

Jerusalem

Rob Yule, October 1995

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25 September 1995 was Rosh Hashana, the beginning of year 5756 in the Jewish calendar. During this year the Jewish nation, in Israel and throughout the diaspora, is celebrating the 3000th anniversary of Jerusalem. The commemoration is dated from just before 1000 BC, when King David captured the city from the Jebusites, as described in 2 Samuel 5 and 1 Chronicles 11, making it the capital of his united monarchy.

David's Capital

David, at the age of thirty, had consolidated his kingship after the death of King Saul. He reigned initially for nearly seven years at Hebron, then a further thirty three years after capturing Jerusalem. The city, known at the time as Jebus, occupied a strategic location on the commanding ridge of central hill country, about 750 metres (2,500 feet) above sea level, between Philistine territory on the coastal plain in the west and the Dead Sea rift valley on the east. Jebus was the one major hostile fortress remaining after David's earlier campaigns, separating the southern and northern areas of Israelite territory.

The capture of Jebus was one of the most imaginative of David's military exploits. The Jebusites had regarded it as so impregnable that they boasted that even the blind and lame could defend it. David's troops attacked the city by climbing up the water shaft, so gaining surprise access within its walls. Its capture made it royal property by right of conquest, and enabled David to unify the southern and northern tribes in a united kingdom.

Exile and Return

The Hebrew name *Yerushalayim* means 'City of Peace.' Yet, as Barbara Tuchman says in *Bible and Sword*, 'More blood has been shed for Jerusalem than any other spot on earth.' It has been conquered thirty seven times in its 3000 year history.

Jerusalem was first conquered by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar II in 586 BC, ending what is known by Jews as the First Temple period. As described in 2 Kings 25, the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem after an abortive revolt by Judah's last king, Zedekiah. Solomon's Temple was destroyed, the Jews exiled to Babylon, and the southern kingdom of Judah ended. Exile had a profound impact on Jewish consciousness, imparting a world outlook to their faith but at the same time intensifying their longings for their homeland and Jerusalem, as illustrated by the musician who wrote Psalm 137:

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
when we remembered Zion....
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
may my right hand forget its skill.

Jerusalem and the Jews

*'Jerusalem is not divine,
her life depends on our presence.
Alone she is desolate and silent,
with Israel she is a witness, a proclamation.
Alone she is a widow,
with Israel she is a bride.
Zion is not a symbol but a home,
and the land is not an allegory but a possession,
a commitment of destiny.*

*How can anyone expect us to betray our pledge:
"If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither."*

Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel,
in *An Echo of Eternity*

Cyrus the Great, ruler of the first 'world state' in history, the Medo-Persian Empire which stretched from the Aegean Sea to the River Indus, conquered Babylon in 539, and in the following year authorized the first return of Jews to Jerusalem, under the leadership of Zerubbabel. In 537 Zerubbabel began construction of the Second Temple, a small structure compared to that of Solomon, completing it in 515.

Greeks and Romans

In the inter-testamental period Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Seleucid king of Syria, forcibly attempted to impose Hellenistic Greek culture and religious syncretism on the Jews. In 167 BC he forbade circumcision, entered the Jerusalem temple, offered sacrifices to the pagan deity Zeus, and crucified Jews who attempted to resist. This provoked the revolt of Judas Maccabeus, commemorated in Handel's famous oratorio, which led to the reestablishment of Jewish independence for one hundred years. Antiochus's profaning of the temple is referred to in the Bible as the 'abomination that causes desolation' or 'desolating sacrilege' (Daniel 9:27, Mark 13:14), and led him to being viewed in later tradition as an archetype of Antichrist. During the reign of Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BC) the Israelite nation reached its greatest extent, from the Mediterranean coast to eastern Jordan - a greater territory than under King Solomon.

