

2018 Winter Newsletter

Detroit Bible Students Ecclesia

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JERUSALEM

"And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it."

Zechariah 12:3

On December 6, 2017, President Donald Trump publicly recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital and stated that the American Embassy will be moved to Jerusalem, finally implementing the Jerusalem Embassy Act, passed in 1995 during the presidency of Bill Clinton, which directed that the US embassy be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, "subject to conditions." This proviso, however, allowed subsequent presidents to delay implementing the move in an attempt to broker peace in the Middle East. As a result, Mahoud Abbas, the leader of the Palestinians, in a fiery speech, threatened the end of the "peace process," and a storm of criticism from many nations provoked a resolution in the United Nations General Assembly condemning the US. The status of Jerusalem is indeed a "burdensome stone" in Middle East politics for all nations today.

Jerusalem figures in the religious observances of Christians, Arabs and Jews. Keeping free access to the holy places of all faiths has been of great concern. Under the present Jewish administration, the city is open to all, Christian and Muslim alike. Christians and Jews have not always fared so well under Muslim rule.

For the Jews, Jerusalem is fundamentally identified with the worship of God and with their identity as a people. The name of Jerusalem is found 814 times in 767 verses of the Bible, and at every Passover Seder for the 19 centuries of their diaspora, Jews

all over the world have prayed, "Next year in Jerusalem!" Jerusalem was their ancient capital and the site of their Temple. For the Jews, Jerusalem is their holiest city.

Jerusalem is Islam's third holiest city behind Mecca and Medina. According to the Qur'an, the Prophet Mohammed made a night journey from the Holy Masjid in Mecca, overland to Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem from which he ascended into heaven. Apart from this event, no significant Arab history can be shown to center around Jerusalem. There is an almost total absence in Islamic literature of references to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is not mentioned in the Qur'an. It was never an Arab capital. It was not even mentioned in the original PLO charter written in 1964.

The first mention of Jerusalem in the Hebrew scriptures is in Joshua 10:1, but the Hebrew people's connection with Jerusalem may go back much farther even than after the exodus, all the way to Abraham and Melchizedek. The earliest extra-biblical Hebrew writing regarding Jerusalem, discovered in 1961, is dated to the sixth or seventh century BC. The inscription states: "I am Yahweh thy God, I will accept the cities of Judah and I will redeem Jerusalem."

An interpretive rendering (Apocyphon) of Genesis found on the Dead Sea Scrolls, equates Jerusalem with "Salem," the

kingdom of Melchizedek to whom Abraham gave tithes in Genesis 14:18-20. According to *McClintock and Strong's Biblical Encyclopedia*, Josephus, an historian contemporary with the time

of Jesus, and the Jewish Targums (spoken paraphrases or explanations of scriptures), place Salem in Abraham's day in the same area that later became Jebus and then Jerusalem (Judges 19:10). This is supported by Psalm 76:1,2, in which Salem is equated with Jerusalem. "In

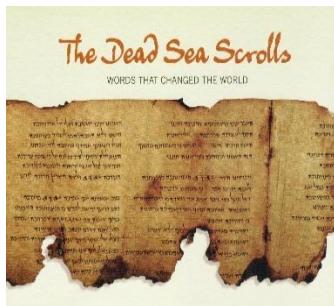
Judah is God known: his name is great in Israel. In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion."

Israel's claim to Jerusalem is based upon centuries of past sovereignty in the city's history and Jewish descent from the Kingdom of Judah, of which Jerusalem was the capital. In contrast, Palestinian nationalists claim the right to the city based on modern Palestinians' descent from many diverse peoples who have lived in the region. Before 1948, Arabs living in the area were identified with the surrounding nations; Egyptians, Turks, Jordanians or Syrians. There has never been an autonomous "Palestinian" nation. The demand for a Palestinian state is a new phenomenon.

In the time of Israel's first king, Saul, Jerusalem was a Jebusite city. David, Israel's second king, conquered the Jebusites (1 Chronicles 11) and established Jerusalem as his capital. David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and thought to build a temple to house it (1 Chronicles 17:1). God told David to set up an altar on Mount Moriah, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, but his son, Solomon, would build the Temple. David bought Ornan's threshing floor for six hundred shekels of gold (1 Chronicles 21:18-26), and Solomon built the first Temple on Mount Moriah, known today as the Temple Mount, where Abraham had symbolically sacrificed his son Isaac (Genesis 22:1-17). The Ark of the Covenant was placed in the Temple and, from then on, the Temple became the focus of Jewish worship.

After Solomon's death, the ten northern tribes revolted against Judah (2 Chronicles 10) and moved their capital to Samaria, but the kings of Judah, including Benjamin, continued to recognize Jerusalem as their capital. When Assyria conquered the Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC, Jerusalem was swelled by a great influx of refugees from the northern kingdom. The First Temple period ended when the Babylonians conquered Judah and Jerusalem, took the Jews captive to Babylon, and laid waste to Solomon's Temple.

