

Bethlehem Today

If it weren't the birthplace of Jesus, Bethlehem would still be remembered. For millennia it has been the site of Rachel's tomb, and a pilgrimage destination (in times when pilgrimage was practised) for devout Jews. Today the tomb is on the outskirts of the city, met as one approaches from Jerusalem on Hebron Road. Nearby is Bethlehem Bible College, located on the edge of a refugee camp of Palestinians who left their homes in 1948. During the conflict of the last three years the college has suffered damage. Barricades have been built alongside it, bullets have gone through the windows and water tank, and a wall being built to ensure safe access to Rachel's tomb for Jewish visitors makes approach to the college difficult.



The Grotto

destroyed in the 6th century the 7th century church is what we see now. It was the only church in the city to survive the Persian invasion of the 7th Century (only a few years before the Muslim invasion), and was somewhat restored by the Crusaders in the 11th century.

David's home
"How long will you mourn over Saul...? I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king." (1 Sam.16:1)

The Church of the Nativity is the focal point for Christians in Bethlehem, one of many towns in the region that have had primarily Christian residents. In the West we have largely forgotten what it is to have religion at the center

of our lives. In the Middle East religion holds the place that race or nationality hold for us in the West. The Church is Greek Orthodox but also hosts Roman Catholic (Latin) and Armenian Orthodox congregations. Adjacent to the main church building are a Greek and an Armenian monastery, as well as the Catholic Church named for St. Catherine of Alexandria.

Ruler to come
"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will judge over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times." (Mic.5:2)

In April, 2002, when Palestinian militants took

refuge in the church they were simultaneously recognizing and violating the respect and sanctity in which the church is held by all faiths. The occupation and curfew that Bethlehem had suffered for months on end was lifted earlier this year, but it is still ringed by road blocks and checkpoints, making life difficult for the whole community. Many in the Christian community look for opportunities to emigrate to the West, having a strong desire for a Palestinian state but little sympathy with the militant groups. From the West Bank they are emigrating at the rate of as many as 1,000 per year.

Rachel's tomb
While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty...
So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel's tomb. (Gen.35:16-20)

Portions of the church are the property of the different faiths:
Greek: Basilica, including the nave, aisles, katholicon (choir and sanctuary), south transept, and the Altar of the Nativity in the Grotto.
Armenian Orthodox: north transept and its altar. (also, on occasion, use of the Greek altar in the Grotto)
Latins (Catholic): Altar of the Adoration of the Magi in the "Grotto of the Manger", the silver star beneath the Altar of the Nativity (it is inscribed. *"Hic de Virgine Maria Jesus Christus Natus Est."*)



Bethlehem street adjacent to Manger Square



Inside the church

Child in a manger
So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.... While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. (Luke 2:4,7)



