

## ***Letter From Israel***

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### **Palestine 101**

**Palestinian Education**

**A Short Take on a Long History**

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**July 31 - August 6, 2002**

**JAFFA**—Have you heard the one about Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Chairman Yasir Arafat finally sitting down to negotiate? Sharon opened with a "biblical" tale.

"Before the Israelites came to the Promised Land and settled here, Moses led them for 40 years through the desert. One day, miraculously, a stream appeared. They drank and then decided to bathe. When Moses came out of the water, he found all his clothes missing.

" 'Who took my clothes?' Moses asked. 'It was the Palestinians,' replied the Israelites."

"Wait a minute," interrupted Arafat. "There were no Palestinians during the time of Moses!"

"All right," smirked Sharon, "now that we've got that settled, let's start talking."

"If the lie is big enough and told often enough, it will be believed," Nazi propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels once said. What worked for Goebbels evidently is also working for Arafat.

The blatant lies and vicious propaganda emanating from the Arab world have gotten out of hand. Anti-Semitism is out of the closet. Jews are murdered in Canada, their graves are desecrated in Italy. It's time to sort through the spiteful drivel.

No, Charlie, despite what you read on a zillion Arab Web sites, Jews do not use the blood of Arab children to bake their holiday bread.

Yes, Harriet, the Jewish Temple did exist in Jerusalem. I know Arafat insists it didn't and his excavators are busy destroying all archaeological record of it. But next time you visit Rome, go check out the Forum and you'll find its story carved in the ancient stone of Titus's arch. Let's start at the beginning.

First, who really owns the land encompassing what is now Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority? The answer is so well documented it could be the subject of future UN resolutions—the Canaanites. They established the Land of Canaan here around 2000 B.C., so they have first dibs. Unfortunately for them, there isn't a single Canaanite left on earth.

Abraham, the Father of the Jews and a figure revered by Islam, led a band of Hebrews from Mesopotamia and began the conquest of Canaan in 1741 B.C.—that's 3743 years ago. Those first Israelites were joined in about 1290 B.C. by the Jewish slaves led out of Egypt by Moses.

After many years and a lot of help from Joshua, the Israelites finally defeated the Canaanites and old King Saul united the country in 1100 B.C. King David added Jerusalem in 1000 B.C., and King Solomon built the First Temple around 956 B.C. The land was plagued by raiders like those guys dubbed the Philistines, "Sea Invaders," who came out of the Aegean and snatched a nice chunk of the coast. Remember Goliath? He was a Philistine and King David made mincemeat of him, but the Philistines were a nuisance for many years.

Big trouble loomed in 586 B.C. when the Babylonians (nasty ancestors of the nasty Iraqis) invaded under King Nebuchadnezzar II. They sacked the lavish city Solomon had built in Jerusalem and tore down the First Temple. The Babylonians rounded up all the Jews they could catch and deported them to Babylonia as slaves. That "Babylonian Exile" lasted a mere 50 years and the Jews returned to build the Second Temple.

For the next 1000 years, everyone and his brother grabbed a piece of the territory—Persians, Greeks, and Romans. The Roman reign was particularly benevolent. They destroyed the Second Temple in 70 A.D. and killed an estimated 1.1 million disobedient Jews, including one named Jesus. The Romans also maliciously renamed the area Palaestina, after the Jews' old enemy, the Philistines. The Christian Byzantine Empire took over in 300 A.D. and held on for more than 300 years. During that era, the Muslim Prophet Muhammad was born in Mecca in 570 A.D.

Muhammad's followers believed in conversion, big time, and swarmed around the Middle East giving everyone a fair choice—become a Muslim or die. These Arabs stormed Palestine in 638 A.D. Do the math. The Arabs got to the region 2379 years after the Jews. So, who is occupying whom??

The Arabs considered Palestine unimportant and ruled from Damascus and Baghdad. You could call them benign except for the massacres and the fact that they were uncomfortable with trees . . . so they cut them all down, turning the once fertile region into a more familiar desert.

With all the hoopla about Jerusalem, check out the Muslim holy book, the Koran. The Koran mentions Mecca and Medina countless times but never once speaks of Jerusalem. On the other hand, there are 811 references to Jerusalem in the Bible.

Christian Crusaders arrived from Europe in 1099 and ousted the Arabs. In subsequent years, the land switched back and forth between invaders, and in the turmoil Jews began filtering back from their scattered exile. Many came from Spain, whence they were expelled in 1492.

In 1516, the non-Arab Ottoman Turks conquered Palestine and held sway until after World War I, when the British took over.

We really have no idea how many Jews and how many Arabs there were at the time—mainly because both groups hid from the Ottoman census takers to avoid taxes.

But we do know that there were probably fewer than 350,000 people, the majority Arab, in the whole region (including what is now Jordan) when Mark Twain made a pilgrimage in 1867.

In his travelogue, *Innocents Abroad*, Twain wrote, "One may ride ten miles hereabouts and not see ten human beings."

"Nazareth is forlorn . . . Jericho the accursed lies a moldering ruin today," Twain said, adding, "There was hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere."

But the population was growing. More Jews arrived from Eastern Europe and Russia in the 1880s, either fleeing oppression or following the Zionist dream. And Arabs from neighboring countries flocked to jobs created by Jewish immigrants.

Take a deep breath, because now the plot thickens.

In 1917, Britain issued the Balfour Declaration and promised "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish People."

The British then turned around and gave over 77 percent of Palestine to the Arab Hashemites, for what later became Jordan. The remaining 23 percent, west of the River Jordan, was supposedly for the Jews.

But in 1947, the UN voted to partition that 23 percent of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. The Israelis accepted the plan and in 1948 proclaimed the establishment of their state. Neighboring Arab nations, however, rejected both the partition and the idea of a Jewish state and launched a massive invasion of Israel.

They were defeated, and at the end of the 1948 war Israel held all of Western Palestine except the West Bank, which was captured by Jordan, and Gaza, which was seized by Egypt.

In the 1967 Six Day War, Israel again defeated Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq, gaining control not only of Gaza and the West Bank, but also of Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and Syria's Golan Heights.

The big question is: Where were the calls for a Palestinian state during the 19 years Jordan occupied the West Bank and Egypt held Gaza?

A 1978 peace accord signed with Egypt returned the Sinai to Cairo, but the Egyptians seemed relieved to leave Gaza with Israel. In 1988, King Hussein of Jordan officially renounced all claims to the West Bank.

As far as Israelis were concerned, the land, won in a defensive war, belonged to them.

But even after all the nauseating terror of the last 23 months, the majority of Israelis are willing to give Palestinians the West Bank, Gaza, and half of Jerusalem for their state. We just wonder if they are willing to let us keep ours.

Tell us what you think. [editor@villagevoice.com](mailto:editor@villagevoice.com)  
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