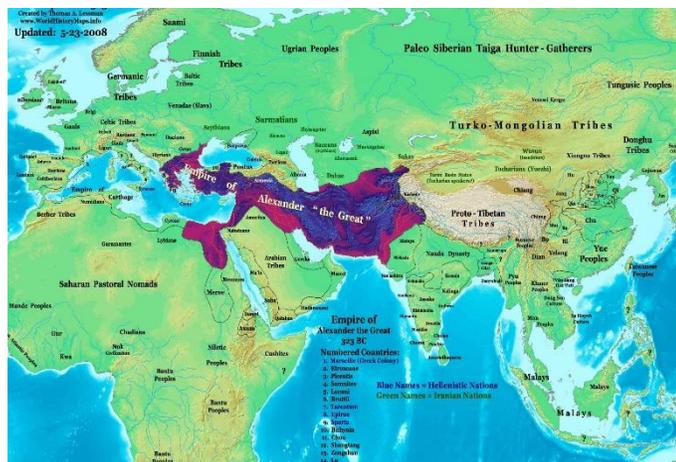
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- Around **720 BCE** the Kingdom of Israel is conquered by the Neo-Assyrians.
- In **597 BCE** the Babylonians conquer the southern Kingdom of Judah including Jerusalem. In **586 BCE** they destroy Solomon’s Temple. They capture the societal leaders and take them to Babylon. This period is known as the **Babylonian Captivity**. Psalms of sorrow were written during the exile that still reverberate in such contemporary songs as “The Rivers of Babylon” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYK9iCRb7S4>).



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- Captive leaders of Jerusalem and their descendants are allowed to return to Jerusalem in **538 BCE**. This leads to a renewal of identity and culture and the construction of the Second Temple, completed around **516 BCE**.
- **332 BCE** Alexander the Great conquers the region.
- In **200 BCE** the Greek-speaking Seleucids under Antiochus capture the region. In **167 BCE** the Seleucid king desecrates the temple by sacrificing a pig on the altar. A revolt erupts as a result and lasts from **167 – 160 BCE** under the leadership of the Maccabees (also known as the Hasmoneans) who regain control of the region and the temple priesthood. The re-taking of the temple is celebrated each year by Hanukkah.



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- In **63 BCE** the Romans conquer the region.

This is why the Romans are in control of the area at the time of Jesus' birth. They establish the family of Herod as puppet kings in the region.

- Around **5-0 BCE** Jesus of Nazareth is born in Bethlehem.
- Around **30 CE** Jesus dies and is resurrected in Jerusalem.

From the First Century to 1900

- In 66 CE the First Jewish-Roman War begins as the Jews attempt to throw off their oppressors. All of the Second Temple is destroyed except for the Western Wall in 70 CE. The revolt is fully squashed by 73 CE.

The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE shifts the center of Christianity, which had been in Jerusalem until that time, to Europe.



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- In 132 – 135 CE the Bar Kochba rebellion occurs but also fails to throw off the Romans.
- In 313 CE, the Holy Roman Emperor Constantine legalizes Christianity, and it soon becomes the most important religion of the empire.

Churches begin to be built in Jerusalem, including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem where Jesus died, and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.



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- In 636 CE Muslims conquer Jerusalem.

- In 687 CE Muslims build the Dome of the Rock Mosque on top of the site of the Temple to commemorate Mohammad's ascension into heaven.



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- In the 8th, 9th and 10th centuries battles continued for control among Muslim invaders.
- In 1099 CE Pope Urban II launches the crusades and for the next two centuries Roman Catholic Crusaders battle with Muslim armies and the Orthodox Christians of the Holy Land for control of the region, killing countless innocent civilians in the process both in Europe and Palestine.
- In 1291 CE the Mamluks fully defeat the Crusaders and the Crusades to the Holy Land end.



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- In the 1500s the Turkish Ottoman empire conquers the area. The Dome on the Rock mosque is restored. Despite much conflict, the Ottoman empire remains mainly in control until the end of WW I.