Orthodox wedding in the Church of the Nativity

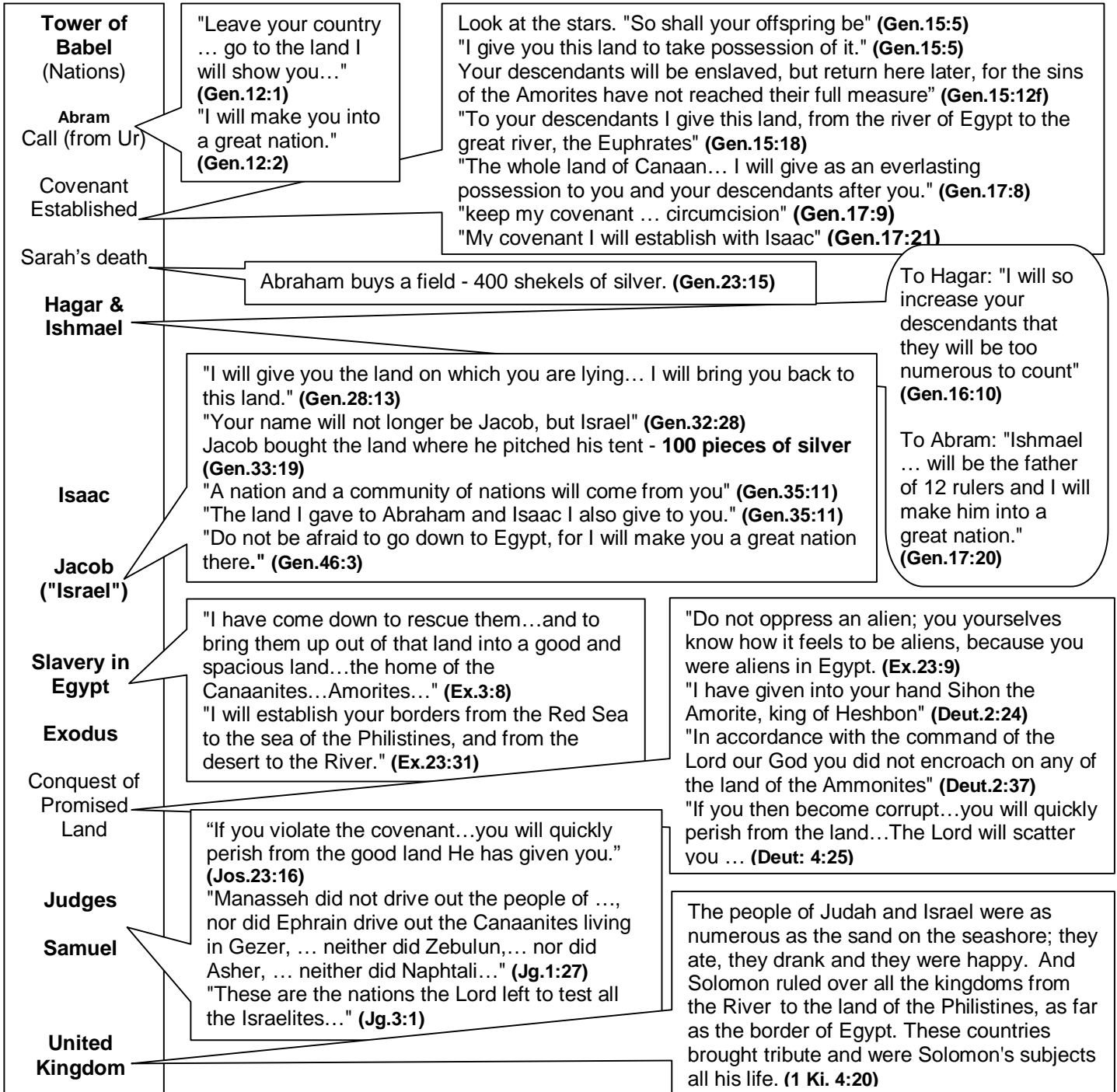
How far back does it go? – Part 6: 500 pieces of silver

(The first of a three-part article summarizing the Old Testament history of the land of Israel.)

The land called **Canaan**, another name for the coast of the eastern Mediterranean, is first mentioned in Genesis 11:31 (though the grandson of Noah is named in Gen.9:18). It was this geographical area that God selected to be His Promised Land; promised first to Abram (even before he had seen it) and successively to his descendants.

