



# Did Jews take Israel away from Palestinians?



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### QUESTION:

The Palestinians were in Israel first, then it was flooded with European Jews from the Holocaust. I have sympathy for someone fleeing the Holocaust, but they shouldn't be able to just take over someone else's land, should they?

### ANSWER:

The statement and question posed above may be something you hear from those who believe the Jews creation of the State of Israel constituted an act of colonialism – an act of taking political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, displacing its indigenous people, and exploiting it economically.

Consider the historic inaccuracies in the statement and question above:

- It is inaccurate to say Arab Palestinians lived there first.
- Jews have lived on the land of Israel continuously for almost 4,000 years.
- The land of Israel is the birthplace of the Jewish people. Approximately 4,000 years ago, Abraham moved to the land of Israel where he lived with his family, raised his children and purchased land to bury his wife and himself.
- After Abraham came Isaac and Jacob. Jacob, who was named Israel by God, had twelve sons whose families became the 12 Tribes of Israel.

- Approximately 3,000 years ago, the Jews established a monarchy in the land that includes Israel, Gaza, the West Bank (Judaea and Samaria), the Golan Heights, parts of Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. (See the map below)



The map above shows the lands occupied by the 12 Tribes at the time of the unification by King Saul.

- King Saul united the 12 Tribes as a Jewish nation.
- Under King David (who ruled first from Hebron – today part of the West Bank), Jerusalem was established as the capital of the Jewish nation. King David purchased Mount Moriah for 50 shekels of silver.
- King Solomon built the holy Temple in Jerusalem, known as the First Temple.
- The Babylonians conquered Israel about 2600 years ago (586 BCE) and destroyed the First Temple. Most of the Jewish population was exiled to Babylon, but some Jews remained.
- About 150 years later (539 BCE), the Persians conquered Babylon and permitted the Jews in exile to return to Israel and authorized the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.
- 200 years later Alexander the Great and Greeks conquered the Persians and the Jews continued to live in Jerusalem and Israel under Greek rule.
- The Romans occupied Jerusalem and Israel in the first century BCE. The Jews revolted against Roman Rule about 130 years later during what became known as the First Jewish Revolt. In response, the Romans destroyed the Second Temple (70 CE). Many Jews were slaughtered by the Romans and most left the country, but some Jews remained. The Romans renamed Judea “Palaeestina” in an attempt to minimize Jewish identification with the land. It was from that point forward land became known as Palestine.
- It was not until 622 CE that the Muslim religion was established by Mohammed in Mecca in what is today Saudi Arabia.
- Caliph Umar was a contemporary of Mohammed and began conquering non-Arabian lands, including Palestine, around 636 CE. Jews were permitted to reenter Jerusalem and settled around the Western Wall. However, over the next 400+ years, Jews suffered under Caliphate rule.
- Christian Crusaders conquered Palestine in 1099, slaughtering both Jews and Muslims.
- After 200 years under Christian rule where non-Christians, including Jews and Muslims

suffered, the Mamluks began rule of the area. During the Mamluk era there was a decline of towns and commerce and of Jewish communities.

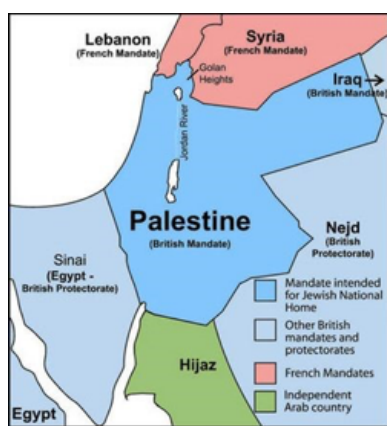
- In 1517 the Ottomans took over control of Palestine and there was a further decline of the land, but an increasing Jewish population.
- During World War I, in 1917, the British took over control of Palestine and the British Mandate for Palestine (discussed further below) was established in 1922.
- Maps from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century of "Palestine" demonstrate Palestine was seen historically connected to Jews. This [VIDEO](#) shows various maps through time recognizing that the term Palestine applies to the Jewish nature of Palestine from well before the Ottoman Empire.

From the [timeline above](#), it is clear that Jews preceded both Arabs and Muslims in Palestine by 2600 years if measured from the time of Abraham or by at least 1600 years if measured from the establishment of Kingdom of Israel.

