

The Holy Land

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WHAT IT WAS AND WHAT IT IS

In early recorded history, the land between the Jordan River to the East and the Mediterranean Sea to the West was considered the land of Canaan. In the Old Testament of the Christian Bible as well as the Torah of Judaism, this land is referred to as the “Promised Land” for the descendants of Abraham.

Additionally, this area is referred to in the Quran and has been ruled over by more empires and flown under more flags than any other land in the world.

Today, this land between the river and the sea is no larger than the state of New Jersey but contains two of the world’s cultural icons: Palestine and Israel.

But the reality of the situation is that the native people in the land are under military occupation by the State of Israel. The space is divided unevenly between both groups with the Palestinians displaced and concentrated into the walled-off West Bank and Gaza strip.

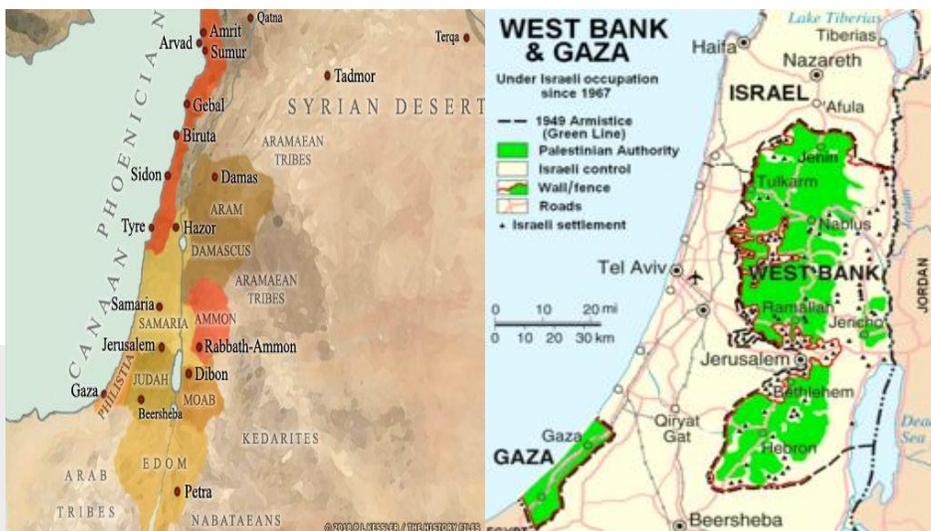
OTHER FACTS ABOUT THE HOLY LAND

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:10

The current borders of the West Bank and Gaza are a result of the 1947 UN Partition Plan.

By the end of 2016, the West Bank Jewish population rose to 420,899, excluding East Jerusalem, where there were more than 200,000 Jews.

According to USAID.gov, United States funding in Israel rose to over \$3.2 billion during the 2017 fiscal year.



HERE, TODAY

Our church, Hope Lutheran in Ramallah, is comprised almost entirely of Palestinian refugees. Our school, associated with the church, serves a small minority of Christian and large majority of Muslim students. This reflects the demographic population of the city itself.

I volunteer as an assistant to two English teachers for grades 6-11. By the 12th grade, students enter into a program called Tawjihi. This program is similar to stretching the SAT and ACT testing experience over the whole school year. So, the students spend all of their time preparing for and taking exams that influence which universities they will attend or what careers they will have after high school. Many of these students will go on to attend Birzeit or Bethlehem University in the West Bank.

My cohort of six other volunteers are spread out over the Jerusalem area with some volunteering at schools in Beit Sahour, Beit Jala, and Ramallah. Others are participating in other forms of service such as working in church offices, daycare facilities, and an environmental education center.

The focus of our work here is on the subject of education. We are all witnessing the many ways in which Palestinians are capable of learning within the context of occupation.

***“Education is the most powerful tool which you can use to change the world.”
Nelson Mandela***

Picture 1: I am leading a study game with the 11th grade.

Picture 2: My cohort and I in Wadi Rum, Jordan.