Maccabean rule ended in 63 BC, when the Roman general Pompey conquered Jerusalem. Entering the Holy of Holies in the temple, Pompey was surprised to find it empty, devoid of idolatrous religious objects. The Romans ruled Palestine through Jewish puppet kings, the greatest of whom was Herod the Great, who ruled from 37 BC to AD 4 and was king at the time of Jesus' birth. In 19 BC Herod began a massive rebuilding of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. This was not completed until AD 64, only six years before its destruction by the Romans, as prophesied by Jesus in his eschatological discourse in Mark 13.

The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, by the Roman general Titus, after a bitter siege, is described by the Jewish historian Josephus in *The Jewish War*. Titus placed Roman emblems in the temple before his troops set fire to it and then tore it apart stone by stone to get at the gold that had melted into crevices in the rock, thus fulfilling to the letter Jesus' prophecy that 'Not one stone here will be left on another' (Mark 13:2). The Romans killed 600,000 people in Judea, crucified 10,000 Jews, and took 90,000 Jews captive to Rome as slaves. This shattering event is portrayed on a famous frieze on the triumphal Arch of Titus in Rome, which shows the Hebrew slaves bearing the seven branched candelabrum and other utensils from the temple. A replica of it comprises the entrance portal to the Nahum Goldman Museum of the Jewish Diaspora in Tel Aviv, a poignant introduction to this magnificent exhibition which covers the ensuing nineteen centuries of Jewish dispersion among the nations of the world.

Jerusalem was destroyed a second time by the Romans in AD 134, provoked by the Jewish Revolt led by Simeon Bar Kochba, who had been declared Messiah by Rabbi Akiva in 132. 580,000 Jews were killed when the Romans suppressed this revolt. Among those who died were Rabbi Akiva himself, and Yehuda, leader of the Christian community in Jerusalem (effectively ending Jewish Christianity till the rise of Messianic Judaism in

modern times, and beginning the fateful separation of Gentile Christianity from its Jewish roots). In 136 the Emperor Hadrian sought to obliterate all surviving traces of Jewish influence. He renamed Judea 'Syria Palaestina' (the name Palestine has had an anti-Jewish connotation from the first) and refounded Jerusalem as a pagan city which he renamed 'Aelia Capitolina'. Hadrian built a temple to Jupiter on the site of the former temple, and forbade Jewish observances such as circumcision, the Sabbath, and the annual festivals.

Christians and Arabs

Over the next few centuries Christianity not only lost its Jewish character but began to develop anti-Semitic tendencies. In 629 Jerusalem was captured by the Byzantine Christian Emperor Heraclius, who massacred its Jewish inhabitants and renewed earlier edicts of Hadrian and Constantine banning Jews from the city. In 632 he decreed the forced baptism of Jews throughout the Byzantine Empire, the first of many such unhappy episodes in the Middle Ages which have given Jews a perverted understanding of Jesus and the Gospel.

The seventh century saw the meteoric rise and westward expansion of Islam. Jerusalem was captured from the Byzantines in 638 by Muslim Arabs under the leadership of Caliph Omar. His successor, Caliph Omar II, was the first to introduce, in 717, discriminatory regulations against *dhimmi* (non-Muslim subjects), including the wearing of special clothing. This was the origin of the notorious badge of shame, enforced on Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe in 1939-45.

The eleventh to thirteenth centuries were the period of the Crusades, a series of military expeditions undertaken by Christian western Europe to rescue the Holy Land from the Saracens. The First Crusade, led by Godfrey of Bouillon, sacked Jerusalem in 1099, slaughtering Muslims in the al-Aqsa Mosque and burning Jews in the main synagogue. It resulted in the establishment of four Crusader states in Palestine. Many of the Crusader castles are still visible today, occupying dominant locations throughout the country. Between 1095 and 1272 there were eight Crusades, most aimed at liberating the Holy Land. In 1187, Saladin, sultan of Egypt, defeated a Crusader army at Hattin, near Tiberias, recapturing Jerusalem for the Arabs and bringing to an end the Crusader occupation of Jerusalem. Saladin is the hero of President Assad of Syria, Israel's most wily and implacable present-day enemy.

