

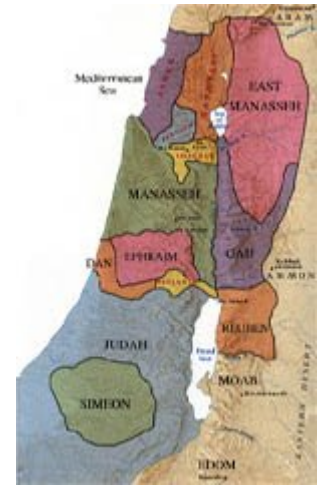
40 Significant Facts About Israel's History - Part 1

by Clarence H. Wagner, Jr.

The Jewish people have had an inseparable relationship with the Land of Israel - the Land of the Bible, for the past 4,000 years since the days of Abraham.

There have been ebbs and flows in Jewish habitation of the land.

However, to be sure, at no period since the days of Joshua have all of the Jewish people been exiled from the Land of Israel. Some Jews have always remained in the Land, in greater or lesser numbers.



While their exiles under the Assyrians and Babylonians were relatively short lived, the last greater exile by the Romans lasted almost 1,800 years.

Nevertheless, God said He would restore His people Israel to their land in one final and great return and restoration. There are a multitude of biblical prophecies concerning the regathering of the Jewish people from around the world to a barren land that would be restored to its former glory. This began to unfold in the late 1800s. Events leading to the establishment of the modern State of Israel began during the period when the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire controlled the region, then called Palestine.

The chronology of past invaders who ruled in the land of Israel reads like a Who's Who of World Empires. The Land of Israel was a choice fruit that everyone wanted to pluck for their own ends. Those characteristics that made this land desirable enough to be chosen by the Lord as "His Land," also made it the focus of empires who wanted to rule the world. In some cases, they just wanted to overrule the Jewish people, because they were the people of God and some of these world powers were opposed to the things of God. Israel and the Jewish people are some of those important "things" of God.

In this Israel Teaching Letter, I want to traverse the significant facts of over 4,000 years of Israel's history so that we have a foundation to validate the Jewish claim to this land.

Fact #1

According to many scholars, the Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, were active in Canaan between 2100-1875 BC. The birthright to the covenant established with Abraham in

Genesis 12:1-3 was passed on from Abraham to Isaac (not Ishmael or the other sons of Abraham), to Jacob (not Esau), and through Jacob's twelve sons who became known as the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

The twelve sons of Jacob were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph and Benjamin. God withdrew Levi from the list of tribes to use the Levites in the transport and care of the tabernacle and its service (Num. 1:47-53). Why Joseph was withdrawn from the list, we are not told, but his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (two half tribes), were selected to make up the number of twelve. Some suggest it was an expression of the double portion of inheritance to a firstborn son, showing that Joseph's dream was, in fact, true. (1)

After Jacob's son, Joseph, was sold into slavery and eventually became the Prime Minister of Egypt, the rest of the family found refuge there from a regional famine. They remained in Egypt, and the Hebrews ultimately became slaves under a Pharaoh *"that knew not Joseph."*



Fact #2

As promised, about 400 years after Joseph first came to Egypt, a redeemer was raised up to bring the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt in a great Exodus. His name was Moses. It was God's intention for the Children of Israel to move into the Promised Land directly, but they chose to stay in the desert after receiving the report of the twelve spies that the people of the land were powerful and their cities fortified. Despite the fact the Joshua and Caleb brought examples of the produce of the land - grapes, figs and pomegranates - the people chose not to enter. Not violating their freewill, God kept them in the desert for 40 years, so that the second generation was the one to move into and conquer the Promised Land.

Even though the first generation of Hebrews who left Egypt in the Exodus showed a lack of faith in God, choosing not to enter the Promised Land immediately, God was still with them. He provided shelter, food (manna and quail), shoes that would not wear out, and showed Himself in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He still loved them even though they disobeyed Him. He protected them so that their children could fulfill His calling to enter into His land.



Fact #3

After God brought Joshua and the Israelites into the Promised Land, it took hundreds of years to conquer the land, just as God had said:

"The Lord your God will drive out those nations before you, little by little. You will not be allowed to eliminate them all at once, or the wild animals will multiply around you. But, the Lord your God will deliver them over to you, throwing them into great confusion until they are destroyed. He will give their kings into your hand, and you will wipe out their names from under heaven. No one will be able to stand up against you; you will destroy them. The images of their gods you will destroy by fire" (Dt. 7:22-25a).

