

# Palestine — Holy Land of Three Religions



(Acme photo.)  
Unchanged for centuries is this narrow cobblestoned street in Jerusalem.

(Continued from page one.)  
and for well within the next two centuries this land was strangely abandoned by outsiders. For a period then of about 400 years there were no nations in the world powerful enough to impose their rule upon the inhabitants of Palestine. It was a time when lands were divided among small kings; when tribes rather than nations were in control. Consequently there appeared in Palestine a number of petty rulers, each claiming a bit of land and a handful of subjects.

These were the Jewish kings of the Old Testament. Their people were of the Semitic race, of the same stock as the Phoenicians and the Arabs, but whence they came to this day remains a mystery. The Hebrew tribes finally united to form a single nation, with their deity a national Hebrew god, the wrathful Jehovah. About 722 B. C. (Figure 4), however, this nation was split into two rival states, Judah and Israel.

Judaism, the religion of the Jews, which in modern times has spread over the world, thus was born among the Hebrew tribes of Palestine centuries ago. And so to the Jews of all times Palestine is the Holy Land. The jealous and wrathful Jehovah of the Old Testament was satisfactory among these early people as an inspiration for war, but there were other human activities that required inspiration, such as agriculture and the like, so over the centuries there gradually developed among the followers of Judaism new conceptions of the Supreme Deity. In other words, the God of the Jews today has become transformed, through thought, into a loving, suffering God. There is little if any difference, despite what hair-splitting theologians may contend, between widespread Jewish and Christian views of the attributes of deity.

As the map on page one reveals, Palestine was subject to invasions from Assyria in the period from 1115 B. C. to 750 B. C. (Figure 3). It was these people from the east who after the formation of the rival states of Judah and Israel imposed what would now be called a protectorate over Palestine. First Israel was dominated by the Assyrians, then Judah fell under their control.

The power of the Assyrians after a while began to wane. On the banks of a branch of the Euphrates river soon was to be built upon the ruins of the city of Babylon, ancient capital of Hammurabi, a new and more magnificent city of Babylon. Its builders, the Chaldeans, who are believed originally to have come into Mesopotamia from Arabia on a route along the coast of the Persian gulf, established a dynasty in Babylon in about 625 B. C. Twenty years later these neo-Babylonians, in alliance with the Medes and the Scythians, overthrew the old empire of the Assyrians. And by 600 B. C. the Babylonians were marching triumphantly into Palestine (Figure 5), marking another milestone in the tragic history of that land.

The kings of Babylon were not long destined, however, to control Palestine, although in their brief domination they imposed many hardships on the Jews. It was Nebuchadnezzar, one of the

## History Is Filled with Conflict

Babylonian kings, who were responsible for the so-called Babylonian captivity, the deportation by force of captive Jews to Babylon. There were three of these deportations during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, the first occurring in about 597 B. C. Under the rule of Babylon the land of the Jews was in great turmoil. An Egyptian army which had attempted to assist the people of Palestine against the Babylonians had been driven out, the Jews themselves had revolted against their oppressors, and the whole land was laid waste as a result. But, as aforementioned, fate was not long to deal well with the kings of Babylon and their subjects.

In 539 the Persian King Cyrus appeared before the walls of Babylon with a well equipped army. Nabonidus then was king of Babylon. His son was Belshazzar. How Cyrus took the city is described in the Old Testament in connection with the famous episode of the "hand-writing on the wall," but the Encyclopedia Britannica has this to say on the subject:

"The legends of Belshazzar's feast and of the siege and capture of Babylon by Cyrus which have come down to us from the book of Daniel and the 'Cyclopaedia' of Xenophon have been shown by contemporaneous inscriptions to have been a 'projection backwards' of the reconquest of the city by Darius Hystaspes."

Darius Hystaspes, referred to in the foregoing, it might be well to mention here, was a Persian governor and general, the father of Darius the Great.

Whether or not there occurred at the Persian capture of Babylon the events set forth in the scriptures, history shows beyond a doubt that Cyrus actually took the great city in 539 B. C. Soon after, or about 500 B. C. (Figure 6), the Persians advanced into Palestine. Among the Jews of this land Cyrus was regarded as the divinely appointed Messiah, the anointed one of Jehovah. Although he did not live up to the rôle, it is recorded that he was very tolerant of the Jews and their religion. Under the Persians, Palestine became a part of the largest empire of antiquity. For a time it flourished, and then internal dissensions set in. Egypt, which had been conquered by the Persians, rose and declared its independence as the Persian empire began to weaken. This had its effect on the inhabitants of Palestine, who again were about to fall under the domination of another group of conquerors.

