

Land of Partition

BY CHARLES C. RYRIE*

Jerusalem, the city of peace, is in pieces. Palestine, the land of promise, is a land of partition. I traveled recently in the whole of Palestine. May I share with you some of the sights?

If I could inscribe one word on the hearts of Christian people concerning the Arab piece of Palestine, it would be the word *refugee*; for in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and the Gaza strip there are 850,000 of these refugees living in unspeakable conditions. These are the victims of the Arab-Jewish war. These are the people who formerly lived in the part of Palestine which is now the State of Israel.

It seems rather useless to spend much time trying to place blame for this problem. Who fired the first shot will probably never be settled, but shots were fired on both sides. Doubtless many Arabs fled, thinking they would soon return in the wake of a victorious army; doubtless, too, many were forced to leave. It is true that Israel encouraged them to stay, but it is not difficult to see how the activities of guerilla bands, though officially disavowed, added to the confusion of the moment. Let us simply say there was a war, and in no war, generally speaking, is one side entirely innocent and the other entirely guilty. One of the tragic results of this war is this refugee problem.

Come with me to one of their camps in Lebanon. Here living conditions are somewhat better than in the tent camps, for these people are housed in old army barracks. These barracks were built for 600 occupants though they are presently housing 2,600. These people came from Galilee, where their ancestors had lived for 1,500 years, and they walked all the way. Yes, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency is supplying them with relief rations of flour, sugar, beans, and oil which amount to about one-third of a normal diet. Yes, they can work, but only during the one month harvest season and then for about twenty-five cents per day.

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world Jewish community also has a refugee problem which is being partially solved by the immigration of approximately 200,000 Jewish people per year into this three-year-old State of Israel. To travel in this country is to see a miracle of modern times.

The year 1951 has been designated as the "year of the ingathering of the exiles," and those who come are not called refugees but "those who return home." I saw them in the reception center; I saw them in the transient work camps; I saw them on their collective and cooperative land settlements; I saw them building their modern cities; I saw their progress on plans for irrigating 60,000 acres of desert land by 1955; I saw their parliament sitting in Jerusalem. In a word, I saw the fulfilment of divine prophecy, but I also saw a people who need a Saviour. God save us from being so interested in prophecy that we lose our concern for people.

What does the future hold for this tiny nation? The Scriptures answer in clear detail. It is not our purpose, however, to deal with that in this article, for we are primarily concerned that the burden of these people, who are returning *in unbelief*, may be laid on the hearts of Christian people. There are now 1,300,000 in Israel and they continue to pour in day by day—but without Christ.

What is the solution to this problem? We know that the answer is our Lord Jesus Christ. Will you not pray that they may receive Him as Saviour before He comes as King? Pray not only for the peace of Jerusalem, but pray also for the pieces which today make up this land of partition.

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And this has been their condition for over three years. It is remarkable that Communism has not overrun such a place, but increasingly the seed of Communist doctrine is finding lodging in this well-prepared soil. These Arab refugees, who blame America for their plight because of her quick recognition of the State of Israel, are beginning to reason that Russia, the enemy of their enemy America, must be their friend. Is not the way being prepared for the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the Assyrian in the end time?

Come to another camp—a sprawling tent city of 20,000 people. The rations are the same; the stoves are open fires; the pillows are mud; the desert heat is intense. Immorality is widespread, as evinced by a birth rate of 40 per 1,000. A lone medical missionary near this camp estimates that in this place alone there are over 8,000 cases of tuberculosis. Scurvy, too, spreads quickly among these people. Christianity has hardly scratched the almost universal Moham-medan surface.

It is very easy to engineer a relocation project for these refugees by remote control. Up to the present moment, about 500 have been relocated in Arab territory. At this rate it will take a very long time to complete the job. Concern about this problem is not anti-Semitism. The world must realize that there will never be peace in the Middle East as long as 850,000 people live within a day's journey of their homes. In applying recently for a grant-in-aid from the United States Government, Israel gave as a reason that "today, aside from Turkey, Israel has the strongest army in the Near East." But if we do not also give some attention to the Arab piece of Palestine, we may find ourselves supporting Israel, a state smaller than Vermont, as an island like Formosa in the midst of a red Arab sea. But infinitely more important than these political considerations are the spiritual burdens for these refugees and for the thousands of others who live in these lands. It is a call to us for urgent prayer for these unreached people and for the few Gospel agencies that are laboring among them.

If one word needed to be chosen to describe the Jewish piece of Palestine it would be the word *regathering*. The