
Lydda

A town in the coastal plain of Israel, 10 miles southeast of Tel Aviv-Jaffa, is first recorded in Thutmose III's list of towns of Canaan (1465 BC).

According to the Bible it was founded by Shemed, a Benjaminite (I Chronicles 8:12). In the Hellenistic period Lydda was outside the boundaries of Judea. In 145 BC. it was detached from Samaria and given by Demetrius II to Jonathan the Hasmonean.

In Maccabean times it was a purely Jewish town, and later Julius Caesar is reported to have restored the privileges of its Jews, taken away by the Greeks. In 43 AD Cassius, the governor of Syria, sold its inhabitants into slavery. The Roman proconsul of Syria, Cestius Gallus, burned Lydda on his way to Jerusalem in 66 AD. Captured by John the Essene at the beginning of the first Jewish war (66--70), it was occupied by Vespasian in 68 AD.

Between the First and Second Jewish Wars the town flourished. It had a large market, raised cattle and ran textile, dyeing and pottery industries. It was a seat of the Sanhedrin, and its scholars included Akiva and Eliezer ben Hyrcanus. It also had a Christian community at the time of Peter (Acts 9:32--35). In the year 200 Septimus Severus, the Roman emperor, established a Roman city there. Still partly Jewish, it took part in the revolt against the emperor Gallus in 351 and was punished when this failed.

By the Byzantine era, the town was predominantly Christian. It was the legendary birthplace of St. George, patron saint of England, and was called Georgiopolis. Captured by the Muslims in 636, it served as the headquarters of the province of Filastiṅn. The Crusaders occupied the town in 1099; there was only one Jewish family there in 1170, according to Benjamin of Tudela. But more Jews settled there again after the conquest by Saladin. During the early Ottoman period there seem to have been no Jews living there, though a small Jewish community was founded in the 19th century. The Jews were forced out by the 1921 Arab riots; by 1944 Lydda had a population of 17,000 Arabs, one-fifth of them Christian. During the War of Independence, Israel forces occupied Lydda in July 1949. The majority of Arabs abandoned the town. At the end of 1990 the population numbered 43,000 including over 4,000 Muslims and Christian Arabs.

Israel's international airport, renamed in honor of David Ben-Gurion, was originally built on the outskirts of Lydda by the British Mandatory government in 1936. It is the home base for Israel's El Al airlines. Almost three million passengers passed through it in 1991. Both the airport and Israel Aircraft Industries are important sources of employment for the local population. Other industries include papermaking, food preserves, electrical appliances, cigarettes and oil refining.

from the Catholic Encyclopedia

A titular see of Palestina Prima in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The town was formerly called Lod, and was founded by Samad of the tribe of Benjamin (I Par., viii, 12).

Some of its inhabitants were taken in captivity to Babylon, and some of them returned later (I Esd., ii, 33; II Esd., vii, 37; xi, 34). About the middle of the second century B.C., the city was given by the kings of Syria to the Machabees, who held it until the coming of Pompey to Judea (I Mach., xi, 34, 57; Josephus, "Antiquities", XIV, x, 6).

Julius Caesar in 48 B.C. gave Lydda to the Jews, but Cassius in 44 sold the inhabitants, who two years later were set at liberty by Antony (Josephus, "Jewish War", I, xi, 2; "Antiquities", XIV xii, 2-5). The city also experienced civil wars and the revolt of the Jews against the Romans in the first century of our era; it was then officially called Diospolis, but the popular name always remained Lod or Lydda.

There were Christians in this locality from the first, and St. Peter, having come to visit them, there cured the paralytic Aeneas (Acts, ix, 32-5).

The earliest known bishop is Aetius, a friend of Arius; the episcopal title of Lydda has existed since that time in the Creek Patriarchate of Jerusalem. In December, 415, a council was held here which absolved

the heretic Pelagius, at the same time condemning his errors. Lydda has been surnamed Georgiopolis in honour of the martyr St. George, who is said to have been a native of this town.

The pilgrim Theodosius is the first to mention (about 530) the tomb of the martyr. A magnificent church erected above this tomb, was rebuilt by the Crusaders, and partly restored in modern times by the Greeks, to whom the sanctuary belongs. On the arrival of the Crusaders in 1099 Lydda became the seat of a Latin see, many of whose titulars are known. At present the city contains 6800 inhabitants, of whom 4800 are Mussulmans, 2000 schismatic Greeks and a few Protestants. The Catholics have a parish of 250 faithful in the neighboring town of Ramléh.