- It is inaccurate to say Jews are interlopers into the Middle East and that they only came to the land after the Holocaust. While Jews were dispersed from the Middle East at various times, Jews have lived continuously in the Land of Israel, including through Babylonian, Persian, Roman, Byzantine, Muslim and Crusader rule.
- Large Jewish populations were established in Jerusalem and Tiberias by the ninth century BCE and in other cities throughout Palestine by the eleventh century.
- Crusaders massacred Jews in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the Jewish population rebounded over the next two centuries.
- By the fourteenth century when Israel fell under Muslim rule, there were Jewish communities in at least thirty cities, including Haifa, Hebron, Gaza, Jerusalem and Safed.
- At the time of the Ottoman conquest in the early sixteenth century, 200 years later, Jews lived in Jerusalem, Nablus, Hebron, Safed and in many Galilean villages.
- Jews in the Diaspora began to return to Israel in 1770 from Eastern Europe. Many Jews, also, left Eastern Europe in the late 18th and early 19th centuries in order to pray and die in the four sacred cities of the Holy Land: Jerusalem, Safed, Tiberias and Hebron.
- According to a [British census in 1864](#), Jews constituted a **majority** of the population of Jerusalem. In 1875, an Ottoman [census of Jerusalem](#) confirmed the Jewish majority in Jerusalem and another in 1905 showed Jews represented two-thirds of the Jerusalem population.



- Over [800,000 Jews were forced to leave Arab and Muslim countries](#) between 1948 and 1972 and many had their property confiscated. Approximately 600,000 of those Jews emigrated to Israel and Israel received no compensation for their resettlement.
- Immediately after World War II, under the British Mandate, Jewish refugees from the Holocaust were [limited to 18,000 per year](#). Thus, after the end of the war and prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, [very few Holocaust survivors](#) were able to enter Israel.
- Today there are approximately 135,000 [Ethiopian Jews](#) living in Israel, with almost 86,000 of those Jews emigrating to Israel. None would be considered Holocaust survivors.
- A small percentage of the Israeli population both at the time of the establishment of Israel and currently are Holocaust survivors.
- It is inaccurate to say the State of Israel only came into existence because of the Holocaust.
- The [First Zionist Congress](#), convened in 1897, called for the creation of a Jewish State in the land of Israel secured by international law.
- On November 2, 1917, the British Foreign Office issued a statement declaring the British Government's position favoring the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Written by Lord Balfour, the document became known as the [Balfour Declaration](#).
- A recent article by Ayman Ashour in *Egyptian Streets*, [Egyptian Support for Balfour Declaration](#), outlines historic Egyptian support for the Balfour declaration.
- The map below reflects the geographic makeup of the land that would make up the Jewish Homeland under the Balfour Declaration.



1917-1922

In the 1917 Balfour Declaration, Britain endorsed "Zionist aspirations" to reestablish their homeland in Palestine and promised to "facilitate" the effort.<sup>3</sup> In 1920, international peace negotiators incorporated the Balfour Declaration in the Treaty of Sevres and called for a Mandate in Palestine.<sup>4</sup> In 1922, the League of Nations instructed the British Mandate authorities to "facilitate" Jewish immigration and settlement of Palestine.<sup>5</sup> Many European and Arab leaders hoped Jews would revive this small, impoverished, thinly populated region.

- In April 1920, the post-World War I Allied Supreme Council determined the mandates for the administration of the three undefined Ottoman Territories in the Middle East – Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia. For Palestine, the administration was entrusted to the British government with the charge of implementing the Balfour Declaration and establishing a [national home for the Jewish people](#).
- In 1922, the League of Nations formally gave Great Britain the responsibility of the [Mandate for Palestine](#) and for implementation of the Balfour Declaration. At the time of the formal creation of the Mandate, the territory for the Jewish Homeland was reduced by 77% from the original Mandate. (See [map](#) below)



- In 1936, the British government established a Royal Commission, known as [The Peel Commission](#), to investigate the unrest between Arabs and Jews in Palestine. A report was issued in 1937 that recommended a partition of the land between Arabs and Jews with an international zone running from Jerusalem to Jaffa to be continued as a British Mandate (See Map below). The Report, after being accepted by the British Government, was rejected by the Arabs. In 1938, the British Government rejected the plan as unimplementable.



- When the United Nations Charter was adopted in 1945, Article 80 of the Charter maintained the [rights to a Jewish homeland under the Mandate](#).
- In 1947, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a [resolution](#) recommending the partition of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab with Jerusalem to be governed by an international regime. (See map below)



- While the UN partition plan reduced the Jewish Homeland even further, it was accepted by the Jewish side, but not by the Arabs. The Arabs immediately launched a war of annihilation against the Jewish state.
- As the General Assembly Resolution for the Partition of Palestine was never accepted by both parties, it never became binding under international law.
- The plan for the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine was created long before the beginning of the Holocaust.
- It is inaccurate to say the British Mandate of Palestine did not consider Jews to be Palestinians.
- Jewish organizations acquiring land for the Jewish people included the Palestinian Jewish Colonization Association and the Palestinian Land Development Company.
- During the British Mandate, the *Jerusalem Post* was called the *Palestine Post*. The name was not changed until 1950.
- The flag of Palestine under the Mandate had a Star of David, the currency had Hebrew on it and Jews were identified as Palestinians.



