**The Land of the Israelites and the Philistines**.

What did they fight about?

Surprisingly a visit to the land of Israel begins at a place where the enemies of the Israelites, the Philistines, lived in Biblical times, some 3000 years ago.

The Ben Gurion airport is located here for the same reason that the Philistines lived here, namely it’s flat, ideal for chariots in the past and airplanes in the present.

This part of Israel is known as the “Shefelah” and it lies between the Mts. of  Jerusalem and Judea in the East and the Mediterranean coast in the West.

Both the Israelites and Philistines settled in Israel in the 12th century. The Philistines in the flat “Shefela” the Israelites in the mountainous areas to the East.

This division was the result of a technological gap between the two nations.

The Philistines were a technologically advanced nation who had come from the Greek islands with the knowledge of how to make iron, a hard metal necessary for the manufacture of chariots.

The Israelites, on the other hand were somewhat “retarded” technologically and only knew how to make bronze, a soft metal, good for making short daggers and arrowheads but not for making chariots, swords or spears.

They weren’t any match for Philistine chariots. The Philistines conquered the flat “Shefela” and the Israelites were left in control of the mountain areas, where chariots were useless.

Only in the reigns of David and Solomon did they learn how to make iron and conquered the “Shefela”.

All the battles mentioned in the Bible, from the time of the Judges to the days of king Solomon were fought over these two areas:

The Philistines wanted to conquer the mountains because that would give them strategic control over the entire land: the Jordan valley to the East and the Shefela to the West.

The Israelites wanted to conquer the “Shefela” for its economic advantages; the main international highway, the “Via Maris”(Way of the Sea) connecting Egypt with Babylon, passed through here, the harbors were here; Jaffa(Joppa) Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza and others.

The first book of Samuel is replete with these mammoth struggles; David and Goliath, The Battle of Aphek, where the Ark of the L-rd was taken, and the two sons of Eli were killed, David’s battles with the Philistines in the Valley of Rephaim and one of the great Philistine victories, the Battle of Bet Shean, where Saul took his own life.

By the time Solomon came to the throne of Israel, however, the game was over for the Philistines, because the Israelites had caught up to them, technologically; they had mastered the use of the chariot and the horse.

The Philistines left the Land of Canaan. Only a few traces of their culture have been found; Tel Kasile, in Tel Aviv, Ashdod, Ashkelon and now even more at the **recent**excavations at Ekron, Kibbutz Revadim.