After his conquest of Babylon, the Persian King Cyrus the Great, offered the Jews held captive there the opportunity to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their Temple (Ezra 1:1-7) Seventy years after the destruction of the First Temple, the Second Temple was completed amid the hostility of neighboring peoples who harassed the workers until a decree from Darius, the king, stopped their incursions. (Ezra 6:7-12) In about 445 BC King Artaxerxes of



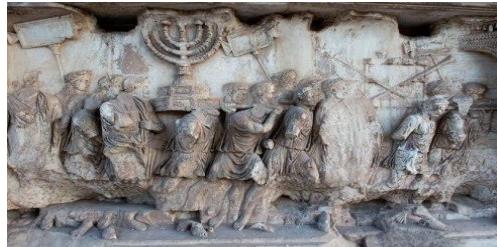
Persia issued a decree allowing the city and its walls to be rebuilt. This account is in the book of Nehemiah. Jerusalem then resumed its role as Israel's capital and the center of Jewish worship.

Although the claim has been made that the Jews have no history in Jerusalem, archeological evidence is rife identifying the Jews as Jerusalem's long-time inhabitants. Many Jewish tombs from the Second temple period have been discovered. One such tomb bears an Aramaic inscription in Paleo-Hebrew script which reads, "Abba, son of the priest Eleazar, son of Aaron the high (priest)..born in Jerusalem, and went into exile into Babylonia..."

When Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire, Jerusalem and Judea came under Macedonian control and then became part of Ptolemy I's Egyptian Empire after Alexander's death. In 63 BC Roman general Pompey the Great captured Jerusalem and brought Judea under the influence of the Roman Republic. It was during this period that Jesus lived and died in Jerusalem. Tiberias Caesar is identified in Luke 3:1 as being in his fifteenth year as emperor when Jesus came to John to be baptized (AD 29). Three and a half years later, Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem.



In AD 70, the Second Temple was destroyed, and the city of Jerusalem leveled by the Romans. Contemporary Jewish historian Josephus wrote that the city "was so thoroughly razed to the ground by those that demolished it to its foundations, that nothing was left that could ever persuade visitors that it had once been a place of habitation." (Josephus, *Jewish War* 7:1:1) After a final challenge to Roman rule by the Bar Kokhba revolt in 132-135 AD was put down, Emperor Hadrian consolidated the area and renamed it Syria Palaestina, replacing the name of Judea. Jerusalem was rebuilt in the style of a Roman town and renamed Aelia Capitolina. Jews were prohibited from entering the city on pain of death.



Hadrian's Arch— Roman army carrying away Temple furnishings

Jerusalem has been destroyed at least twice, besieged 23 times, attacked 52 times, and captured and recaptured 44 times. In the 5th century, Jerusalem shifted from Byzantine to Persian rule and then back again. Arab armies conquered Jerusalem in 638 and in the early days of Islam the city was called, Madinat bayt al-Maqdis (City of the Temple).

The succeeding centuries saw Arabs, Turks, and European Crusaders jockeying for control of Jerusalem. In 1187 the city was

wrested from the Crusaders by Saladin who permitted Jews and Muslims to return and settle in the city. In 1244 Jerusalem was sacked by the Tatars who drove out the Jews. From 1517 to 1917, the Ottoman Turks controlled the region. In 1878 Jews were permitted to own land in Palestine for the first time since AD 70. Petah Tikvah (Door of Hope) was their first settlement. When the Ottomans came into the First World War on the wrong side, the League of Nations awarded Palestine to the British.

Shaykh Prof. Abdul Hadi Palazzi, the Secretary General of the Italian Muslim Assembly, Kalifah for Europe of the Qadiri Sufi Order asserts that Muslim antagonism toward the Jews is not religious, but political in origin. He says Haj Amin Hussein, the Multi of Jerusalem and uncle of Yasser Arafat, was the architect of the modern belligerence toward the Jews.

Shaykh Palazzi says, "Both the Bible and the Qur'an state quite clearly that the right of the Israelites to the Land of Israel does not depend on conquest and colonization but flows from the will of Almighty God Himself." He quotes:

"And [remember] when Moses said to his people: 'O my people, call in remembrance the favour of God unto you, when he produced prophets among you, made you kings, and gave to you what He had not given to any other among the peoples. O my people, enter the Holy Land which God has assigned unto you, and turn not back ignominiously, for then will ye be overthrown, to your own ruin.'" [Qur'an 5:20-21]

Professor Palazzi continues, "Moreover, the Holy Qur'an explicitly refers to the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel before the Last Judgment - where it says:

"And thereafter We [Allah] said to the Children of Israel: 'Dwell securely in the Promised Land. And when the last warning will come to pass, we will gather you together in a mingled crowd.'" [Qur'an 17:104]

Why is Jerusalem important to us as Christians? It is important not only because it is the site of Jesus' life and death, but especially because **God has named it the capital of Messiah's Kingdom**. The fact that the Jews are now in possession of Jerusalem is also an evidence that God's promises are sure of fulfillment and his kingdom is near (Matthew 24:32,33).

"The days come...that it shall no more be said, The LORD liveth that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers...I will cause them to know mine hand and my might; and they shall know that my name is The LORD" (Jeremiah 16:14-21).

"I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your savior...Have no fear, for I am with thee: I will bring ... bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth." (Isaiah 43:3-6)

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain [kingdom] of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations

shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: **for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem**. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." (Isaiah 2:2-4)

"The LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem." (Zechariah 2:12)

"For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice forever in that which I create: for, behold, **I create Jerusalem a rejoicing**, ... and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying..... And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them....They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble;.... And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, ...They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain [kingdom], saith the LORD." (Isaiah 65:17-25)

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; And I John saw **the holy city, new Jerusalem**, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." (Revelation 21:1-4)

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Psalm 122:6

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