- Even the Arabs considered the Jews to be Palestinians. See, for example, [Resolution 16 of the Arab League](#) adopted as part of their boycott of the Jews it began in 1945:

***“Products of Palestinian Jews are to be considered undesirable in Arab countries. They should be prohibited and refused as long as their production in Palestine might lead to the realization of Zionist political***

**aims.”**

- It is inaccurate to say the Jews just took over or stole Arab land. In addition to land owned by Jews already living in Palestine, there were substantial land purchases made by the Jewish National Fund, the Palestine Land Development Company and the Palestine Jewish Colonization Association between the late 1880s and 1930s. Most of the land purchases were made in the Jezreel Valley, Jordan Valley and Galilee where the Arab population was sparse, and soil was poor. At the time of the UN partition vote in 1947 most of the land not already owned by Jews was public land, not privately-owned land. Very little of the land was privately owned by Arabs. See the chart below which outlines land purchases from 1880 until 1935 by the Palestine Land Development Company and the Palestine Jewish Colonization Association. Purchases by the JNF also occurred between 1936 and 1947.
- [Jewish Land Purchases 1880 -1935 in Dunams\[1\]](#)

Organization	Total Land Acquired	Government Concessions	From Private Owners	Large Tracts
Palestinian Jewish Colonization Assoc.	469,407	39,520	429,887	293,545
Palestinian Land Development Co.	579,492	66,513	512,979	455,169
Jewish Nat'l Fund	836,396			
Until 1930		270,084	239,170	90%
1931-1947		566,312		50%
Individual Jews	432,100		432,100	50%
Total	2,317,392			

- To the extent small Arab landholders in Palestine “lost” their land to Jews, it was the result of wealthy Arab families in Middle Eastern cities like Beirut and Damascus acquiring large tracts of land in Palestine and subsequently selling lands to Jews.
- The early Zionist pioneers saw the Arab population as small, apolitical, and without a nationalist element and they therefore believed that there would be no friction between the two communities. They also thought development of the country would benefit both peoples and they would thus secure Arab support and cooperation. Indeed, many Arabs attracted by new employment opportunities, higher wages and better living conditions migrated to Palestine from other countries in the wake of economic growth stimulated by Jewish immigration.
- It is inaccurate to say Palestine defines a nationality. Palestine simply describes a geographic area.
- The people referred to today as Palestinians are [not indigenous](#) to the land. Jews, on the

other hand can claim they are indigenous.

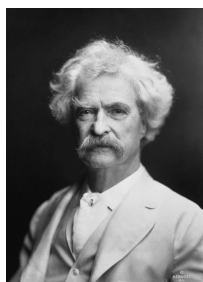
- In 1937, [a local Arab leader stated](#): “There is no such country as Palestine. ‘Palestine’ is a term the Zionists invented. . . . Our country was for centuries part of Syria. ‘Palestine’ is alien to us. It is the Zionists who introduced it.”
- The term Palestinian as used to refer to Arabs was [not used until 1964](#) when the Russian KGB helped Egypt’s President, Abdul Nasser, create the Palestine Liberation Organization. “Palestinian” was part of disinformation created by the Russians.
- The Quran itself recognizes the right of Israelites to the Holy Land – a Kuwaiti writer makes the case on an Arab television show:

[Kuwati Writer Asserts Israel Is a Legitimate State, not an occupier and that there is no Palestine](#)

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## SUMMARY

- The statement and question raised are historically inaccurate.
- Palestine defines a geographic region, not a nationality.
- “Palestinians” were not there first – Jews have continuously been on the land for over three thousand years.
- There was an influx of European Jews starting in the 1770’s. It did not start with the Holocaust.
- There are more Palestinian, Arab and North African Jews than the number of Jews arriving from DP camps after the Holocaust.
- As Jews developed the lands, more Arabs moved into Palestine.
- There was never a Palestinian State nor an Arab Palestinian people. The term “Palestinian” was used to describe all people living in Palestine, Jews, as well as Arabs.
- Palestine (“Palaestina”) was the name given to the area when the Romans conquered the area.
- Jews didn’t just take over the land – they purchased it, they developed it, they grew the country.
- Britain, post-World War I allies, the League of Nations and the United Nations all intended that a Jewish homeland would be established in the British Mandate known as Palestine.
- The term Palestinian as used today was an invented term that was not used until the 1960’s and was invented by Russia.



### Mark Twain famously noted

*“The Egyptians, the Babylonians and the Persians rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and faded away; the Greeks and Romans followed and made a vast noise, and they were gone; other people have sprung up and held their torch high for a time but it burned out . . . . The Jew saw them all, survived them all. . . .”* [September 1897](#) (Quoted in *The National Jewish Post & Observer*, June 6, 1984)



[1] A dunam is equal to slightly more than 4 acres.

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