At this stage in the history of Palestine, Europe came to be reckoned with. In Greece there had been developing a new civilization and a new culture which for many centuries was to be the dominant force in the then known world. In 333 B. C. the Macedonian King Alexander the Great defeated Darius Codomanus, the Persian, at the battle of

Issus, thus settling the fate of western Asia. The Macedonian Greeks and their allies under the command of Alexander in 332 B. C. passed through Palestine on the way to conquer Egypt. Alexander left the Jews undisturbed as to their laws and their religion, although by 300 B. C. (Figure 7) this country of the Hebrews was in reality a part of the Grecian empire.

After the death of Alexander the Ptolemies, Grecian rulers of Egypt, came into possession of Palestine. The Ptolemies regarded Palestine simply as a source of tribute for their treasury and its great forests of Lebanon as a rich

(Acme photo.)  
Village maidens still carry water jugs.



source of lumber supplies. Their hold upon the land of the Jews never was very strong, and when the Seleucid dynasty was set up in western Asia by Macedonian generals and warriors who had aided Alexander in his conquests as far east as India, Palestine easily fell under Seleucid domination. The Seleucids were stronger in their Hellenism than the Ptolemies. They built Greek cities and introduced Greek culture. Because these Seleucids erected great altars to their deity, Zeus, and made strenuous efforts to suppress the religion of the Jews, a wave of resistance to their occupation of the country swept through Palestine. A Jewish rebellion, led by one Judas (Maccabeus), at first was confined to guerrilla warfare, but later met with considerable success in important battles. Judas, the revolutionary, was slain finally at the battle of Elasa (161 B. C.) and the rebellion was broken, but the Grecian victors did not follow up their advantage. The Jews were allowed to keep control of their country after that with little interference on the part of the Seleucids; in fact, they were even

permitted to extend Jewish territory to the east to a considerable distance into what is now known as Transjordan. Rome slyly encouraged them in this.

A sanguinary quarrel among various leaders of the Jews at this period gave Rome an excuse to capture the city of Jerusalem. When the smoke had cleared away there was presented the picture of the Roman leader, Pompey, ready to decide who should be the king of the Jews. That was in 63 B. C. (Figure 8), the year that saw the birth of Octavius, who as Augustus Caesar was to become the founder of the Roman empire. Pompey selected Hyrcanus as the leader of the Jews, but instead of making him king he proclaimed him high priest. Rome definitely was in control of Palestine.

And now we come to the period of the history of Palestine most important from the Christian viewpoint. Augustus has become emperor of Rome. He has proclaimed that throughout Syria (also under Roman control) and Palestine there shall be taken a census for the basis of a general



(Associated Press photo.)  
As in biblical times, shepherds still tend their flocks in Palestine.

had established the status of the leader of the Jews as that of high priest the Roman government, which by this time had acquired imperial form, relented and allowed succeeding Jewish leaders to take the title of king. But they were kings only as the emperor of Manchukuo today is an emperor. The real power lay in Rome, there were Roman governors in the land, and Roman soldiers in shining armor paraded the streets of Jerusalem and other cities of Palestine. Augustus later divided the land of the Jews into small kingdoms. To Herod Archelaus he allotted Judea (Latin for Judah), Samaria, and Idumea. To Herod Antipas went Galilee and Perea. To Herod Philip the Roman emperor gave Trachonitis, Batanea, and Auranitis. These three Herods were the sons of Herod the Great. For a short while later (A. D. 37-44) all Palestine was united under Herod Agrippa I, a grandson of Herod the Great.

The Jews in time grew weary of Roman occupation and of the eternal business of paying taxes to the Romans and being tried before Roman judges. In A. D. 66 they rebelled and gave the Romans considerable trouble until Vespasian and Titus with big armies were sent from Rome to stamp out the rebellion. The Jews made little resistance except in the extreme north of the land and in Jerusalem. They held Jerusalem against the army of Titus but finally were forced to surrender it. In spite of the orders of Titus to the contrary, Jerusalem was destroyed by the victorious Romans. That was in A. D. 70.

Palestine continued under Roman rule. In A. D. 395, when the Roman empire was divided, the land of the Jews fell to the emperor of the east. For 200 years there was comparative quiet in Palestine. Then for a brief spell there was trouble from an easterly direction. The Persian King Chosroes II. invaded Syria and Palestine and with the assistance of the Jews took these lands from the Byzantine empire. In A. D. 628, however, the country was recovered by the eastern Roman Emperor Heraclius.

