



Student Handout: Historical Background Of Palestine - A Cradle Of Prophets And Civilizations Journey To Ancient Palestine

In our last lesson, we learned that Palestine is a blessed land called “Al-Ard Al-Muqaddasah.” Today, we travel back thousands of years to explore its ancient history, its first known people, the amazing prophets who walked this sacred soil, and Prophet Muhammad's (saw) and the Sahabahs' love for Masjid al-Aqsa.

This module comprises of two units. In each unit there is a quiz and at the end of the module there are interactive activities. You are required to answer the quizzes and do the activities in your journals.

Vocabulary - Key Terms:

- **Canaanites:** Indigenous / original people of Palestine
- **Al-Quds (Jerusalem):** Ancient holy city
- **Masjid al-Aqsa:** Second house of Allah (swt) on Earth
- **Bayt al-Maqdis:** House of Holiness (another name for Masjid al-Aqsa)
- **Tawhid:** Oneness of Allah (swt)
- **Indigenous:** Original inhabitants of a region
- **Semites:** Descendants of Prophet Nuh's (as) son Sam
- **Al-Khalil:** Hebron, burial place of Ibrahim (as)
- **Bani Israeel:** Children of Israel (descendants of Yaqub (as))

Unit 1

1. Introduction

What do you know about Palestine?

This land is called "Al-Ard Al-Muqaddasah" (The Holy Land)

2. The eternal sacred status of Masjid al-Aqsa pre-dates human existence

Masjid al-Aqsa is not a building that began in history; it is a sacred space that began with creation itself. Allah (swt) says in Surah al-Isra, 17:1:

“Glory be to Him who took His servant by night from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al-Aqsa — whose surroundings We have blessed.”

Masjid al-Aqsa's blessing existed even before structures or civilizations.

Muhammad (saw) said: *'The first masjid established on earth was al-Masjid al-Haram, then al-Masjid al-Aqsa.'* It was asked, *'What was the period between them?'* He said, *'Forty years.'* (Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim)

This means that al-Aqsa's sacred foundation dates back approximately to the time of Prophet Adam (as),

making it a place of worship that predates all recorded human civilizations in Palestine. The stones and walls of Masjid al-Aqsa have changed through time, but its sanctity has never changed. While human civilizations come and go, Allah's (swt) designation of sacred spaces is eternal. This blessed land was made sacred before the terms Canaanite, Israelite, Roman, Arab, or Palestinian ever existed.

Common Misunderstanding:

Q: But did Sulaiman (Solomon) (as) not build the Temple there?

A: The Islamic understanding is that prophets like Dawud (as) (David) and Sulaiman (as) renovated and maintained the sacred space that Allah (swt) had already established. They did not create its sanctity—they honored and preserved it.

Q: What about archaeological evidence?

A: Archaeological evidence shows us physical structures from different time periods. The spiritual significance of al-Aqsa, however, is based on divine revelation, not human construction dates. The sacredness predates anything archaeologists can find.

3. The Canaanites: The First People

Who were the Canaanites?

The Canaanites are considered to be the original, or indigenous inhabitants of Palestine. But who were they? The Canaanites (al-Kan'āniyyūn in Arabic) are considered descendants of Canaan (Kan'ān), the son of Prophet Nuh (as), who is mentioned in the story of Prophet Nuh's son who refused to board the Ark and drowned (Qur'an 11:43). The Qur'an does not name them explicitly as "Canaanites," but refers to "a mighty/powerful people" (qawm jabbareen) inhabiting the Blessed Land when Musa (as) and Bani Isra'il were commanded to enter it (Surah al-Ma'idah 5:20-26). Later Muslim scholars like Al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir identify these people as descendants of Kan'an (Canaan). The Canaanites settled in Palestine and southern Sham after the Great Flood, becoming one of the earliest established civilizations in the region.

