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: Battlefront 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 cities
  With 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 ⅓ 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