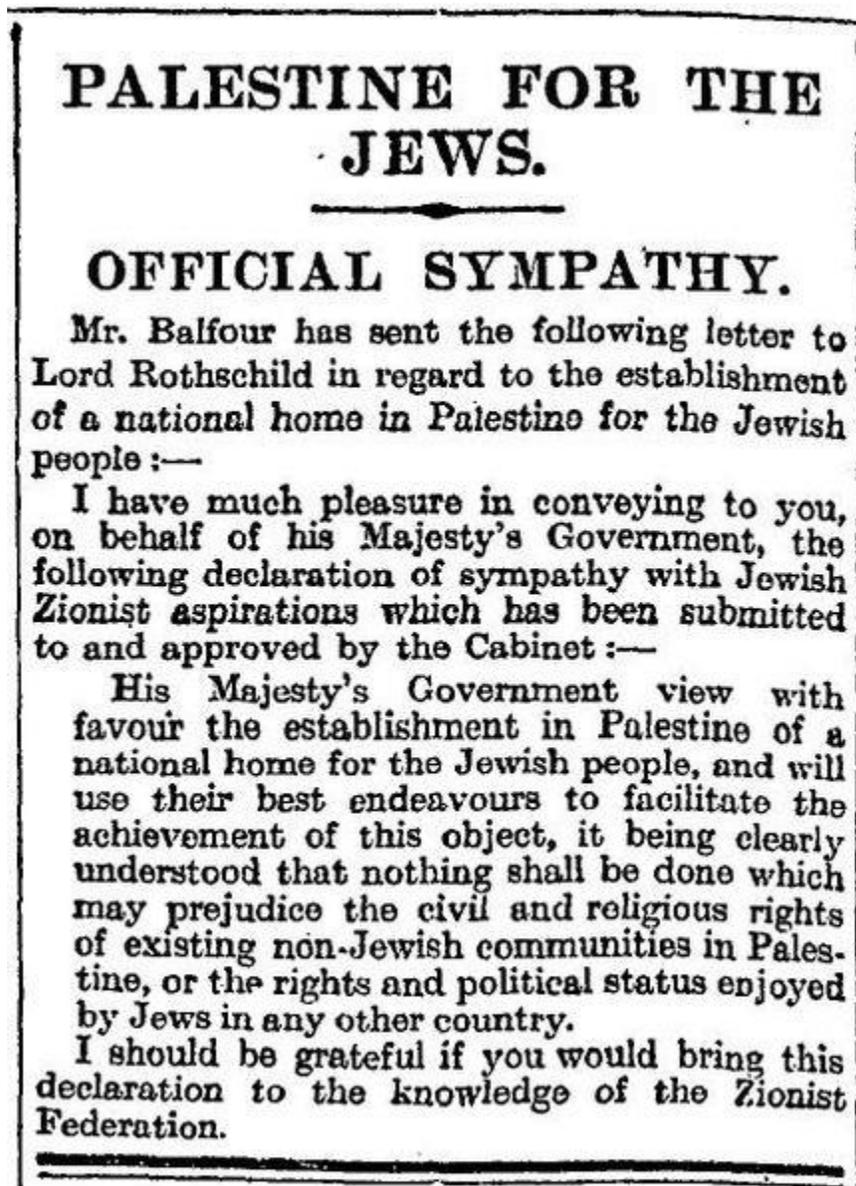


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- In 1799 CE the Napoleonic wars occur but do not oust the Ottomans.
- Because of ongoing oppression of Jewish peoples in Europe, in 1897 the First Zionist Congress is held in Basel, Switzerland to establish a homeland for Jewish people. In 1901 the **Jewish National Fund** is created to fund these efforts.

From 1900 until Today

- In 1917-1918 the British conquer the area and take over rule from the Ottoman Empire. The area is now called the Palestine Mandate.
- In 1917, the British government publishes the Balfour Declaration in which it declares its support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. At this time 8% of the local population is Jewish and 92% is Palestinian (of which about 30% of these are Christian and about 65% are Muslim). The local population is not consulted.



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- From 1939 to 1945 the world is embroiled in WWII, and the resulting genocidal attacks on European Jews intensifies the desire to create a Jewish homeland (aka Zionism).



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- By 1947 about 30% of the population of the Palestine region is Jewish and 70% Palestinian (Christian and Muslim).
- In 1947, the UN negotiates with Britain (without Palestinian consultation) that 57% of Palestine should be taken as a Jewish homeland. The most fertile land and the major port cities are all given to the new Jewish country of Israel. Jerusalem is deemed a *corpus separatum*, a distinct area not part of the new Jewish homeland.



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- Non-Jewish inhabitants begin to be evicted, persecuted and killed by some of the settlers despite efforts by British troops to prevent this. Many observers refer to this as ethnic cleansing.ⁱ
- Britain declares that its troops are leaving Palestine on May 15th, 1948. The state of Israel is declared the day prior. On May 15th, 1948 the Nakba (Catastrophe) therefore

begins. Israeli troops move in and destroy 418 Palestinian villages turning approximately 750 000 Palestinians into refugees. The remaining small minority of Palestinians flee into what becomes Israel, and are later given Israeli citizenship but report discrimination to this day.



