

A Stone Named Jerusalem

by **Richard T. Ritenbaugh**

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When referring to Jerusalem in their reports, reporters invariably mention something akin to "the holy city of three great religions." Not only is Jerusalem the birthplace of Judaism and Christianity, but it is also the third most holy place—after Mecca and Medina—to Islam. That it is a "bone of contention" among adherents of these religions is an understatement!

The Temple Mount in East Jerusalem is, of course, the most volatile of all. Moslem authorities control the 40 acres that comprise the top of the Temple platform, upon which sits the Dome of the Rock and El Aqsa Mosque. The Jews would like to have at least joint control over the area in hopes of a possible third Temple.

Springing from the religious conflict over Jerusalem is the political strife that has not ceased for millennia. Notwithstanding its economic importance, Jerusalem has been the envy of many kings and political leaders throughout history. It has seen very few years of peace in its 3500-year existence. In fact, the city has endured at least 27 sieges, which does not include other military actions like surprise attacks or battles that did not include a siege.

In our times, we have a resurrection of the 4000-year-old feud between the descendants of Isaac and those of Ishmael. Added to the mix are the modern-day sons of Esau and possibly the remnant of the Philistines. In today's "small world" of electronic wizardry, instant news and increasing one-world thinking, this age-old conflict has embraced many other nations in its stranglehold.

This has not happened by chance. God prophesies in Zechariah 12:2-3:

Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it.

German Participation

Though this prophecy has its greatest application to the time immediately preceding Christ's return, we can see that it is also being fulfilled in a lesser way today. As these verses describe, the state of Israel has been under constant siege since its founding in 1948. Not only is it surrounded by belligerent Arab states, but it has also been routinely condemned in United Nations resolutions for defending its existence. Frequently, "all nations of the earth [have been] gathered against it," with only the United States standing with Israel in the UN.

The current so-called Middle East peace process has brought other players into greater participation in the game. The most important new face is German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who spent June 2-8 in the area

. . . to discuss German and European Union support for the peace process between Israel and its Arab neighbors. . . . Kohl made it clear in his talks with Egyptian, Jordanian,

Israeli, and Palestinian leaders that Germany and the EU are willing to provide political encouragement and concrete financial and economic help. (*This Week in Germany*, June 9, 1995, p. 1)

He underscored his statement by announcing German and European Union participation in a \$400 million water project along the Israeli-Jordanian desert border. In tandem with their government's actions, German firms such as Volkswagen are also establishing major economic footholds in Israel and nearby Arab states.

In commenting on the Chancellor's trip, the *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung* wrote on June 6: "As the leading government head within the European Union, Kohl could contribute to putting relations between Europe and the Middle East on a new footing." Also on June 6, another German paper, *Ostsee-Zeitung*, made this prophetically interesting comment: "Because of its equally good relations with Israel and several Arab states, ***Germany is almost compelled to play an intermediary role between the formerly hostile countries*** " (our emphasis).

Egyptian Belligerence

At the same time, Egypt is suddenly becoming more bellicose and anti-West. Though Egypt has been officially pro-Western since Anwar Sadat's presidency, the country is showing signs of swinging back to Arab nationalism. One Egyptian political scientist, Dr. Hassan Nafia of Cairo University, says America can no longer be trusted to broker peace in the region because of its support of the Israeli positions on the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and Jerusalem. Of this, he says, there is "a full consensus among the Egyptian elite" (*Intelligence Digest*, June 9, 1995, p. 1). Combined with the above facts about Germany, this Egyptian reversal brings Daniel 11:40-43 to mind:

At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack [*push at*, KJV] him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through. He shall also enter the Glorious Land, and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon. He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape. He shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt; also the Libyans and Ethiopians shall follow at his heels.

Even in the past month, several other events have brought Jerusalem to the world's attention:

- In peace treaty negotiations, Israel has offered to withdraw its troops from the Golan Heights over several years in return for concessions on the status of Jerusalem. This issue is dividing the Israeli electorate into many camps.
- Except for a U.S. veto, a proposed UN resolution would have condemned Israel for its plan to confiscate land in East Jerusalem for building (known as "eminent domain" elsewhere).
- Catholics from the region have opened a synod in Israel to discuss issues affecting the area. One of their aims is to secure Jerusalem as a free city under joint religious, not political, hegemony. This would please the Catholic church, which is working toward establishing a greater presence in the region.

Jerusalem Versus All

These events may seem minor, but with the more significant changes in the balance of power worldwide—that is, America's consistent surrender of power to the United Nations, Europe's rising political and economic influence and the maneuverings of Russia, China, Japan and Iran—they become monumental. Joseph de Courcy, editor of *Intelligence Digest*, writes ominously, "**Jerusalem will prove to be *the* big issue of the late 20th century, early 21st century**" (*Intelligence Digest*, May 26, 1995, p. 1, his emphasis).

Although the timing of events is uncertain, he is right about Jerusalem's key role. One of the clearest signs of the end is "Jerusalem surrounded by armies" (Luke 21:20; see Matthew 24:15-16). Zechariah 12:2-3 plainly names the city as "a cup of drunkenness" (see Jeremiah 25:15-38) and "a very heavy stone" (see Revelation 18:21), referring to its position as the foremost cause of war at the end time. Controlling Jerusalem is vital to the national and/or religious interests of many nations. To mix metaphors, Jerusalem is the match that lights the fuse of the Middle East powder keg.

All sides are intractable on the fundamental issue of whose city it is, and with such an attitude, peace negotiations have no hope of succeeding. When the king of the South, possibly a confederation of Arab states, makes trouble (Daniel 11:40), a stronger power—called "the king of the North"—will feel compelled to intervene militarily to keep the peace and protect its interests. This move will incite other nations to contest it (verse 44)—and the world will explode in war!

Revelation 16:12-16 describes the Sixth Bowl (or Vial) of God's wrath. Three demons "go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (verse 14). Where do these nations finally meet in battle?

Behold, the day of the LORD is coming. . . . For I will gather all the nations to battle *against Jerusalem*; the city shall be taken. . . . Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. (Zechariah 14:1-4)

Jerusalem, city of peace! Only when God sends New Jerusalem down from heaven will true and lasting peace reign in the city of David (see Revelation 20:7-9; 21:2-4). In the meantime, as you watch world events, expect the eyes of the world to focus increasingly on Jerusalem, the holy city.