In 1517, contemporary with the beginning of Luther's Reformation in the west, the Ottoman Turks conquered Jerusalem. The Ottoman Empire reached its greatest extent under Emperor Suleiman the Magnificent in the mid sixteenth century, who took Turkish power into southern and central Europe, with consequences still felt today in the smouldering hostilities of the former Yugoslavia. In 1537-41 Suleiman rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, which surround the Old City to this day.

Modern Times

Towards the end of the First World War, in 1917, the British army under General Allenby liberated Jerusalem and Palestine from Turks, the only time in its three thousand year history that Jerusalem was captured without a shot being fired. Allenby, a Bible-believing Christian, dismounted his horse and entered Jerusalem on foot, anxious to distinguish his entry from that of Jesus nineteen centuries earlier. The establishment of the British League of Nations Mandate over Palestine (1920-48) brought to an end 401 years of Ottoman Turkish misrule and neglect. Of interest to New Zealanders is that ANZAC troops were involved in this campaign: those who died in action are buried in the Commonwealth Cemetery on Mount Scopus.

After the Second World War, like Berlin at the same time, Jerusalem became a divided city. Early in 1948, following the Arab siege of Jerusalem that preceded the War of Independence, east Jerusalem, the Old City, was overrun by the Jordanian Arab Legion, leading to a nineteen year division of the city. The Jewish Quarter was destroyed, along with fifty eight of its historic synagogues (some were used as latrines); the ancient Jewish cemetery on the slopes of Mount of Olives was desecrated, its tombstones used as paving slabs; and Jews were prevented from worshipping at the Western Wall.

Wednesday June 7, 1967, was an unforgettable day in Jewish history. On the first day of the famous Six Day War Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol appealed to King Hussein not enter hostilities, promising that Jordan would be able to retain control over Jerusalem and the 'West Bank' if it remained neutral in the conflict. Misled by Egyptian propaganda predicting a rapid and overwhelming Arab victory over Israel, Hussein ignored this appeal and sent the Arab Legion across the armistice lines into west Jerusalem. In the resultant bitter fighting (which for Jerusalem was in fact a three day war) an Israeli counter-attack recaptured the Old City of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount from the Jordanians.

Emotional scenes took place at the Western Wall as Chief Rabbi Goren blew the shofar and Israeli soldiers wept as they fingered its ancient stones. Down in Al Arish Naomi Shemer, Israel's leading folk singer, was performing

for the troops when news of the event came through. She immediately composed an additional verse for her recent song, *Yerushalayim Chel Zahav*:

*We have come back to the deep wells
To the marketplace again.
The trumpet sounds on the mount of the temple
In the Old City.
In the caverns of the cliff
Glitter a thousand suns.*

Taken up exultantly by the whole population, 'Jerusalem the Golden' instantly became the anthem of the Six Day War. United Jerusalem was again capital of a sovereign Jewish state for first time since the Maccabees twenty two centuries earlier.

Conflict Over Jerusalem

With its long history of conquest and contempt, it is little wonder that we are exhorted in the Bible to 'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem' (Psalm 122:6). David Pawson sums up Jerusalem as a place 'with too much history and too little geography.' Reviewing its tragic history we might wonder why this postage-stamp sized piece of territory (Israel is about size of Northland, New Zealand, the Old City of Jerusalem about the size of the Massey University campus in Palmerston North) should evoke such antagonisms. The basic reason, I believe, is spiritual. According to the prophecies of Zechariah 12 and 14, Jerusalem - particularly east Jerusalem, where the Mount of Olives is - will be a focus of increasing international conflict, because it is the venue for Jesus' second coming to reign over all the earth.

If we ask, with the Psalmist, 'Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain?' (Psalm 2:1), the answer is, 'I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill' (Psalm 2:6). The basic root of the political and international conflict over Jerusalem is eschatological, relating to the future fulfilment of God's purposes for this earth. God has set his king on Zion. He has determined that his king, Jesus, will one day reign over the earth from his appointed City of Peace, Jerusalem, which the Psalmist therefore calls 'the city of the Great King' (Psalm 48:2). This glorious future of Jerusalem is the subject of my next article.

