

Mid-East e-News

An electronic journal of the Middle East, for those who want to be informed.

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Welcome

Well, asking you in e-News 27 for your opinion on “Is it a Religious War?” really prompted a response! Thanks for your input, and it’s not too late to contribute to the discussion. Perhaps there’s a web site you’d like me to look at? A series on this topic will begin in the next issue.

Missing copies of e-News ? See below.

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In the News this week

Did you notice that Sharon’s success in getting the withdrawal from Gaza approved depended upon support from the opposition Labor party? This was necessary, since some of his own coalition deserted him. Even now four of his own ministers have threatened to resign if he does not call a referendum within a fortnight. (See e-News 24 for background on the various parties). The withdrawal will include all 21 of the Gaza settlements, which house about 8,000 Israelis, and 4 within the West Bank. (An article on this topic is in preparation, and I will try to have that for issue 29 on November 15th.)

Yasser Arafat’s illness has brought the question of his succession into sharp focus. Initially Israel was hesitant, but after a day or two they allowed him to visit hospital, and then to travel to Paris for hospital treatment. He has not left his Ramallah headquarters for two years, having been told by Israel that they would not promise to allow him back if he did leave. On Wednesday (27th Oct.) they pledged to allow him to return, partly through the concern that they would be held responsible for his health if he waited too long. Rumors of him having Leukemia have been squashed by the French doctors (as of today, Oct 31st) but... (See e-News 22 for possible successors to Arafat.)

Thailand is back in the news. Over the last week violence erupted again in the southern province of Pattani. 78 died (suffocated) while being transported to jail after rioting over the arrest of 6 Muslims. Check out e-News 18 if you have forgotten what was happening in August.

And **Darfur** is still in the news, with little change of heart, apparently, by the government there. Abuses continue against refugees, and women in particular, by government forces and their jinjawid militias. e-News 12 gave some of the background, back in February.

Recommended Web Pages

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/default.stm (BBC Middle East News)

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/middle_east/2001/israel_and_the_palestinians/default.stm (Israel and the Palestinians. A collection of items, including maps, diagrams and animations that illustrate and explain the issues.)



If you are needing a ‘hard copy’ of issues of e-News that you have missed, perhaps this compilation of issues 1-24 (the first year) will be what you are looking for. I will print and ship them as I receive orders. Bound, and in color, with a ‘Table of Contexts’ to help you find what you are looking for! Check, \$18, by mail is probably the best method. Shipped within 1 week of receipt. Please include mailing address and email (for confirmation). If outside the US, please email me.

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Jerusalem, the City of David

When newly-crowned King David attacked Jebus, the city of the Jebusites, it was the last of a series of attempts by the Israelites to control this strategic summit. Much earlier, very soon after their arrival in the Promised Land, and the conquest of Jericho and Ai, the king of 'Jerusalem', Adoni-Zedek, attempted to defeat them at Gibeah (**Joshua 10:1-13**). It was during this battle that the sun stood still for Joshua's victory.

When the tribes of Judah and Benjamin were given their allotment of territory, the border between them ran alongside the hill of Jerusalem, up the valley of Hinnom, with Jerusalem belonging to the tribe of Benjamin. However, neither of them were able to defeat the Jebusites (**Joshua 15:63, Judges 1:21**), who would remain a threat for many years.

