E. 1) How Habitation of the Holy Land Was Affected by Malaria and Desertification
Old Testament

In the Old Testament the land was described as being a:

“Land flowing with milk and honey”.

Exodus 33.v3

What did this mean?
Palestine was under Turkish (Ottoman) rule from 1517 - 1917

Was Palestine important to the Turkish Empire? How was it treated?
Neglect

The Turks cut down trees. Bedouin sheep and goats were eating anything they could find.

(Jewish farmers clearing stones from barren land)

What was the result?
Above all, malaria was rampant.
Malaria

By 1922 malaria had become endemic.

Some parts had become uninhabitable.

The total population in 1922, including Muslims, Christians, Jews, and other minorities was 757,182

(British Census)

What was the effect on the people living there?
Travellers

“The land in Palestine was lacking in people to till its fertile soil”.


"Palestine is a ruined and desolate land".


"The country is in a considerable degree empty of inhabitants and therefore its greatest need is of a body of population”.

James Finn, British Consul, Report to Foreign Office, 1857
Travellers

“Above all other countries in the world, [Palestine] is now a land of ruins.

“In Judea it is hardly an exaggeration to say that...for miles and miles there is no appearance of present life or habitation”.

Cook’s Tourist Handbook for Palestine and Syria, Thomas Cook & Son, Ludgate Circus, E.C, 1876
Traveller

“A desolation is here that not even imagination can grace with the pomp of life and action. We never saw a human being on the whole route”.

Mark Twain, American author and humorist, ‘Innocents Abroad’, 1887

What was the effect on people who remained?
Soldiers

“During the British occupation of Palestine in 1917, 90 per cent of all British soldiers entering Beisan, part of the Jezreel Valley, came down with malaria within their first ten days in the area, thus attesting to its endemicity”.

Report of ‘Malaria Survey of Beisan’, 1923

“Rosh Hanikra, marking the border between the provinces of Syria and Palestine, was guarded by a small company of Turkish soldiers. The platoon had to be changed every month because everyone got malaria in 10 days”.

‘The villagers (of Samaria Village in the Beisan Area) state not one child out of ten born in the village ever reaches maturity. (Malaria) carries them off before they are 10 years of age.’

Report of ‘Malaria in Samaria Village’, 9/12/1922
Dangerously Malarious Land

“The Syrian absentee landlords in some cases...find cultivation of their lands unremunerative....Malaria decimates the population, or so enfeebles it, as to completely nullify nature’s rich gifts”.


Who were the absentee landlords?
Dangerously Malarious Land

Jews bought land here

(See the black patches denoting Jewish habitation)

Why did they do this?

What else could they do about the malaria?
They attempted to clear the malaria swamps, many dying in the process.
Swamps

They imported and planted Eucalyptus trees, but this did not work either.
Dr Israel Kligler, a Jewish scientist, arrived in the area in 1920.

The British adopted his programme of malaria eradication.

This involved making sure no water remained stagnant, and education of the local populations in malaria control.

Did this work? What was the result?
Immigration

The resulting healthier conditions, and the extra work which the British were generating, attracted Arab immigration from around the Middle East.

"This illegal immigration was not only going on from the Sinai, but also from Transjordan and Syria".

Malaria-Free Land

“Very large areas of what is recognised by all as some of the most fertile land in the country have been reclaimed after centuries of waste, by the antimalaria measures undertaken.

“Many large tracts which until recently meant nothing but death to those venturing into them, have now been reduced into rich and fertile land free from all danger to health”.

‘A Review of the control of Malaria in Palestine 1918-1941’, British Mandate, Dept of Health
Today

Today the area is an oasis of fertile malaria-free land, flowing with milk and honey.

The total population west of the Jordan river in 2014 is over 10 million

What precautions should you take when travelling to a malaria-infested area?
Map from World Malaria Report 2009 of the World Health Organization. Countries certified as malaria-free and/or no ongoing local transmission for over a decade are displayed without any colour.

* China, Indonesia, Philippines, Solomon Islands, Sudan, Vanuatu and Yemen have localized malaria-free projects.