City with a Glorious Future

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The present status of Jerusalem is becoming a matter of great controversy. The European Union and many other nations are boycotting the 'Jerusalem 3000' commemoration, and even as the celebrations take place, international pressure is mounting for east Jerusalem to be handed over to the Arabs to become the capital of a Palestinian state. We seem to be entering the situation predicted by the biblical prophet Zechariah, who long ago foretold that Jerusalem would one day become a focus of international conflict.

Focus of Conflict

For nearly two millennia Zechariah's prophecies seemed wide of the mark. Only a century ago Jerusalem was a depopulated market town in a provincial backwater of the crumbling Ottoman Empire, which Austrian Foreign Minister Metternich dubbed 'the sick man of Europe.' Nobody could have foreseen that it would one day be centre stage in world politics and a flashpoint of international conflict involving 'all the nations', as Zechariah foretold in two remarkable prophetic images.

Zechariah's first picture is of a *Drugged Cup*. The Lord says, 'I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling' (Zechariah 12:2). The image is of a cup that has been laced with a stupefying drug, that causes those who drink it to lose their senses and do things contrary to their normal judgement. So, in their dealings with Jerusalem, surrounding nations forsake normal standards of international relations and behave in an obsessive, irrational, and unbalanced manner.

Zechariah's second image is of a *Heavy Stone*. 'On that day...I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves' (Zechariah 12:3). This picture is of a heavy weight that causes those who try to pick it up to rupture themselves and do themselves injury. Thus, in attempting to resolve the issue of Jerusalem's international status, nations will take on something too big for themselves and in the process damage their own interests, doing themselves serious or perhaps irreparable harm.

There are two controversial issues which affect the present status of Jerusalem:

Whose Capital?

For Jews, the question whose capital Jerusalem is is abundantly clear. Jerusalem is the capital of the modern sovereign state of Israel, just as it was the capital of the Davidic and Maccabean kingdoms long ago. Jerusalem has been the focus of their prayers and dreams throughout their long years of exile. 'Next year in Jerusalem' has been the conclusion of their annual Passover *seder* for centuries. Every day a devout Jew prays in the *Amidah* or Jewish daily prayer book the prayer, 'May our eyes behold Thy return in mercy to Zion.'

Jerusalem has always held a place of central importance for Jews. Historically the city has prospered when ruled or administered by Jews, and invariably languished when ruled by other nations. It was quite consistent with the age-long Jewish love for Jerusalem that it was made their capital shortly after Israel gained independence in 1948, and that the Jerusalem Law of 1980 should declare Jerusalem to be Israel's 'eternal and undivided capital' - a claim not merely political, but based on the promises to David of an eternal kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12-16). Most of the world's states responded to this decree by withdrawing their embassies from Jerusalem and moving them to Tel Aviv. It was this action which led prophetic Christian leaders like Jan Willem van der Hoeven and Johann

Luckhoff to establish the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem, to express worldwide grassroots evangelical Christian support for Israel and the Jewish people.

Jerusalem has no comparable significance for Arabs or the Moslem world. Jerusalem is mentioned 657 times in the Old Testament, and a further 154 times in the New Testament, but Al Quds, its Arabic name, does not occur even a single time in the Koran. For Palestinian Arabs, as well as Moslems elsewhere, the claim that Jerusalem should be the capital of a sovereign Palestinian state is a very recent innovation. Even in the heyday of Arab sovereignty in the Middle East, when the Moslem empire stretched from Iraq in the east to Spain and Morocco in the west, its capital was always Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo or Istanbul - never Jerusalem. Only thirty years ago east Jerusalem was controlled by the Jordanians, but King Hussein showed a haughty disregard for the city, which he let fall into decay.