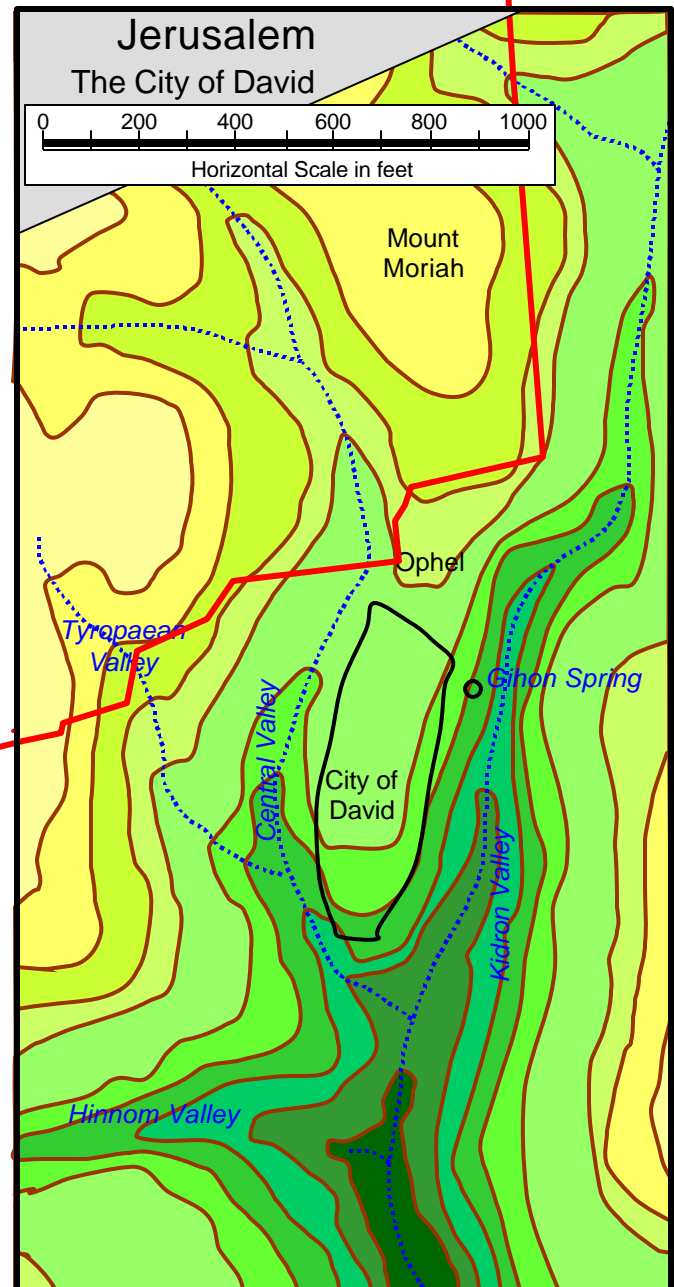
The earliest biblical mention of the area, though, was earlier still. While Abraham was living in Beersheba, then controlled by the Philistines, he was told by God to sacrifice his son Isaac. He was to "go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." (**Genesis 22:2**). Moses later wrote instructing the Israelites to "seek the place the Lord you God will choose from among all your tribes to put His name there for his dwelling." Generations later David built another altar at the same site, when God restrained the angel of the plague after David's untimely census of the fighting men. (**1 Chronicles 21:15-28**) Later, this was the site where Solomon was directed to establish the temple, transferring the sacrificial system from the Tabernacle to the leveled summit of Mount Moriah. (**2 Chronicles 3:1**)

Jebus finally succumbed to the Israelites under the leadership of King David. His capture of the city is recalled in **2 Samuel 5:6-10** and **1 Chronicles 11:4-9**. The capture required David to send his men in through the water shaft (though an alternative translation suggests that they used "scaling hooks"). We are told that Joab, later a commander of David's army, was the one who led the assault.

It is pertinent to point out that the new name of the city would from henceforth be the *City of David*. Even when the city had expanded under Solomon, the lower area would always be referred to as the City of David. The verses that describe the capture of the city refer to it as the "fortress of Zion, the City of David." This seems to indicate that Zion is that specific ridge, though some scholars suggest that Zion is actually the western hill – the Jebusite city may well have been the *fortress* of the immediate region.

Once the city had been conquered, David built up the area, though the Jebusites may have already had some supporting terraces in place. This would mean leveling the ridge, to make it more suitable for occupation – and it would allow the walls to be raised some, too. Once the site was ready David also moved the Tabernacle into the location where it would stay until Solomon erected the temple. (**1 Chronicles 15:1-2**)

It was in this small city, perched on the end of the narrow ridge descending from Mount Moriah, that David established his capital. The grand walls of our contemporary "Old City" are much more recent – even since the time of Jesus – and, as can be seen from the map, the City of David is completely outside the present walls.