Common Misunderstanding:

Q. But were the Bani Isra`il not the original inhabitants of Palestine?

A. The Zionist narrative tries to claim that Jews are the indigenous people of Palestine and that they are just returning to their ancestral homeland. The

Canaanites were the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine, establishing civilizations there over 5,000 years ago. Cities like Jerusalem (Jebus), Jericho, Hebron were Canaanite settlements. Bani Isra'il emerged as a distinct group much later (around 3,200 years ago).

The Quranic Evidence

When Prophet Ibrahim (as) arrived, he came as a sojourner to a land already inhabited by Canaanites. His descendants, including Ya'qub (as) and his people (Bani Isra'il), eventually migrated to Egypt where they lived for generations. When Prophet Musa (as) led Bani Isra'il out of Egyptian slavery, Allah (swt) commanded them to 'enter' the Holy Land:

"O my people, enter the Holy Land which Allah has assigned to you and do not turn back [from fighting in Allah's cause] and [thus] become losers." (Quran 5:21)

The word "enter" (udkhulu/اُدْخُلُوا) proves they were coming FROM OUTSIDE.

When commanded to enter, Bani Isra'il said:

"O Moses, indeed within it is a people of tyrannical strength, and indeed, we will never enter it until they leave it..." (Quran 5:22)

This clearly shows that the land was already inhabited. The Canaanites (the "powerful people") were already living there. Bani Isra'il were newcomers trying to enter occupied territory.

Learning about the Canaanites helps us understand that Palestine has a very long history, even before it was known by that name, and that people have called this land home for a very long time.

4. Historical Overview: From Canaanites to the Time of Dawud (as) and Sulaiman (as)

What follows is a brief history from the Canaanites to Dawud and Sulaiman (as).

Egyptian Influence (c. 1550 – 1200 BCE)

The region fell under Egyptian control, with Canaanite rulers in cities like Al Quds (Jerusalem) functioning as vassals, maintaining local governance while paying tribute to the pharaohs.

The Bronze-Age Collapse & Arrival of the Philistines (c. 1200 BCE)

Regional upheaval brought the Sea Peoples, one group being the Peleset (Philistines). After failing to conquer Egypt, they settled along the southern coast — Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, Gath — forming Philistia. The word "Palestine" is derived from Philistia.

Early Iron Age Mosaic (c. 1200 – 1000 BCE)

After Egypt's decline, no single empire ruled Palestine. The land was shared by:

- Canaanites (still dominant in many areas)

- Philistines (coastal plain)
- Early Israelites (emerging gradually in the hill country)
- Phoenicians and other groups

Palestine remained diverse and interconnected.

Prophets Dawud & Sulaiman (as) – The United Monarchy (c. 1000 – 922 BCE)

Prophet Dawud (as) unified tribes and established Al Quds (Jerusalem) as his capital (1000-961 BCE). Prophet Sulaiman (as) ruled (961-922 BCE) and rebuilt Masjid al-Aqsa in Al Quds (Jerusalem). Their blessed kingdom lasted about 80 years then split into Israel and Judah. Philistines, Phoenicians, and other groups maintained independent territories throughout this period.

Common Misunderstanding:

Q. But, it is said that Palestine was, "*A land without a people for a people without a land*"?

A. The phrase, "*A land without a people for a people without a land*" was used in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to justify the colonization of Palestine. The slogan's purpose was to erase the existence of the indigenous Palestinian population; present Palestine as available for settlement without moral consequences; justify colonization by claiming no displacement would occur; and create a narrative of "empty land" waiting to be "developed"

The Historical Reality: Palestine has never been empty. From the Canaanites to Philistines, Israelites, Phoenicians, Prophets Dawud & Sulaiman (as), Arabs, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Ottomans, Muslims, Christians, and Jews, the land has always been inhabited.

Palestine in the late 19th/early 20th century was:

- Populated - Approximately 600,000-700,000 people lived in Palestine by 1914;
- Cultivated - Extensive agricultural lands, olive groves, citrus orchards, villages;
- Urban – Had thriving cities like Al Quds, Jaffa, Haifa, Nablus, Gaza, Hebron;
- Diverse – Had Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities living together; and
- Economically active – Had trade, agriculture, crafts, established infrastructure.