The Bible is very specific as to where the Twelve Tribes of Israel were settled in the land, describing their territorial claims in great detail. With a Bible and current map of Israel, you can still trace the borders of these tribal regions. Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh were settled on the east side of the Jordan River (Num. 32:33). The other nine and one-half tribes were settled west of the Jordan as recorded in Joshua 15-19.



Fact #4

Saul became Israel's first king in about 1050 BC. However, only under Kings David and Solomon, Israel's second and third kings, did the nation fully consolidate into the Davidic (1010-970 BC) and Solomonic (970-930 BC) empires. Solomon's empire incorporated all the land from the Sinai desert up to the Euphrates River, but not the totality of what God had promised to Israel.

Prophetically, this will come to pass in a day to come.



Fact #5

In 1004 BC, Jerusalem became the capital of a United Israel, by God's choice. It was specially located to be the administrative and spiritual center of the kingdom, on the border between the tribal area of Judah and Benjamin. It was not located on any major trade route, nor a major waterway or seaport, or near an economic or agricultural resource. Jerusalem's only main attraction was the Temple of the Lord and His Presence, even in the past. Other empires and religions only wanted to conquer Jerusalem because of its spiritual identity and importance in the Bible.

David conquered the city and bought the threshing floor of Araunah for fifty shekels of silver for the House of the Lord. Eventually Solomon built the Temple (II Chr. 3:1), and to this day, the only recorded deed for this land is in the Bible. However, instead of there being a Jewish Temple to the Lord there today, there are several Moslem mosques on this site and religious Jews and Christians are forbidden to pray on this Temple Mount. Yet, according to the Bible and history, it is a sacred

area that does not belong to the Moslems, but to the Jews. It is also the site for the Third Temple that is yet to be built (Eze. 40-44), so one day its status will change.



Fact #6

After Solomon's death in 930 BC, the United Kingdom was divided into a northern kingdom (Israel), with its capital in Samaria, and a southern kingdom (Judah), with its capital in Jerusalem.

The major kings of the northern kingdom (Israel) were: Jeroboam I (928-907 BC), Nadah (907-906), Baasha (906-883), Omri (882-871), Ahab (871-852), Joram (852-842), Jehu (842-814), Jehoahaz (814-800), Jehoash (800-784), Jeroboam II (784-748), Menahem (747-737), Pekahiah (737-735), Pekah (735-733), and Hoshea (733-724). The line ended with the Assyrian Captivity in 722 BC.

The major kings of the southern kingdom (Judah) were: Rehoboam (928-911 BC), Abijah (911-908), Asa (908-867), Jehoshaphat (867-846), Jehoram (846-843), Athaliah (842-836), Joash (836-798), Amaziah (798-769), Uzziah (769-733), Jotham (750-735), Ahaz (733-727), Hezekiah (727-698), Manasseh (698-642), Josiah (639-609), Jehoiakim (608-598) and Zedekiah (596-586). The line ended with the Babylonian Captivity in 586 BC. (2)

The major prophets of the northern kingdom (Israel) were: Elijah (875-848 BC), Elisha (848-797), Jonah (785-775), Amos (760-750), and Hosea (750-715).

The major prophets of the southern kingdom (Judah) were: Obadiah (855- c.840), Isaiah (740-681), Jeremiah (626-585) and Ezekiel (593-571). After the exile, we find Daniel (605-530), Zechariah (520-480), and Malachi (440-430). (3)



Fact #7

In 722 BC, judgment came upon the northern kingdom when Sennacherib, King of Assyria, conquered it, but unsuccessfully laid siege to Jerusalem. King Hezekiah built the underground water tunnel that emptied into the Pool of Siloam so that the people had water inside the city walls. The angel of God killed Sennacherib's army on the hills around Jerusalem and he went home in shame (II Kgs. 19). In the record of his life, Sennacherib recorded the event just as it is told in the Bible.

In 586 BC, the southern kingdom of Judah eventually fell to Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, who captured and destroyed Jerusalem, dismantling the First Temple of God. The Ark of the Covenant disappeared at this time. Many speculate on where it is, but no one has made such a discovery public. Judah was taken into captivity in Babylon (II Kgs. 25).