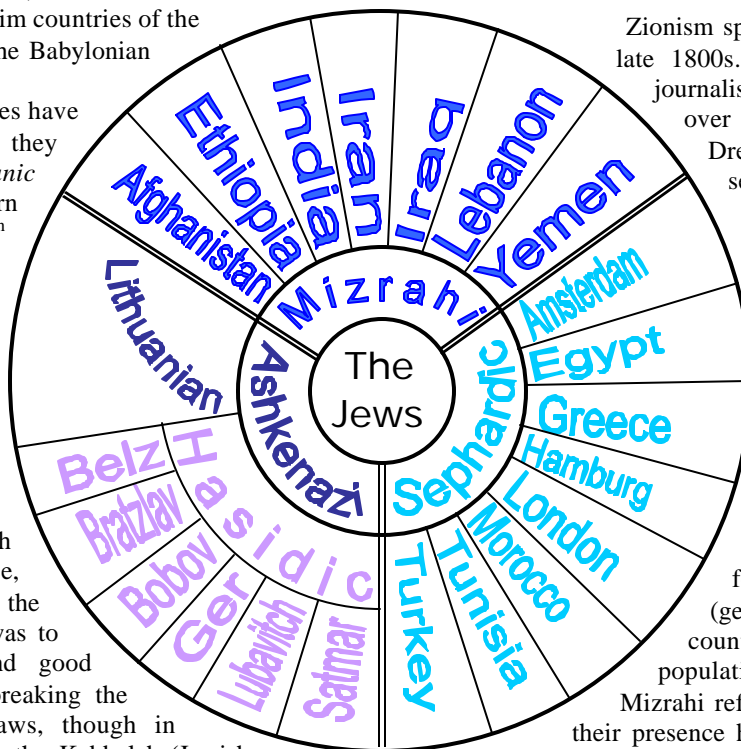


Israel – People Groups

So Israel is a religious country? Perhaps. But if that means most of the population being observant Jews, then the answer would be “No,” since about 70% of the country would consider themselves secular. Jews, religious or secular, are in two groups, Ashkenazi and Sephardic, though the latter group also includes the Mizrahi Jews. Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews live apart, but their closer ties and related immigrant experience have allowed Sephardic and Mizrahi to co-mingle. They even share the same Chief Rabbi, though not necessarily from choice (see *e-News* 27).

Sephardic Jews trace their ancestry to the Jews that returned from the Babylonian captivity after Cyrus’ declaration (2 Chron.36:22, Ezra 1:1). Of the 140,000 in exile there, some figures suggest, only 40,000 returned at the time of the re-establishment of temple worship. Many were taken captive to Rome during the rebellions of 70 and 135 AD. During the dissolution of the Roman Empire they moved westwards, many of them finding themselves in Spain. In 1492 the Jewish residents of Spain were expelled during the Inquisition that followed the Reconquista. These refugees scattered through the nascent Ottoman Empire, North Africa, Turkey and eastern Europe as well as England, France, Italy and to some extent amongst the Ashkenazi of Germany, Austria and Hungary. The Mizrahi, on the other hand, are Oriental Jews whose ancestors have lived in the Muslim countries of the Middle East since the time of the Babylonian captivity.

The Ashkenazim themselves have a mixed heritage, though they originate from the *Germanic* regions of central and eastern Europe. During the 18th Century a spiritual movement swept through the Jews, its founder being Yisrael Ben Eliezer (known as the Baal Shem Tov). The towns of Breslau, Belz, & Lubavitch were among those that responded to this charismatic teacher, who taught that the way to God was through heartfelt worship, prayers, dance, and not intense study of the Talmud. The prime concern was to encourage joyful worship and good works without the worry of breaking the many Jewish traditions-cum-laws, though in time Hasidism came to include the Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism) in its practices.



Today the Ashkenazim are either Lithuanian or Hasidic. The Lithuanian (‘Vilnius’) Jews were the only group to hold out against the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, being staunchly opposed to Hasidism, and are today known as *Mitnagdim* (‘opponents’). The Hasidic Jews are recognized by the names of the original home towns of their Rabbis. Politically these consider the modern Jewish state to be a human institution, not one ordained by God, and might walk out of their seats in the Knesset when the *Hatikvah*, the national anthem, is played.



The streimel, or fur-trimmed hat, is associated with Hasidic Jews from Galicia, Poland.

The Lubavitchers, however – the ‘evangelicals’ among the fragmented mosaic that is Judaism – have a different opinion. Their attitude towards the declaration of independence is that it heralded the imminent coming of their promised Messiah. Lubavitchers are known for being enthusiastic promoters of their faith, particularly amongst the secular Israelis.

Zionism sprouted and grew in Europe in the late 1800s. Its founder, Theodore Herzl, a journalist, was influenced by the furor over the trial in France of Alfred Dreyfus, falsely accused treason and sentence to life imprisonment. After WWI the immigration of Jewish refugees into ‘Eretz Israel’ was primarily from European countries, and hence almost entirely Ashkenazi. These numbers increased with the rise of the Nazi party, and by 1950 the Ashkenazi Jews (Lithuanian and Hasidic) were 80% of the total Israeli population.

When the state of Israel was formed, in 1948, the Mizrahi Jews (generally, those from Islamic countries) were, then, just 20% of the population. By the 1960s the influx of Mizrahi refugees had reversed the ratio, and their presence has now grown to 55-60% of the Israeli population.

In the next issue of *e-News* we shall look at who these immigrants were.