When I travelled by Bahraini Air Line from Bahrain to Cairo in 1982, the map of the Middle East in the passenger handbook did not even name the state of Israel the whole Arab world is so opposed to, or mention the city of Jerusalem Arabs now claim should be a Palestinian capital. Western countries who should know better repeat this political fiction. Official United States State Department maps carried by Secretary of State James Baker in his shuttle diplomacy on Middle East peace talks in 1991 showed all the capital cities of the region - except Jerusalem.

Biblical prophecies like those of Zechariah show that Jerusalem will become a flashpoint of international tension. I expect pressure will increase from the governments of world, the United Nations, the Vatican, and perhaps even many of the historic churches of Christendom, for Jerusalem to be placed under international control. I expect, on the other hand, that Jews will tenaciously resist these demands to surrender control of Jerusalem, because of their historic links uniquely with this city. No other issue unites the entire Israeli political spectrum as this does. Perhaps their stubborn refusal to hand over control of Jerusalem will be what provokes the nations ultimately to invade Jerusalem as described in the sombre prophecies of Zechariah 12:3-5 and 14:1-5.

The Temple Mount

The restoration of the Old City of Jerusalem to Jewish control during the lightning Six Day War of June 1967 has had an enormous impact on worldwide Jewry. It was the first time Jerusalem had been under Jewish sovereignty since the Maccabees in the second century BC. Its capture led to surge in Jewish self-confidence, following the humiliation of the Holocaust. It precipitated a sudden increase in Jewish immigration to Israel. There was rediscovery of Jewishness by diaspora Jews who till then had simply wanted to assimilate into the cultures of their host countries. The Jewish revival in the former Soviet Union dates from this time. Since 1967 there has even been a growing Jewish interest in Yeshua, as the Jews call Jesus, with a dramatic emergence of Messianic Judaism unparalleled since the first century.

Many Christians, too, saw the return of the Old City of Jerusalem to Jewish control as an important prophetic event. In 1971, Carl F.H. Henry, then editor of the world's foremost evangelical magazine, *Christianity Today*, convened an international Conference on Biblical Prophecy in Jerusalem to study the implications for Christians of the modern regathering of Israel. Many Christians believed this was a fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy in Luke 21:24, 'Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.' It seemed that the period of Jerusalem being subjected to Gentile control was over, and that we were entering a new era in the fulfilment of God's prophetic purposes for the world, heralding the ultimate return of Jesus as Messiah to inaugurate God's universal reign of peace on earth.

More careful examination, however, shows that one crucial part of Jerusalem is still under Gentile control. The most contested piece of real estate in the world is the fourteen hectares of the Temple Mount. The Temple Mount is the remaining foundation of Herod the Great's first century temple. Today it is dominated by two Moslem mosques, the Al Aqsa to the south and the Dome of the Rock to the north. In 1967 Israel made the mistake, from the best intentions of observing religious freedom, of putting the Temple Mount under the control of the Moslem Council or *Waqf*. Not even the Jordanians, from whom control of the Temple Mount had been wrested, had trusted the *Waqf* with its administration. Minister of Defence Moshe Dayan hoped this gesture would build relationships between Muslims and Jews. Instead, the *Waqf* prohibited the building of a synagogue or church on the Temple Mount, banned archaeological excavation, and forbade Jews and Christians from praying there.

Moslems today claim that Jerusalem and the Temple Mount are holy to Islam, because Muhammad ascended to heaven from there. In fact, Muhammad never even travelled to Jerusalem. He died in 632, six years before Jerusalem was first captured by the Arabs under Caliph Omar. It is another characteristic political fiction, used to shore up spurious Arab claims to sovereignty (as opposed to access) over the Temple Mount, which results in riots whenever there is any suspicion that Jews are laying claim to this area. A few years ago, even a special Commission of the Israeli Parliament or Knesset was barred from inspecting the Temple Mount by the Muslim authorities, who stirred up intimidation and threats of civil disturbance to prevent it.