Fact #8

In 539-537 BC, following a decree by the Persian King Cyrus who had conquered Babylonia, some Jews returned to Israel. An estimated 50,000 embarked on their First Return, led by Zerubbabel, a descendant of the House of David. (4) The first thing the people did was to reestablish the Temple of the Lord, as recorded in the book of Ezra. Less than a century later, in 445 BC, a Second Return was led by Ezra the Scribe and Nehemiah. They undertook a massive reconstruction and fortification of the city walls and the further development of the Temple of the Lord, as recorded in the Book of Nehemiah. The establishment of this Second Temple was ultimately enlarged and beautified by Herod the Great, 500 years later.

The repatriation of the Jews, Ezra's inspired leadership, the building of the Second Temple, the refortification of Jerusalem's walls and the establishment of the Knesset HaGedolah (Great Assembly), which was the supreme religious and judicial body of the Jewish people, marked the beginning of the Second Commonwealth (Second Temple Period). Within the confines of the Persian Empire, Judah was a nation centered in Jerusalem, whose leadership was no longer under a king, but entrusted to the High Priest and the Council of Elders. (5)



Fact #9

In 350 BC, the Persians captured Jerusalem. This was closely followed by the Greeks under the leadership of Alexander the Great in 332 BC. After Alexander died, the region was divided up among his three chief generals. In 313 BC, Ptolemy I of Egypt ruled Jerusalem. Then, in 170 BC, the Seleucid king, Antiochus Epiphanes IV, King of Syria, plundered Jerusalem and forced the Jews to stop worshipping the God of Israel, and to worship the pagan gods of the Greeks. During this time, many Jews followed Greek customs and became Hellenized.

When Antiochus Epiphanes IV desecrated the Temple by sacrificing a pig on the altar of God and forced the Jewish people in the towns and villages to do the same, this was too much for some religious Jews. In 167-4 BC the Hasmoneans revolted, led at first by Mattathias of the priestly Hasmonean family, and upon his death by his son Judas, known as the Maccabee (hammer). The terms Hasmoneans or Maccabeans can be used interchangeably.

On the 25th of Kislev, 165 BC, the Hasmoneans captured the Temple, which they purified for proper worship. However, they only had enough sacramental oil for the Temple lampstand for one day. Yet, God allowed it to burn for eight days until enough new oil could be prepared. From this miracle, we get the holiday of Hannukah that is still celebrated today. Jesus also celebrated this holiday, also known as the Feast of Dedication, *"And it was at Jerusalem the Feast of the Dedication, and it was winter"* (Jn. 10:22).

The Hasmonean Empire was quite successful and achieved independence from the Seleucids. The Hasmonean rulers became hereditary kings and regained boundaries not far short of Solomon's kingdom. During the period of the Hasmonean dynasty, which lasted about 80 years (142-63 BC), political consolidation under Jewish rule was attained and Jewish life flourished again in Israel and Jerusalem.



Fact #10

In 63 BC, the Romans invaded the region, led by Pompeii. They granted the Hasmonean king, Hyrcanus II, limited authority under the Roman governor of Damascus. The Jews did not accept the Roman rule well, as evidenced by numerous insurrections. The last attempt to restore the former glory of the Hasmonean dynasty was made by Mattathias Antigonus in 40 BC. His defeat and death three years later at the hands of the Romans brought Hasmonean rule to an end, and the land became a vassal state of the Roman Empire. (6)

In 37 BC, Herod, son of an advisor to King Hyrcanus II and married to his daughter, was appointed King of Judea by the Romans. Although he had no authority in foreign policy, he was granted almost unlimited autonomy in the country's internal affairs and became one of the most powerful monarchs in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. (7) The main regional names for the area can be found in the New Testament, which are: Judea, Samaria, and Galilee west of the Jordan River, and the Decapolis and Perea east of the Jordan River. The name Palestine is not found anywhere in the Bible and is a name given to the land by the Romans 100 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Herod was known as a master builder and built a huge port city in Caesarea (named after Caesar), and fortifications: the Herodian (southeast of Bethlehem), Sabastia in the mountains of Samaria, and Masada on the western shore of the Dead Sea.



