

# HOLY LAND: ISRAEL AND PALESTINE TODAY

Lecture by Rick Steves

## HOLY LAND HISTORY OVERVIEW

- **c. 2000 B.C.** — Abraham has two sons by two different mothers: Isaac starts Jewish nation, Ishmael starts Arab nation
- **1st century** — Jesus and the start of Christianity
- **A.D. 70** — Jewish rebels are defeated by Romans (committing mass suicide at Masada); their temple in Jerusalem is destroyed; Diaspora begins as Jews scatter throughout the world
- **7th century** — Muhammad and the advent of Islam; most Holy Land Arabs become Muslim
- **late 19th century** — Theodor Herzl and others spread “Zionism,” the idea of creating a Jewish homeland and a nation of Israel
- **1938-1945** — The Holocaust murders 6 million Jews
- **1948** — With UN support, the State of Israel is established, displacing approx. 700,000 Palestinians
- **1967** — In the Six-Day War, Israel quadruples in size
- **1987-1991** — First Intifada (Palestinians stage armed riots and suicide bombings against Israeli targets)
- **1993** — Oslo Accords
- **2000-2005** — Second Intifada; Israel begins building a wall “to keep out terrorists”
- **2012** — UN recognizes the State of Palestine

## ROUGH STATS

- **Holy Land:** Total pop. of 12 million—roughly 6 million Israelis (mostly Jewish) and 6 million Arabs (mostly Muslim)
- **Israel:** Pop. roughly 8 million (6 million Jews, 2 million Arab Israelis)
- **Palestine (West Bank & Gaza):** Pop. about 4 million, nearly all are Arab, over 90% are Muslim, less than 10% are Christian Palestinians.

## ISRAEL

### Jerusalem (pop. 890,000)

- **Temple Mount:** Holy ground to Jews, Christians, and Muslims
- **Western Wall:** “Wailing Wall,” foundation of destroyed Jewish temple complex
- **Dome of the Rock:** The place from where Muslims believe Muhammad journeyed to heaven
- **Four Quarters of Jerusalem’s Old Town:** Jewish, Armenian, Arab, Christian
- **Via Dolorosa:** The “Way of Grief” where Jesus carried the cross up Cavalry Hill (Golgotha)
- **Church of Holy Sepulcher:** Site of the Crucifixion; church now run by mix of denominations (Coptic, Armenian, Greek

Orthodox, Franciscans, etc.)

- **Damascus Gate:** Entrance to Old Town
- **Mea Shearim:** Ultra-Orthodox neighborhood
- **Green Line:** Battlefield in 1967, now Mamilla Mall
- **Jewish Israelis:** Melting pot, lots of new immigrants
- **Masada:** Mountaintop last refuge of Jewish rebels (A.D. 70)
- **Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial:** Powerful museum honoring the 6 million Jewish victims of the Holocaust

## Coastal Cities

- **Tel Aviv:** City built on sand dunes in 1909
- **Jaffa:** Historic city and “Ellis Island” of Zionism, with port that welcomed returning Jews
- **Caesarea:** Roman port under Herod
- **Haifa:** Bahá’í World Centre and temple

## Jesus in Galilee Sights

- **Sea of Galilee (Tiberias home base):** Where Jesus spent most of his three years of active ministry
- **“The Jesus Boat”:** The type used by “fishers of men,” at Kibbutz Ginosar
- **Church of the Beatitudes (near Tabgha):** “Blessed are the meek...”
- **Mensa Christi / Church of Primacy of St. Peter:** Where Jesus told Peter, “Feed my sheep”
- **Loaves and Fishes**
- **Jordan River:** John the Baptist

## Golan Heights (Border with Syria)

- **Gadot Lookout:** Former Syrian post looking down on Galilee
- **Mount Bental:** Overlooking Syria, with Café Annan

## Settlements

More than half a million Israelis now live in fortified, gated communities in the West Bank.

## PALESTINE

### What to call it?

Depending on your perspective, it’s “Palestine,” the “Palestinian Territories” or “Occupied Territories,” or “Judea & Samaria.” Like the UN, I call it Palestine.

Made up of two parts: **Gaza** (ruled by the more extreme Hamas, less inviting to tourists) and my focus, the **West Bank** (ruled by the more moderate Fatah).

### Bethlehem (pop. 25,000)

- **Best Accommodations:** Dar Annadwa Guest House
- Small and shrinking Christian community
- Church of the Nativity on Manger Square



## **Battir National Park**

- ✦ **Biblical Terraces:** 2,000+ -year-old olive groves

## **Politics**

- ✦ **The Wall:** a.k.a. “Protection Barrier,” “Security Fence,” “Anti-Terrorism Barrier”; twice as long as the border
- ✦ **Political art** on The Wall
- ✦ **Areas A, B, C:** Territory is divided into three zones:
  - A—Palestine, with huge majority of population
  - B—Palestinian civil control but no security allowed
  - C—Israel-controlled, mostly uninhabited stretches between citiesWith trouble, Israel can shut down B, which locks down A (most of the cities and towns).
- ✦ **Color-Coded License Plates:** Green for Palestinians, yellow for Israelis

## **Countryside Sights**

- ✦ **Judean Desert:** Wadi Qelt gorge
- ✦ **Monastery of St. George:** Sixth-century Greek Orthodox
- ✦ **Jericho:** Excavation site, oldest city
- ✦ **Dead Sea:** 1,400 feet below sea level, lowest place on Earth, more than ½ minerals so you are buoyant
- ✦ **Bedouin Nomads**

## **Hebron (pop. 250,000)**

- ✦ **Economic Engine:** 30% of West Bank economy
- ✦ **Tomb of the Patriarchs:** Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah—all sacred to both Jews and Muslims
- ✦ **Settlers:** Israelis living on top of Palestinians
- ✦ **Sanctuary of Abraham:** Mosque/synagogue with Tomb of the Patriarchs and bulletproof glass
- ✦ **Market:** Sells everything...including tasty camels

## **Nablus (pop. 125,000)**

- ✦ **Kunafeh:** Favorite dessert, with shredded wheat, sweet cheese, syrup
- ✦ **Political Art:** Martyrs/terrorists lionized
- ✦ **Refugees:** “The Key”
- ✦ **Balata Refugee Camp:** Since about 1950, current pop. 23,000

## **Women in Palestine**

- ✦ **The Hijab:** Fashionable head scarf, optional in Palestinian society
- ✦ **Birzeit University**

## **Ramallah (pop. 25,000)**

- ✦ De facto capital of Palestine
- ✦ **Hotel:** Beauty Inn
- ✦ Yasser Arafat, led PLO

## **LOGISTICS**

- ✦ **Red Tape:** Visa, passport, shekels, cell phones
- ✦ **Local Guides in Palestine:** Husam Jubran (hjubranus@yahoo.com) and Kamal Mukarker (kamal\_mukarker@hotmail.com)
- ✦ **Local Guides in Israel:** Abie Bresler (abresler@zahav.net.il) and Benny Dagan (dagantrl@inter.net.il)

## **LEARN MORE**

**Read:** *There are plenty of good resources (books, documentaries, and websites) providing both the Israeli and Palestinian narrative.*

**Watch:** *Rick Steves' Holy Land DVD*

**Listen:** *Travel with Rick Steves* radio podcast archives at ricksteves.com

**Surf:** *ricksteves.com*

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