As Heraclius was winning back Palestine for his empire there was growing up to the

## Often Pawn of Rival Races

south, in Arabia, another great religion. Mohammed, the prophet and founder of Islam, was creating an irresistible force of militant zealots. Islam was on its way to spread from the doors of China to the western coast of Africa and up into the very heart of Europe. Mohammed had scarcely breathed his last (A. D. 632) when the Arab hordes from the south were pouring into Palestine (Figure 9). The army of Heraclius was utterly defeated by the Mohammedans in a battle fought on the Yarmuk river in 636. Palestine and Syria fell to the Arabs.

The first long line of caliphs of Islam were the Omayyads. These in 750 were deprived of their position by the more powerful Abbassids, who transferred the seat of the caliphate from Damascus to Bagdad. The Abbassids, therefore, soon extended their influence into territories conquered by Moslem armies. Palestine by 814 was under the domination of the mighty house of the Abbassids (Figure 10). In the meantime Caliph Abdalmalik had built in Jerusalem (684) the celebrated mosque, Dome of the Rock, one of the most beautiful buildings in the world. In the early part of the ninth century there came a great split in the Moslem world. Descendants of Fatima, daughter of Mohammed, set up an independent caliphate in Egypt. By 969 the influence of the Fatimites was dominant in Palestine (Figure 11).

In 1098 Palestine suffered its next invasion (Figure 12). The Seljuk Turkomans from Khorasan swept into the land and captured Jerusalem and other cities. Their goal was Egypt, but the Fatimites there repulsed the invaders, drove them back through Palestine and Syria, and retook the cities that had been captured.

And now for a period of nearly 200 years Christians from Europe were to figure prominently in the history of Palestine.



(Underwood & Underwood photo.)  
The shrine in the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem, where, according to tradition, the manger of Jesus lay.

In nine spectacular and successive waves the crusaders marched or sailed for Palestine. In some of the crusades they were successful in reaching the Holy Land; in others they did not even put a foot upon its soil. It was during the first crusade, in 1099, that Jerusalem was captured from the Moslems (Figure 13). The victorious leader of the assault upon the city, Godfrey of Bouillon, was proclaimed king of Jerusalem.

In 1190 the Kurdish leader, Saladin, who had captured Egypt, was successful in wresting Palestine from the Christians and restoring it to the Mohammedans (Figure 14). The second crusade reached no farther into Asia than Syria, and the third crusade, in which Richard the Lion Hearted distinguished himself, had only to its credit the capture of Acre. Jerusalem remained in the hands of the Moslems. The remaining crusades were more or less abortive, although it is recorded that the Emperor Frederick II. was permitted to occupy Jerusalem for a period of ten years as a result of the sixth crusade, of 1229. The last of the crusades took place about 1270 (Figure 13). In the meantime, by 1204 there was established firmly in Palestine a dynasty, that of the Ayyubids (Figure 15), that was to last for a half century. The previously mentioned Saladin was one of the so-called Ayyubite rulers of the Holy Land. He died in 1193.

Mongolians from inner Asia, some time after the year 1240, drove down through Palestine from the north, seizing Jerusalem and other cities and massacring the inhabitants. Finally driven out by the Mameluke sultans of Egypt, they retired, only to make room for a new set of invaders, the Tatar tribes from the wild plains of central Asia. The fourteenth century saw little of historical interest in Palestine, but the beginning of the fifteenth brought a new invader, the ferocious Mongol raider, Tamerlane. And then in 1451 came still another invasion, this of the Circassians (Figure 16).

In 1517 the Ottoman Turks overran Palestine (Figure 17), capturing the land from the Egyptian sultans, who had managed through three invasions from central Asia to keep a more or less precarious hold upon the country.

These Ottoman Turks, whose capture of Constantinople in 1453 had established them firmly as a power to be reckoned with in Europe, held Palestine for more than four centuries, or until the World War brought defeat to them and reduced their territorial limits.

Palestine, which was taken from the Turks by a British expeditionary force, today is a territory administered by the British government under a mandate from the league of nations. Its population is little more than a million, of whom 73 per cent are Moslems, 17 per cent are Jews, and only 8 per cent are Christians. Over the land to the north, the modern Syria, France has relinquished a similar mandate set up after the war.

Today Christian, Jew, and Moslem each holds this country to be a holy land.

Will a unity of faith finally bring everlasting peace to Palestine?