Jerusalem, however, was Herod's crown jewel where his building programs went on for decades as he made this city one of the wonders of the world. In 20 BC, Herod began the expansion and beautification of the Temple, which must have been a site to behold from the Mount of Olives, as the pilgrims came from the Jordan Valley up to Jerusalem.



Fact #11

Jesus was born approximately 3 BC and spent his entire life and ministry in the Land of Israel. The religious and political influences of this period greatly affected His ministry and ultimately resulted in His crucifixion in Jerusalem, which was then part of the Roman province of Judea.

Herod was not a very popular king for two main reasons. First, he was a puppet of the Romans who were occupiers and made the people subject to Rome. More importantly, Herod was Idumean (from the line of Esau), making him illegitimate as a true king of Israel because he was from the wrong covenant/family line. This was good for the Romans, because Herod was acceptable enough to be king, but also unacceptable enough that they knew the people would never follow him into a revolt.

In AD 6, Judea was brought under direct Roman administration, because the heirs of Herod who sat on the throne of Judea became progressively ineffective.

Simultaneous with the introduction of direct Roman rule, a Jewish Resistance Movement, called the Zealots, began to organize and rebel against Rome. Eventually, a full-scale revolt against Roman rule took place in AD 66-73.



Fact #12

In AD 70, the Roman siege of Jerusalem lasted for 134 days, resulting in the sacking of Jerusalem by Titus and the destruction of the Second Temple of God.


According to the first century historian, Flavius Josephus, an estimated one million Jews perished in the siege of Jerusalem alone, with many killed elsewhere in the country and tens of thousands sold into slavery.

Nearly 1,000 Jewish men, women and children who had survived the fall of Jerusalem occupied and fortified King Herod's mountaintop palace complex of Masada on the western shore of the Dead Sea. For three years, they held



out against repeated Roman attempts to dislodge them. When the Romans finally broke through the fortress, they found that the defenders and their families had chosen to die rather than be enslaved. Ten men were chosen by lot to kill everyone, then one killed the nine and only one killed himself. The ten lots, written on broken pottery shards, were discovered by archaeologists when Masada was excavated in the 1960-70s.


After the fall of Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin (Supreme Jewish Council headed by the High Priest with religious, civil and criminal jurisdiction) was reconvened in Yavneh and later in Tiberias. With the Second Temple, the central focus of Judaism, destroyed, the Sanhedrin needed to interpret how Judaism would be practiced. The priests of the Temple were replaced by community rabbis and, in the absence of a central place of worship, the synagogue became the hub of each community. Judaism had to be reinterpreted so that it could survive without the Temple in Jerusalem. The beginnings of rabbinical Judaism were established here.



Fact #13

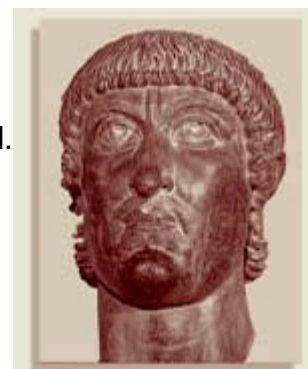
Meanwhile, Christianity was spreading throughout the world. According to the Book of Acts, Jerusalem was the seat of the first Church Council (Acts 15) and remained the center of the faith for centuries. Christianity spread from Jerusalem out to the provinces of the Roman Empire, yet encountered opposition, because new religions were forbidden under Roman Law. Christianity was considered a "religio illicita," an illegal religion, and Christians were gravely persecuted and even put to death for their faith.

There was a brief period of Jewish sovereignty at the turn of the first century, which was followed by a revolt of Shimon Bar Kochbah from AD 132-135. There was a large-scale slaughter of Jews. Jerusalem was razed and then rebuilt by Hadrian and renamed "Aelia Capitolina," after himself (his family name being Aelia). Jews were excluded from Jerusalem. To further blot out the connection between the Jews and the land of Judea, Samaria and Galilee, Hadrian renamed it Syria Palestina, a name that remains in opposition to the name "Israel" to this day.



Fact #14

Constantine, the Emperor of Rome, became a Christian in AD 306. No longer was Christianity persecuted in the Empire. Rather, it became the religion of the Empire, and Judaism and the Jewish people were persecuted.



In AD 324, the Holy Roman army swept into Jerusalem to claim the origins of the faith and established Byzantine rule. In 326, Queen Helena (mother of Byzantine Emperor Constantine) visited Jerusalem and began building major churches including the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.