The Islamic View: The Qur'an describes it as "al-Arḍ al-Mubārakah" — the Blessed Land (Surah Al-Isra 17:1, Surah Al-Anbiya 21:71). It was home to many prophets, including Ibrahim, Lut, Ya'qub, Yusuf, Musa, Dawud, and Sulaiman (as) — all of whom lived among people.

Palestine was never a land without people — *it has always been a land of many peoples, many prophets, and continuous presence*. Its story is one of divine blessing and human civilization, not emptiness.

Unit 2

1. The central role of Masjid al-Aqsa in the life and mission of the Prophets (as)

Allah (swt) chose the land of Palestine for many of His special Messengers, the anbiya (prophets). Al-Aqsa and the land surrounding it is where the Anbiya (as) were born, migrated to, lived, strove to liberate, received divine books, passed away, and are buried. Their presence made this land even more blessed. Let us learn about some of them:

- I. Prophet Adam (as)
 - Most scholars agree that Adam (as) built Masjid al-Aqsa
 - It is the second house of Allah (swt) on Earth, built only 40 years after Masjid al-Haram
- II. Prophet Nuh (as)
 - The floods that came at the time of Nuh (as) destroyed everything except for whatever was safe on the ark with Nuh (as)
 - One of his sons Sam became the father of the Semites
 - The Semites had subnations and one of them is the Canaanites (people of Canaan) who inhabited the Southern Levant, Jordan, and Palestine (including Masjid al-Aqsa)

Common Misunderstanding:

Q. Who are the Semites?

A. The term "Semite" comes from "Shem", one of the three sons of Prophet Nuh (Noah) (as). "Semitic" primarily refers to a family of languages, known as Semitic languages. They include Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic (spoken by Isa/Jesus) (as), Amharic (Ethiopian language), and Tigrinya.

Both Arabs and Jews are descendants of Prophet Ibrahim (as): Arabs (including Palestinians) descend from Ibrahim (as) through his son Ismail (as), and Israelites (Jews) descend from Ibrahim (as) through his son Ishaq (as) → Ya'qub (as) (also known as Israel from whom Bani Isra'il comes from). Arabs and Jews are cousins - both Semitic peoples from the same prophetic lineage.

Q. Who has the Stronger Claim to being a Semite, Jews or Arabs?

A. Palestinians have the strong claim because:

Continuous presence - Palestinians and their ancestors have lived continuously in Palestine for thousands of years;

Never left - Unlike Jews who were largely dispersed after Roman expulsions (70 CE, 135 CE), Palestinians remained;

Cultural continuity - Maintained connection to the land through agriculture, architecture, place names; Majority population - Were the overwhelming majority until the 20th century.

Jewish claim is unsound because:

Brief historical presence - Ancient Israelite kingdoms lasted about 400 years total (1000-586 BCE for Judah);

Long absence - Most Jews lived outside Palestine for 1,900+ years (70 CE - 1948); Many modern Jews are not from the region - Ashkenazi Jews are European, not West Asian

Q. What does the term "anti-Semitism" refer to?

A. The term "anti-Semitism" was coined in the 1800s specifically to mean prejudice against Jews. However, this creates a logical problem because Palestinians are Semitic people. When they are oppressed, discriminated against, or ethnically cleansed → This is ALSO anti-Semitism (prejudice against Semitic peoples). Yet the term is used exclusively for prejudice against Jews and anyone who criticizes these policies is labeled "anti-Semitic."

III. Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) (as)

- After being persecuted in Babylon and being saved from the raging fire, Allah (swt) delivered him and his nephew Prophet Lut (as) to Palestine where the Canaanites lived. The Qur'an says, "And We delivered him and Lut to the land which We had blessed for the worlds." (Surah Al-Anbiya, 21:71)
- He rebuilt the Kabah in Makkah with his son Ismail (as) and Masjid al-Aqsa with his other son Ishaq (as) and maintained both of Allah's Holy Houses
- He taught people about Tawhid - the Oneness of Allah - in the Holy Land, passed away there and is buried in al-Khalil, south of Masjid al-Aqsa

The Burial Site of Ibrahim (as)

The city where Ibrahim (as) is buried became known as 'Al-Khalil' (The Friend) in honor of Ibrahim's (as) title 'Khalilullah'; The Friend of Allah (swt). He is buried in a cave that Muslims call "Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi", The Sanctuary of Ibrahim. Jews call it "The Cave of the Patriarchs." Buried there are: Prophet Ibrahim (as) and his wife Sarah, Ishaq (as) and his wife Rifqah, and Ya'qub (as) and his wife Liya. Today, the Ibrahimi Mosque stands over this sacred cave, making it one of the holiest sites in Palestine and one of the oldest continuously used places of worship in the world.

The Ibrahimi Masjid Massacre and the Division of the Mosque

On February 25, 1994, an extremist Israeli settler, Baruch Goldstein, massacred twenty nine Palestinian Muslim worshippers during Fajr prayer in Ramadan at the Ibrahimi Mosque. Nineteen more Palestinians were murdered by Israeli forces in protests following the massacre. Following this horrific attack, instead of removing the illegal settlers, the Israeli government divided the mosque, giving 60% to Jewish worship and only 40% to Muslims, despite Muslims being the overwhelming majority.

Israeli forces now permanently control the site, with checkpoints restricting Palestinian access. The victims' community was punished with restrictions, while the perpetrator's community gained more control. The mosque is closed for

Muslims 10 days per year on Jewish holy days when Jews have exclusive access; Muslims only have 1-day exclusive access per year. The massacre and its aftermath represent the ongoing violation of Palestinian rights and the desecration of sacred spaces under occupation.

IV. Prophet Lut (as) (Lot):

- Lut (as) was sent as a Prophet to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which were near the Dead Sea in the region of Palestine
- His people were known for their severe immorality and their rejection of Lut's (as) guidance
- Allah (swt) sent angels to destroy them with a shower of stones of clay, as mentioned in the Holy Qur'an and Prophet Lut's (as) wife died in the destruction as well
- His story teaches us about obeying Allah (swt) and the importance of living a good and chaste life

V. Prophet Yaqub (as) (Jacob) and Prophet Yusuf (as) (Joseph):

- Prophet Ishaq (as), the son of Prophet Ibrahim (as), had a son Yaqub (as)
- Yaqub (as) had 12 sons, his most famous son being Yusuf (as)
- Yusuf (as) was thrown by his brothers into the well, which was in Palestine, he was rescued and ended up in Egypt where he grew up and gained prominence
- His father Yaqub (as) and his 11 brothers joined him in Egypt
- Yaqub (as) returned to Palestine where he is buried
- Yusuf (as) also desired to be buried in the vicinity of Masjid al-Aqsa, which was the request that he made to the king of Egypt before his demise

VI. Prophet Musa (as) (Moses)

- Musa (as) saved the Bani Isra'il from the oppression of the Pharaoh in Egypt and Allah (swt) directed him to cross the sea and proceed towards the Holy Land and Masjid al-Aqsa
- The Bani Isra'il refused to enter Palestine to fight its unjust inhabitants and Allah (swt) banished them for 40 years
- They said, "There is a mighty army inside it, we will not enter until they leave". They tell Musa (as) "Go forth with your Lord and fight, we will wait here." (Sura Al-Maidah, 5:24)
- Allah (swt) then ordered, "This land will now be forbidden to them for forty years and they will remain wandering about on the earth." (Sura Al-Maidah, 5:26)
- Musa (as) accompanied his people and died in the wilderness.
- Musa (as) requested Allah (swt) to be buried close to Bayt al-Maqdis and Allah (swt) granted his prayer

