

THE BATTLE FOR JERUSALEM

Tom's Perspectives

by Thomas Ice

Why is the world so interested and focused upon Jerusalem? There are a lot of different reasons at the moment. There are social, political, economic, and let's not forget the religious importance. Whatever the individual reasons, Jerusalem is constantly in the news and at the center of the world's attention.

I am writing this article while on a trip to an Arab country when the recent riots over the Temple Mount erupted. Every day in the local Arab-English newspaper, Israel is blamed for the events in what they always call "occupied Jerusalem." Daily, Ariel Sharon is vilified for having had the audacity to have gone upon the Temple Mount. This is said to be provocative to the Arab and Muslim world. This, in spite of the fact that the Temple Mount is the most holy place for Jews. Apparently, most of the world thinks that it is unfair for Jews to have access to their own holy site in their own homeland. Well, such are the dynamics of the world in which we currently live.

JERUSALEM: THE GLOBAL EPICENTER

During the coming seven-year Tribulation, Scripture teaches us that Jerusalem will be the center of global attention. Dr. LaHaye and I believe that the Battle of Gog and MaGog will take place before the Tribulation (Ezek. 38—39). This battle is an attack on the Jewish Jerusalem which is said by Scripture to be at the center of the earth (Ezek. 5:5). In the middle of the tribulation, the Antichrist defiles a rebuilt Jewish Temple in the city of Jerusalem by setting up his own image in the Holy Place. The Second Coming of Christ is preceded by the Campaign of Armageddon, which revolves around all the armies of the world coming up against Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be the focus of Satan and his Antichrist, because it is God's designated city upon which He has chosen to place His name (2 Chron. 6:6).

No wonder the Prophet Zechariah declares that the LORD is "going to make Jerusalem a cup that causes reeling to all the peoples around; . . . and it will come about in that day that I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it will be severely injured. And all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it. (Zech. 12:2-3). The Lord will so construct history that the world will view Jewish Jerusalem as the source of all the world's problems. So much so, that they will attack it for the purpose of wiping out the Jews. Charles Feinberg notes that the Lord "sovereignly draws the nations—infected through the centuries with the virus of hatred for Israel, and desirous of dealing them a fatal death-blow—to the city of the coming King."¹ In fact, the Hebrew text in 12:3 has the sense of "in cutting he will be cut," where it says "all who lift it will be severely injured." Our Lord is leading the nations into His trap for the purpose of a global judgment that will occur at His Return. "The defeat of the Armageddon armies is thus likened to a man who drinks more than he can hold, or tries to move a weight heavier than he can lift. Those who attack Jerusalem will do so to their own ruin."²

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The beginning of this latest incident in Jerusalem and upon the Temple Mount is said to be a provocation by Ariel Sharon's visit upon the holy site in an effort to remind everyone that Israel is still sovereign over the site. However, the One who is sovereign over the entire universe is the ultimate source of these recent events. God is setting the stage for the events of the Tribulation when Jerusalem will become that "rock that won't roll." We see daily examples of our Lord's posturing if we follow international news.

While I was recently in an Arab country, the English language paper carried a front page story entitled, "Saddam says can destroy Zionism." The article said that Saddam Hussein "could destroy Israel if it was given access to a border strip with the Jewish state." "We must put an end to Zionism and Iraq is capable of putting an end to it on its own," Saddam said in a meeting with university academics." "Let them (Arab states) give us a small portion of territory and support us from a distance, they will see how we can put an end to Zionism in a very short period of time," he boasted." Saddam further boasted, "The great people of Iraq are ready to destroy Zionism right now." Saddam, if your listening, I think God will have a thing or two to say about the destiny of His people that will certainly conflict with your intentions.

This same Arab newspaper, a few days later, carried the synopsis of a call by the imam and khateeb of the Grand Mosque in Mecca saying "that Jews were the archenemies of Islam and Muslims and urged the faithful to launch Jihad against the enemies of God and Islam." Quoting this high ranking imam as saying that the Jews "make use of every chance to clash with Muslims to shed their blood and violate their honor and destroy their properties." He informed his listeners that "It's the duty of every Muslim to do whatever possible and launch a Jihad against the enemies of Allah and Islam seeking the reward of Allah and not for any other purpose and to keep the word of God atop." I thought Israel was already under an Islamic Jihad from these guys.

