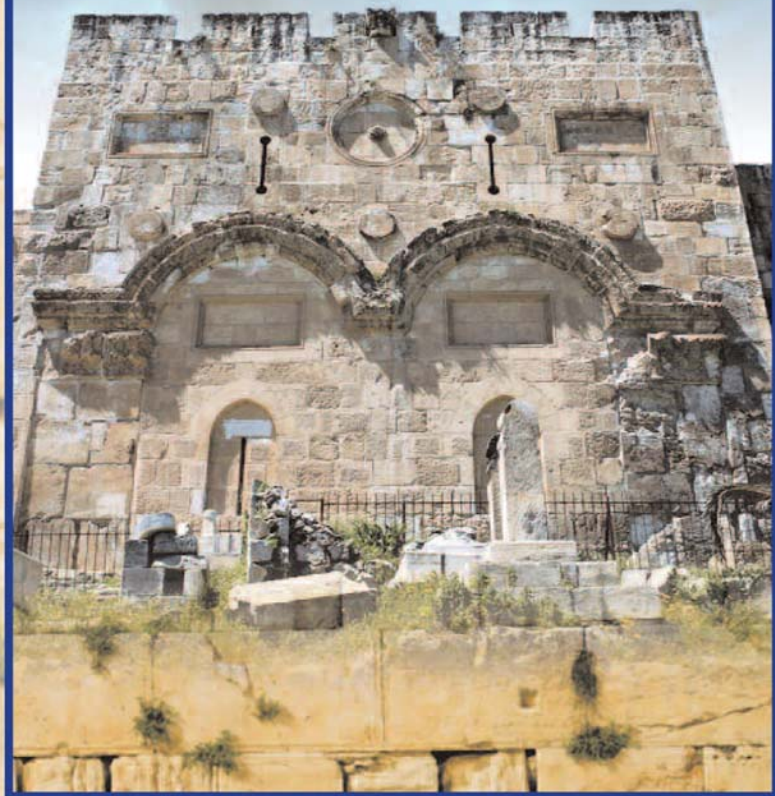


ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

THE
ISRAELITES
THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL



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by
KATHERINE REECE



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Israelites praying at the sacred Wailing Wall in Jerusalem



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INTRODUCTION

“Israel, Palestine, Jordan, the West Bank... More conflict in the Middle East!” We hear news stories like these almost daily. Who are these people and why are they fighting? Israel is a small country not much bigger than the state of Rhode Island. How could such a tiny part of the world be the center of so many conflicts? What is the conflict about? To get an understanding of this part of the world we must take a look at its history. More than 10,000 years ago, some of the oldest known civilizations had their beginnings in this

A major source of conflict in Israel is the ownership of land. The property below that houses the Wailing Wall and the Dome of the Rock is a holy site to two cultures, and both have claims to it and other parts of Israel.





Many popular stories such as the one that tells of Adam and Eve find their origins in the history and religion of the Israelites.

region. Whole cities, kings, and armies had come and gone over this ancient landscape while people in North America were still wearing animal skins and using stone tools. Yet this tiny country, lying along the shores of the eastern Mediterranean Sea, gave birth to so much of what we take for granted in our thoughts and beliefs. Who hasn't heard the story of Noah and the Ark? Of Adam and Eve? These stories and many others like them are woven into the fabric of human history. Names we use today, such as David, Jonathan, Joseph, and Rachel, come from a civilization that is more than 5,000 years old!

WHO WERE THE ISRAELITES?

The modern country of Israel was created in 1948, when the United Nations divided ancient Palestine into Jewish Israel and Arab Jordan. But Israel had its beginnings in a region called **Canaan** in western Asia along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. As early as 3000 B.C.E., people known as Canaanites were forming communities or city-states, irrigating the land for crops, and settling in one place rather than roaming in search of food and water. By 2000 B.C.E. three major civilizations began to develop in the land of Canaan. The first, Phoenicians, settled in the northern section called Phoenicia. They became skilled navigators, sailors, and traders and built a trading empire that reached to distant lands. The second group, the “Hebrew People,” later became the Israelites. They settled around 1200 B.C.E. in the part of Canaan that later became known as Palestine. The third group of seafaring people, named “**Sea Peoples**” by Egyptians, drifted into an area that would become known as Philistine along the coast south of Palestine. These people, the Philistines, were often at war with the Israelites.

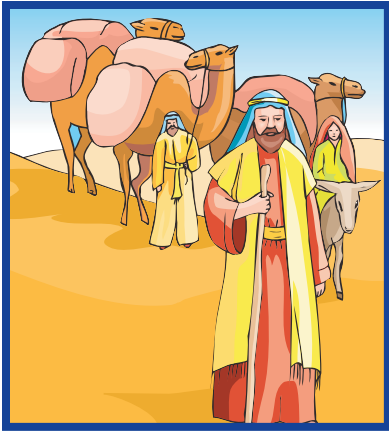
Palestine was at the center of trade routes linking Asia Minor, Egypt, present-day Syria, and Mesopotamia. As a result, Palestine was a meeting place for the exchange of religious and cultural ideas. Palestine is the Holy Land described in the Bible.

A view of the location of the modern country of Israel with its coast along the Mediterranean Sea



DISPUTED TERRITORY

Much of the fighting in Israel has been over land ownership. The area known as ancient Palestine consists of the modern countries of Israel and Jordan. This land has been occupied by various civilizations, at different times throughout history. Today, many Palestinian Arabs also have a claim to the land and want a country of their own called Palestine.



Abram leading his family

Our knowledge of the Israelites comes from Egyptian writings, the stories of the **Bible**, and **archaeology**. From the earliest times, the story of the Israelites is closely linked to the promise of land by their god, **Yahweh**, and the biblical stories of their travels.

The story of the Israelites begins with Abram, a shepherd from the Sumerian city of Ur in Mesopotamia. Abram and his people were nomads who carried their belongings and trade goods on the backs of donkeys, while traveling from city to city. They eventually settled on a fertile strip of land bordering the Mediterranean Sea in the land of Canaan, around 1950 B.C.E.

(Below left) much of what we know about ancient Israel comes from the work of archaeologists. (Below right) a camel loaded with its owner's belongings has been a common way of travel since ancient times.