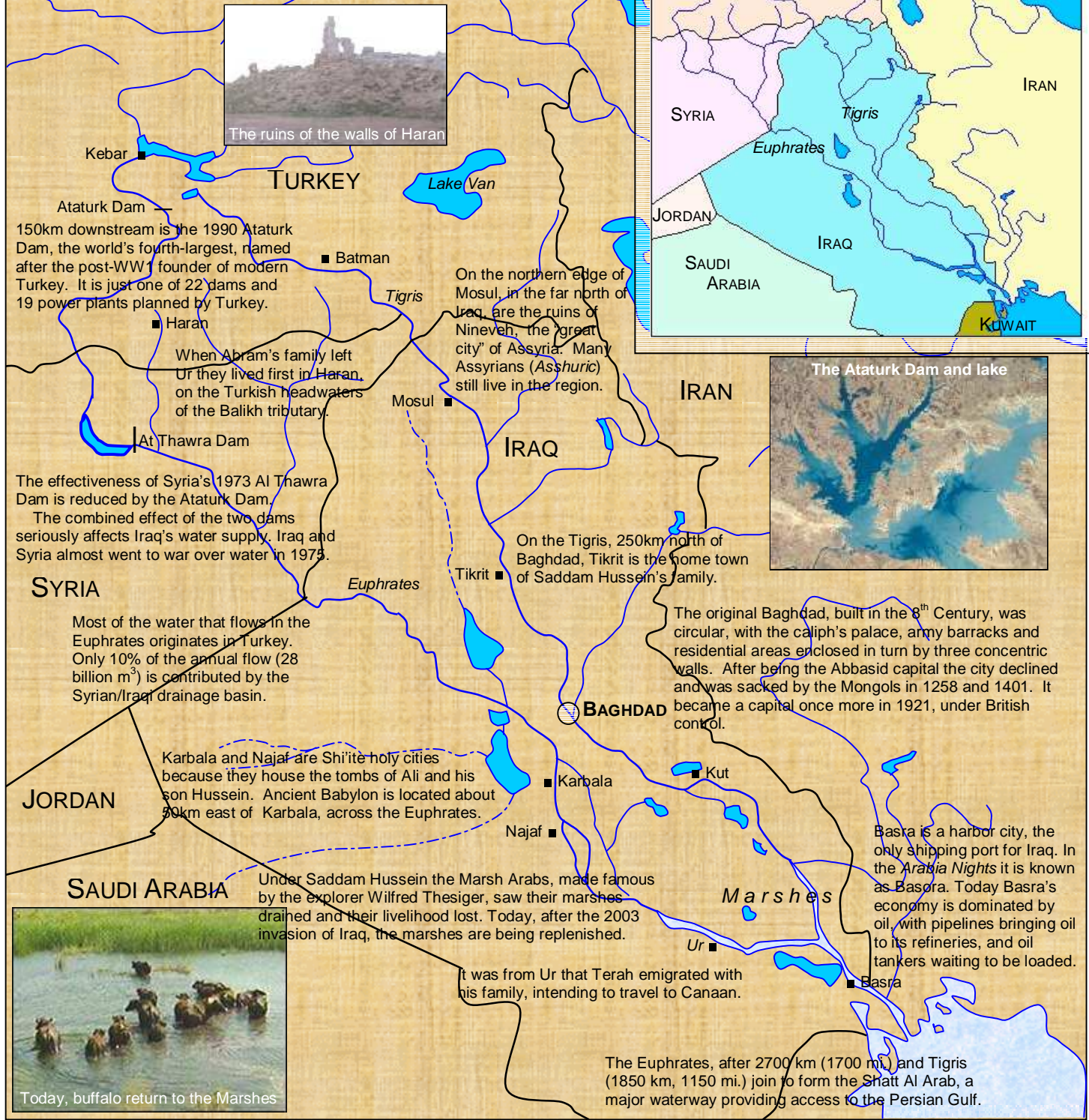
Each of them, though, recognized that the land was not theirs without qualification. Abram’s descendants were circumcised; Moses warned the people that corruption would cause them to perish from the land; even during the time of Joshua and the Judges the Israelites were not in full control of the land, but shared it (as the dominant group) with others.

Promises and warnings are listed alongside an outline of the major events.



The Euphrates & Tigris Rivers

At a distance of 20km apart, two lakes are found in the Munzur Daglari range of eastern Turkey. The largest is formed by the Kebar Dam and is fed by three rivers, one of which flows from the foothills of Ararat. The other, a natural lake, is perched high in the hills, its outlet draining southwest towards Batman. The rivers which flow from these lakes are the Euphrates and the Tigris, and we shall follow them to the sea.



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