While in this Arab country, I occasionally watched a channel in Arabic that was nothing but seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day of anti-Semitic propaganda. Even though I could not understand the words, it was easily clear that its focus was on Jerusalem. They were inciting a call for all Arab Muslims to rise up against the Jews in Jerusalem. Even though a number of battles remain for Jerusalem (cf. Zech. 12—14) until the return of Jesus the Messiah, we already see a full-scale conflict underway in our own day. The stage is being set.

ARIEL SHARON

The Muslim world and most in the West blame the current bloodshed in Israel on Likud leader Ariel Sharon, whom I frankly think is a real national hero and one of Israel's greatest generals. Sharon, unlike current Prime Minister Ehud Barak, loves Jerusalem and the land of Israel, and is interested in preserving it. Yet, when one examines the events that actually led up to this current round of violence, it was clearly a provocation that lies at the hands of Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority. Note the following:

- Ariel Sharon had permission from Barak and Palestinian officials, including the Muslim Wakf of the Temple Mount, to go upon the single most holy place for the Jews (it is only the third most holy site for Muslims).
- Sharon did not want any police protection. It was both the Israeli and Arab police that insisted on accompanying him upon the Temple Mount. This is said to be a key issue, from the Arab perspective, that supposed justification for the riots.
- Sharon's Temple Mount journey could not have been the source of a spontaneous Arab reaction since it was a full day before the Palestinian response began.
- The riots were the clear orchestration by Arafat and the Palestinian Authority since they came only after Palestinian television replayed Sharon's Temple Mount visit, over and over many times.
- Arafat and other key Palestinian leaders made numerous calls throughout the Palestinian media for an intafada uprising against the Jews. The Palestinians eventually complied with their request.
- The Muslim Imam's sermon upon the Temple Mount the day after Sharon's visit was the specific spark that led to the explosion. It was after his inflammatory appeal that the Arabs stormed out of the Al Aqsa Mosque and proceeded to cast stones down upon the Jewish worshippers praying 70 feet below at the Western Wall.

In spite of propaganda in the Muslim and Western media, Israel did not provoke this current round of violence. It was clearly planned and orchestrated by the Arabs, who had been preparing for just such an incident for weeks in preparation for their November 15th unilateral announcement of a new Palestinian state. Many Western nations were not in favor of such a unilateral declaration. It appears that Arafat and his aides believe that they can gain Western sympathy by having our newscasts filled with daily scenes of the bad Israelis attempting to control the rock-throwing Arab mob. The media got just what they wanted when the unfortunate incident of the twelve-year old boy named Mohammad was killed in the Arab, Israeli crossfire while the television cameras were rolling. These pictures have dominated the media throughout the world, casting Israel in a bad light. All these events continue to cause most citizen of the world to see Jerusalem as a burdensome stone. But, beware world, the Lord says that "all who lift it will be severely injured" (Zech. 12:3).

CONCLUSION

The stage is being set for events of the Tribulation when Israel will be back in her land in unbelief, in control of Jerusalem, just as the situation exists today. All that is lacking is for the Jewish Temple to be rebuilt. However, that does not need to be ready and in place until just before the middle of the seven-year Tribulation. Perhaps this current sequence of events will lead to the Russian, Muslim invasion prophesied in

Ezekiel 38—39. Certainly the Arab world believes that they have been wronged. Yet, just such an attack will not lead to a liberation of so-called “inhabited Jerusalem,” as the Arabs call it, instead, it will lead to a complete destruction of the invasion force that comes up against Jerusalem. Perhaps, just such a power vacuum will be what is needed in order for Israel to rebuild her Third Temple that will be the scene of many Tribulation events. These are interesting times in which we live.

No new development is needed for the next event on God’s prophetic calendar to take place and that is Christ’s rapture of the church. It must take place before the seven-year Tribulation and it could happen at any moment. Are you ready? Do you know Christ as your Savior? That is the only way that one can prepare himself for this important event. In the mean time, church age believers are watching and waiting for our Lord, while keeping an eye on developments in the holy land. There can be no doubt that our God is in control of history and has told us in advance through Bible prophecy what we can expect. What can we expect? We can expect increasing hostility to revolve around Jerusalem. It will not be until the second coming of Christ to planet earth that Jerusalem will realize her destiny as a city of peace and light to all the nations. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

¹ Charles Feinberg, “Zechariah” in Charles Pfeiffer and Everett Harrison, editors, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), p. 910.

² F. Duane Lindsey, “Zechariah” in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), p. 1566.