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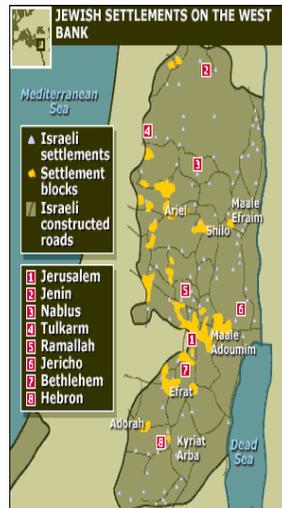


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- Arab armies attempt to fight back yet in 1949 a ceasefire is declared leaving Israel in control of 78% of Palestine – its recognized border of today -- instead of the 57% originally allocated. Palestinians maintain control of East Jerusalem which includes the Old City with the principal Holy sites.
- Most of the rest of Palestine is known as the **West Bank** (of the Jordan River) including **East Jerusalem**, and a separate tiny coastal area, the **Gaza Strip**.
- In 1967 Israel launches pre-emptive strikes against Egypt stating that they fear attack. This triggers the Six Days War, with Syria and Jordan coming to Egypt's defense. With the advantage of surprise, Israel conquers the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, considered Occupied Territory ever since, and intensifies the oppression of 'Arabs' (Palestinians) in Palestine/Israel.

Today

- Since 1967 there have been two major uprisings of Palestinians called **Intifadas** (literally “shaking off”). Nonetheless Israel has taken more and more land from Palestinians.
- Israel continues to establish illegal settlements on Occupied Palestinian land, protecting them with Israeli soldiers, despite more than 70 UN resolutions condemning the practice.



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- Each of the blue dots and yellow areas above represent **illegal Israeli settlements** on Palestinian territory and loss of homes, farms and land for Palestinians. Palestinians are also not allowed to drive on the ‘Israeli constructed roads’ even though these roads cross their territory and may even have been constructed through their own farms. Israelis are given yellow license plates while Palestinians are given green license plates so the army can tell who is driving.



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- Today, Israel also arrests and detains Palestinian children and adults often without charge. According to Defense for Children International Palestine, **“Each year approximately 500-700 Palestinian children, some as young as 12 years old, are detained and prosecuted in the Israeli military court system.”** (https://www.dci-palestine.org/military_detention_stats). The same website reports that there have been 19 documented cases of Palestinian children used as human shields since the practice was rendered illegal in 2005. Worse, many children are killed. By August 2021 DCIP had documented 72 deaths of Palestinian children by the Israeli military since January (8 months). **“At the end of 2020, 781 Palestinian children have been killed by Israeli military and police forces, settlers, and private security guards since 2011.”** (https://www.dci-palestine.org/fatalities_injuries).



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- In the early 2000s, Israel began to build walls enclosing some Palestinian cities and segregating East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, severely curtailing entrance and exit of people. In Bethlehem, Ramallah, and other towns and villages, the wall cuts off farmers from their land, prevents people from going to work or attending universities, seeking medical care, or even having weddings and family gatherings.



The Wall in Bethlehem - Photo Credit: B. Carroll

o Since 2007, Israel has besieged the Gaza Strip by land, water and air, creating a densely-populated open air prison out of what is home for nearly 2 million people. The siege prevents people from leaving, controls the amount of food and clean water entering Gaza, severely limits medicines, and all manner of supplies. The United Nations has declared that Gaza may soon become unlivable.



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- o In 2014, the situation heated up further when, in response to the deaths and arrests without charge of numerous Palestinian children by the Israeli army, members of the militant wing of the Palestinian political organization Hamas kidnapped and killed three Israeli teenagers. Israel responded with widespread arrests of Palestinians. Hamas then launched several rockets out of Gaza into Israel.
- o Israel launched an all-out bombardment of Gaza. The Israeli army bombed UN flagged clinics and shelters, killing over 2000 people of which more than a quarter were children.



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Bombing of Gaza 2014

- o Beginning in March 2018, tens of thousands of Gazans massed every week on their lands near the fence with Israel in non-violent protest as part of the **Great March of Return**. While not a single Israeli was injured by the time of the 70th anniversary of the Nakba, the Israeli

army had attacked and massacred over 100 unarmed protesters and injured over 5000, including many identified as medics such as Canadian doctor Dr. Tarek Loubani.

- o Two major human rights organizations, Human Rights Watch and B'tselem, both concluded that the Israeli occupation of Palestine constituted **Apartheid** in 2021.
- o In May 2021, Israel cut off access to holy sites to Palestinian Muslims during Ramadan and allowed right wing anti-Palestinian Israelis into the Al Aqsa Mosque compound under military escort leading to further unrest. While Palestinians sheltered in the mosque, it was assaulted by Israeli forces. In the meantime right-wing settlers attacked Palestinians throughout Jerusalem and the West Bank and Palestinians responded at times with violence.
- o Israel resumed air strikes on Gaza with **Operation Guardian of the Walls**. So far 60 children have been killed in this round of attacks. Bombings continue as of August 2021.



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ⁱ See for example Ben White, **Israeli Apartheid: A Beginner's Guide** (PlutoPress: London, 2009), 22-31.