VII. Prophet Dawud (as) (David):

- The Muslims at the time of Dawud (as) had been oppressed and expelled from the Holy Land
- As a young boy, Dawud (as) courageously volunteered to fight Jalut (Goliath) and using his slingshot and stones defeated the powerful Jalut
- Allah (swt) chose Dawud (as) to later be a Prophet and king, revealing to him the Zabur (Psalms)
- The Qur'an says, "So, they defeated them by Allah's will and Dawud killed Goliath. And Allah blessed Dawud with kingship and wisdom and taught him what He willed." (Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:251)
- He cleansed Masjid al-Aqsa and protected its sanctity as the Second House of Allah (swt) on earth

VIII. Prophet Sulaiman (as) (Solomon):

- He was the son of Dawud (as) who liberated Masjid al-Aqsa from the disbelievers
- Allah (swt) made Sulaiman (as) a great Prophet and a wise and just king
- Sulaiman (as) was favoured by Allah (swt) in His kingship and given many miracles including being able to converse with animals (such as the Hoopoe bird and the ants) and command the jinn (creations of fire)
- He rebuilt Masjid al-Aqsa and died whilst the jinn were busy building it
- The Qur'an says, "When We decreed Sulaiman's death, nothing indicated to the 'subjected' jinn that he was dead except the termites eating away his staff. So, when he collapsed, the jinn realized that if they had 'really' known the unseen, they would not have remained in 'such' humiliating servitude." (Surah Saba, 34:14)

IX. Other Prophets:

Many other Prophets, like Prophet Zakariya (as) (Zachariah), his son Prophet Yahya (as) (John the Baptist), and Prophet Isa (as) (Jesus), also lived, preached, and performed miracles in Palestine. Prophet Isa (as) was born in Bethlehem and preached in Palestine.

Unit 3

I. Prophet Muhammad's (saw) Love for Masjid al-Aqsa

Although the Prophet (saw) was born in Makkah and lived his life in the Arabian Peninsula, Masjid al-Aqsa was always close to his heart

During the latter part of his (saw) life, he began to make diplomatic efforts and send military

campaigns in the direction of Masjid al-Aqsa

Around 27 expeditions were sent towards the Holy Land and one of these being the Battle of Mu'ta which was fought only 80 km from Masjid al-Aqsa

After the battle of Mu'ta and the liberation of Makkah and the Holy Ka'bah, the Prophet (saw) marched with his army towards Bayt al-Maqdis to fight the Romans

After reaching Tabuk the army returned to Madinah and the Prophet (saw) prepared another army under the command of Usama (ra) to enter into certain areas of Bayt al-Maqdis on scouting missions

The army began to assemble, and the Prophet (saw) fell ill. He would lose consciousness intermittently, and when he awoke, he would ask, "Did the army of Usama depart? Did the army of Usama depart?"

II. The Sahabahs (Companions) Love for Masjid al-Aqsa

In Madinah, Bayt al-Maqdis became a topic everyone was talking about. The Prophet (saw) constantly spoke to the Sahabah (ra) about it. They (ra) would approach the Prophet (saw) and ask him about Masjid al-Aqsa and express their longing to visit it and strive for the Holy Land

Abu Bakr (ra), the first Caliph, insisted the army of Usama (ra) leave for Bayt al-Maqdis after the Prophet (saw) passed away and personally walked the army out of Madinah, and resisted attempts to stop the army's departure.

After the campaign of Usama (ra), Abu Bakr (ra) immediately began sending armies to Bayt al-Maqdis and Bilad al-Shaam

Abu Bakr (ra) was on his deathbed waiting for news of the liberation of al Aqsa, just as the Prophet (saw) waited on his deathbed for news that the army was departing for Masjid al Aqsa.

Umar (ra), the second Caliph, continued the marches toward Masjid al Aqsa, and they achieved the great victory at Yarmouk.

It was during Umar's (ra) caliphate in 638 CE that Al Quds was liberated

Conclusion

- We have journeyed through thousands of years of Palestine history
- We have learned about the Canaanites, the first people of this land
- We have discovered how many Prophets walked this blessed soil
- We understand why Al Quds and Masjid al-Aqsa are so important
- We pray that Allah (swt) grant peace and prosperity to the Palestinians

Activities: You will complete the Quizzes and Interactive Activities related to this lesson in your journals.