Many Christians are interested in the possibility that Jews may one day try to rebuild the temple on this site. It is true that Orthodox Jews have well-developed plans to do so, and are reportedly searching for the perfect red heifer to establish the breeding stock to reinstitute the ancient temple sacrifices that Christians believe have been fulfilled and superseded by the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross for the sins of all humankind.

Christians who expect the temple to be rebuilt often think that it would require demolition of the Dome of Rock, assuming that it is located on the site of the former temple. However, pioneering research in the late seventies and early eighties by Professor Asher Kaufman, Israel's leading authority on the Temple Mount, who I heard lecture in Jerusalem in 1982, has shown that the Dome of the Rock stands where the Court of the Gentiles would have been in Herod's Temple. Kaufman's research indicates that the actual site of the *Hechal* (the Holy of Holies and Holy Place, the temple proper) was on the vacant area just north of the Dome of the Rock. Kaufman remarks, 'It is as if God has ensured that nothing of importance should be built upon the Temple site.'

Glorious Future

The reason why the present day conflict over Jerusalem is so intense is because of the city's central place in God's future purposes for the world. This glorious future for Jerusalem is the subject of many biblical prophecies, more than can be discussed here.

Psalms 102:13,16 indicates a clear sequence of future events: first *the restoration of Jerusalem*, then *the return of Jesus* in glory. 'You will arise and have compassion on Zion....For the Lord will rebuild Zion and appear in his glory.' Before the historical climax of world history can occur, its geographical context must first be prepared. The stage is set, then the celebrity appears.

Zechariah 8:1-8 speaks of God's jealous love for Jerusalem, his desire to restore its inhabitants and return and dwell in their midst. 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: I will return to Zion, and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the Lord Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain.' Though this might seem impossible because of the desolations Jerusalem has suffered, God will one day save his people not only 'from the countries of the east' (where Jews returned from after the first exile to Babylon) but also 'from the countries of the west' (where Jews were never dispersed to or gathered from in biblical times).

Zechariah 8:20-23 says that a time is coming when people from many cities and nations around the world will want to accompany Jews and 'come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty', when they recognize that God is with the Jewish people.

Zechariah 12:10-14 prophesies that God will 'pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication' in the last days, causing them to 'look on the one they have pierced' and so recognize and accept Jesus as their Messiah. This will be so profound and emotional an experience that it will cause the people of Jerusalem to go and mourn in a very orthodox Jewish manner - each family by itself, and even the women separately by themselves.

Hineh Yeshua

'Here is Yeshua,
the salvation of Israel.
Here he is; praise him.
He is the ruler of the universe.
Here he is, praise him.
We have accepted our salvation
and await the comforting of Zion.
We have not lost our hope
but will lift up our eyes unto the Lord.
The law will go forth from Zion
from the sides of the north.

Our redeemer will descend upon Zion
and we will go out in the dances
and celebrate victory.'

(Contemporary Messianic Jewish song)

Zechariah 14:1-9 indicates that on the day when 'all the nations' will gather to fight against Jerusalem the Lord 'will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem' and then become 'king over the whole earth.' The Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley to the east of Jerusalem, was the 'launching pad' where Jesus ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9-12). Similarly it will be his 'landing pad' when he returns at the end of the age. When Jesus comes again at his second coming to reign over all the earth, it will not be to Wellington, or London, or to the United Nations in New York, or to the Vatican in Rome, but to this place in east Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives, where he left from in AD 33.

Isaiah 2:2-4 is a glorious prophecy of the exalted status that Jerusalem, 'the mountain of the Lord's temple', will enjoy in the last days, when many peoples will come there to be instructed in the ways of the Lord, and nations will enjoy the longed for age of universal peace. This is the third phase of the biblical prophets' description of the future of Jerusalem: God's coming *reign of justice*. There will be no more army bases or military training, and weapons of destruction will be melted down to make machinery for agricultural production. 'They will beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more.'