Fact #15

In the early 7th century at the dawn of Islam, Jerusalem changed hands several times. In 614, the Byzantine lost Jerusalem to the Persians, and then regained it in 629. However, in 638 Islamic forces swept in, under the Caliph Omar Ben Hataf, capturing Jerusalem and the land of the Bible and placing it under Arab Muslim rule. From 688-91, the Dome of the Rock was built by Abdal-Malik on the Temple Mount. Even though it is the most prominent feature on the Temple Mount, the more holy site to the Moslems is the Al Aksa Mosque, which was a Byzantine Church before being converted into a mosque. Supposedly, Mohammed stopped off on this site on his way to heaven, even though Jerusalem is never mentioned in the Koranic texts.

Life under Islamic rule continued uninterrupted for about 400 years, with caliphs ruling first from Damascus, then from Baghdad and Egypt. In the 11th century, conflict between Moslems and Christians began to increase. In 1009, the Moslem Caliph Hakim ordered the destruction of churches and synagogues.



Fact #16

In 1096, the First Crusades from Europe captured Jerusalem. This Crusader rule lasted until 1291. When the Crusaders entered the land, they slaughtered Moslems and Jews in their wake. They even killed many Christians because they "looked" Middle Eastern and were assumed to be Moslems. In Jerusalem, Jews were found praying in their synagogues for God's mercy when found by the Crusaders. By Crusader accounts, they put wood around the synagogues and burned the Jews alive while they sang the hymn, " Christ, We Adore Thee." Those who were not killed were sold into slavery.

In 1099, the First Latin/Christian Kingdom was established by Godfrey of Bouillon. In 1187, the Moslem warrior, Saladin, captured Jerusalem

from the Crusaders. In 1192, Richard the Lionhearted tried and failed to reconquer Jerusalem. Yet the Crusaders remained in the land until 1291, when Moslem Mameluks from Egypt put an end to Crusader domination of the Land, as they conquered the entire region.



The Crusaders mainly concentrated on fortifying cities and building castles. They also opened up transportation routes from Europe that allowed for better trade and an onslaught of Christian pilgrimage. Although the Land was under Christian domination, it did not become a Christian country.



Fact #17

The Moslem Mameluks conquered the Christian Crusaders and ruled from 1291-1516 and the Land became a forgotten province ruled from Damascus. Akko, Jaffa, and other ports were destroyed for fear of new Crusades, and international commerce was interrupted. The urban centers were virtually in ruins, most of Jerusalem was abandoned, and the small Jewish community living there was poverty-stricken. The period of Mameluk decline was darkened by political and economic upheavals, plagues, locust invasions and devastating earthquakes. (8)

In 1517, Turkish Sultan Selim conquered Jerusalem and the Land of Israel for the Ottoman Empire. Turkish rule lasted until 1917, when World War I resulted in the breakup of this empire into multiple states within the Middle East.

In 1535-8, the Turkish Suleiman the Magnificent rebuilt the ramparts and wall around Jerusalem. In 1541, the Moslems sealed the Golden Gate to prevent Messiah's entrance (according to Jewish tradition).



The Ottoman Turks divided the land into four districts and attached it administratively to Damascus.

At the beginning of Ottoman rule, it is estimated that 1,000 Jewish families lived in the country, residing mainly in Jerusalem, Nablus, Hebron, Gaza, Safed and the villages of Galilee. The community was comprised of descendants of Jews who had never left the Land, as well as immigrants from North Africa and Europe.

Under the Turks, Jews immigrated to the land, with as many as 10,000 settling in Safed.

In Part Two of this exciting teaching series on Israel's history, I will cover the period from the 19th century to the founding of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948. See you next month!

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These Facts are excerpted from my new book, 365 Fascinating Facts about the Holy Land, which is now available from your nearest Bridges for Peace National Office at a special introductory price, US \$10 plus 10% shipping and handling (or your currency equivalent) to your nearest BFP National Office. Don't forget to order one for your pastor or a friend. If you haven't yet ordered a copy of my first book, Lessons from the Land of the Bible, a newly revised and expanded version is also available for the same introductory price of US\$10 plus 10% s/h, or your currency equivalent. These books are a must for every home or library.