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Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank")

Whom does it belong to?

Is it "occupied territory"?

Many even otherwise well-informed people believe that the turmoil in the Middle East is due to the Israeli "occupation" of Judea and Samaria, also known as the "West Bank"—a territory less than half the size of Los Angeles County.

What are the facts?

■ Jews have been living in all parts of "Palestine" since Biblical times. After World War I, Britain was in control of Palestine. Earlier, in 1917, it had issued the Balfour Declaration. It called for the establishment in Palestine of a "national home for the Jewish people", with the understanding that the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish community would be respected.

■ Until Jewish immigration into "Palestine" began in earnest early in this century, the country was sparsely populated and underdeveloped (Mark Twain describes the desolation well in his book *Innocents Abroad*.) Its civilization was that of the Middle Ages. When the Jews came into the country, they created commercial, agricultural, and industrial opportunities which acted as a magnet to the Arabs, most of them nomadic.

■ In 1920, the League of Nations made Britain the mandatory power in Palestine, effective in 1922. The Mandate, in line with the Balfour Declaration, provided for the establishment of a Jewish national home in all or any part of Palestine. The British, contrary to the spirit of the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate, divided the country in two parts. They granted the area east of the Jordan River to the Hashemite tribes, thus excluding it from Jewish settlement. They limited the Jewish National Home to an area within the 23% remaining west of the Jordan River. That entire area is about half the size of San Bernardino County in California. Transjordan was given independence by Britain in 1946.

In the Camp David Accords, Israel committed itself to autonomy for the Arab inhabitants of the area and to the determination of a permanent political status. Israel has invited representatives of Jordan and of the Arab inhabitants of Judea-Samaria to participate in autonomy talks. But, under pressure and threats of the PLO and Arab rejectionists, they have so far refused to participate in any negotiations. Peace, and the ultimate resolution of the problem of the "West Bank" can only come about by negotiations. Israel has been ready for such negotiations for more than 20 years.

Israel declared its independence in April of 1948, on the same day as Britain relinquished its Mandate, and after the Arabs had rejected a partition plan proposed by the United Nations.

■ In its War of Independence, against overwhelming odds, the newly-formed Israel Defense Forces were able to defeat five combined Arab armies. Transjordan, however, succeeded in pushing westward across the Jordan River and in occupying Judea and Samaria. They were the occupiers, and they stayed in that occupation until they attacked Israel in 1967 and were defeated in the Six-Day War. During its 19 years of occupation, Transjordan, now renamed "Jordan", systematically removed all Jews from the territory. Jewish holy places were profaned and destroyed.

■ Israel has administered Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") since 1967. Approximately 90,000 Israelis have settled there. The Arab population in the area enjoys local autonomy, civil liberties, free access to higher education, and the highest standard of living of any Arab population anywhere in the countries neighboring on Israel.

■ A homeland for Arab Palestinians? Of course, they deserve one. They have such a country. It's Jordan. Jordan (77% of the British Mandate) is Arab Palestine. Never in history has there been an Arab state in Judea and Samaria, and there certainly was never any mention of it during the 19 years of Transjordanian occupation.

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