

“OCCUPIED” or “DISPUTED”

The “West Bank”

- America is dotted with the names of towns like “Shiloh” (Tennessee) or “Ephrata” (Pennsylvania and Washington). These are the names of towns found in the Bible and names of towns reestablished in Israel since 1967 when Jews were finally allowed to go back to these lands to establish homes.
- “West” of what? Why do people call this kidney-shaped piece of land the “West Bank”? The term only came into use after Israel’s War of Independence



(1948-49) when the country of Transjordan captured it and annexed it. The area was the “West Bank” of the Jordan River, which ran through that Arab country. For almost 20 years, the Jordanians controlled the land but never considered allowing a separate Arab country to arise on the “West Bank.” Jews who lived there before 1948 were either expelled or annihilated. By the way, until Jordan forcibly annexed the area, most maps referred to the area by their longtime Jewish names of “Judea” in the south and “Samaria” in the north.

- That’s right. Jews did not suddenly show up in the 1970s and when they did, they did not expel Arabs who lived in the area to make room for their farms or their bedroom communities. Israeli-grown produce

As you ponder the issues before you, bear this in mind. Some advocate a Palestinian state in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. Others say there already is one (Jordan is somewhere between 60-70% Palestinian demographically). Wherever your feelings fall on this question, don’t make the mistake of assuming that Jews have no rights in these areas or that their farms and communities are illegal.



Mosaic of King David from the ruins of an ancient Gaza synagogue

comes either from land in pre-existing Jewish communities, land that was un-owned (that is, previously controlled by Jordan and with no private owner), or land purchased from established owners.

- A final word on legality. In 1920, the Palestine Mandate was established

by the League of Nations with the express purpose of encouraging the “close settlement of Jews on the land, including State (i.e. unowned) lands.” This does not mean that only Jews have rights to these lands as the same Mandate expressly stated that “nothing should be done which might prejudice the ... rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.” But it does mean that Jews, their farms and their homes are permitted there by the only internationally recognized legal document.

Gaza

- Gaza does not have quite as lengthy a Jewish history as do Judea and Samaria but it would be equally wrong to view the area strictly as an ancient Arab population center. Beginning with its conquest by the Maccabees in the 96 BCE (from descendents of the Philistines, NOT Arabs) through the Middle Ages and early modern times, Gaza had a thriving Jewish presence.
- More recently, Kfar Darom, one of the Jewish communities that was eradicated under PM Sharon’s disengagement plan in 2005, was established as a kibbutz in 1946, abandoned under Egyptian attack in 1948 and reestablished in 1970.
- The Gaza strip was also part of the Palestine Mandate. Thus, a renewed Jewish presence in the area is neither more nor less legal than that of any other Jewish farm or home in Israel.
- One final note. Before the Jewish people returned to the Gaza Strip, the area was a barren stretch of sand dunes. Using high end agricultural techniques, Israel has transformed the land; 65% of organic vegetables and 60% of the herbs exported from Israel come from the area