

PALESTINE TODAY

By Charles C. Ryrie

STRANGELY ENOUGH, the attention of the world is rapidly turning these days to the affairs of the Middle East. And yet this is not strange to us, for the student of the Scriptures has always had his attention there. Recently I was privileged to visit this center of attraction and would like to share with you some of the many impressions of a trip to the Holy Land in these days.

PROPHECY

The land of promise is now the land of partition. On the western side of the shaky armistice line which divides Palestine today into two parts there is one outstanding development. All this activity in the new state of Israel is, as one prominent Jewish leader put it, "the fulfillment of divine prophecy." To travel in Palestine today is to see a miracle of modern times, and all of it points toward the fulfillment of God's Word.

The most striking feature of the new state of Israel is the influx of Jewish people from all parts of the world and the process of absorbing them into the economy of the country. When the state was established in 1948 there were 650,000 Jews in the land; today there are 1,300,000, and all of these in an area which is smaller in size than the state of Vermont. Those who come to Israel today are not called refugees but "those who return home." The present year has been designated as the year of the "ingathering of the exiles." Hebrew is the official language of the new state. This was especially impressed on me one day when we were served juice and cookies, for the cookies were stamped with Hebrew characters! Even though Jordan has control of part of the city, the capital of Israel is Jerusalem. The mayor of Jerusalem expressed the sentiment of all Jewish people when he wrote, "The permanent and eternal capital is

TEAR PROOF NO. 804-13P U.S.A.

Help and Food, January 1952, Vol. 71, No. 828. N.Y. Loizeaux Bros.

Jerusalem." At present all but two government agencies are located there and these last two will be moved as soon as quarters can be made available. The Israel Parliament sits in Jerusalem and debate is almost entirely in Hebrew. It takes little imagination to envision this body debating and ratifying a covenant with the man of sin some day soon (Dan. 9:27).

The Sabbath is strictly observed throughout the nation. No public transportation is available from sundown Friday until sundown Saturday. Does this not fill full of meaning our Lord's words concerning the tribulation days, "Pray ye that your flight be not . . . on the sabbath day" (Matt. 24:20)? On every hand things are in preparation for the awful days to come.

PEOPLE

Thrilling as the study of prophecy is, our interest in it must never overshadow our concern for people. The one word *regathering* most adequately describes what is happening in Israel today. However, Christian hearts should be heavily burdened for the people who are being regathered *in unbelief*; 200,000 Jews per year are pouring into Israel, but without a Saviour.

On the Arab side of the border is another heart-rending problem. It is the group of 850,000 Arab refugees who live in unspeakable conditions in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and the Gaza strip. These people who formerly lived in the part of Palestine which is now the state of Israel are the victims of the Arab-Jewish war.

It is not our purpose to try to determine whose fault it is that they are there. There was a war, and this is one of the tragic aftermaths of that war. Most of the refugee camps are sprawling tent cities. All of them are overcrowded. The human beings who exist in these places have been there for over three years. A United Nations relief agency is supplying them with rations which amount to about one-third of a normal diet. Cooking is done over open fires. Immorality is widespread—the birth

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rate is 40 per 100. There is no work for them to do except perhaps during the one-month harvest season. Disease is rampant. In one camp of 20,000 a lone medical missionary estimates that there are 8000 cases of tuberculosis. Scurvy spreads quickly; Christianity spreads slowly.

These are the people of Palestine today.

PRAYER

Pray for Palestine. The land is filled with signs of our Lord's soon return, and surely that makes us cry out, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus." But do not forget to pray for Palestine today. Pray for the few gospel workers who are laboring there; pray for the governments not only of that land but also for those who are playing politics in Palestine; pray for the thousands of unbelieving Jewish immigrants; pray for the pitiful Arab refugees; pray, pray for Palestine today.