

The Survival of Jerusalem

by: Ronald L. Dart

From a purely secular point of view, the Middle East must really be an enigma. There seems to be no logic there. War after war has been fought over Jerusalem in history. I'm sure if someone recounted them for us, we'd all be astonished at the blood that has been shed, the thousands of lives lost—millions of lives perhaps—over that city. I've been to Jerusalem. I saw no beauty there and that was disappointing after all I had heard and read about the place. I saw nothing there worth shedding a single drop of human blood for. I can understand the longing of the Jewish people for Jerusalem. It's a longing for home. A longing of a people long displaced who have only one center on the planet, and that's Jerusalem. I understand the longing of Christian people to go there because that's where our Lord suffered and died for us and it makes it more real to us somehow. But what on earth did the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Greeks, the Romans, and the Turks see in Jerusalem that made it worth fighting over?

Then there are the Muslims. With all the land they possess in the world, with all the oil, with all the wealth, why do they want that land? Why do they have to have that place? And why do they want to destroy the Israelis? Jerusalem is supposed to be a holy place for Muslims as well, but I strongly suspect that is a carefully crafted lie. The legend that Mohammed ascended into heaven from the rock on the Temple Mount served two purposes: 1) it co-opted the Temple Mount from the Jews and made it impossible for the Muslims to go there and build another temple; 2) it established an equivalency with Christianity that had Christ ascending from the Mount of Olives. They seem to be saying, we're as good as you are. Our prophet also ascended into heaven. He also ascended into heaven from Jerusalem, and we have our temple on the Temple Mount. I think the historical motivation of Muslims concerning Jerusalem was jealousy of two older and better religions.

The Future of Jerusalem

There's a prophecy in the Book of Zechariah that serves to illustrate the future of Jerusalem. I can't say this is a prophecy of Jerusalem today, but I do know that many scholars see it solely in historical terms. What I can say is that the prophecy applies in principle, and that it is set in what sounds a lot like other passages that "speak" of the last days. Here's what the prophecy says. "This is the word of the LORD concerning Israel. The LORD, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him, declares: I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling, Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves" (Zechariah 12:1-3 NIV). When the Bible uses the word "cup" in this way, it's about a cup of wine or strong drink, something you can get drunk on. "I will make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be

cut in pieces. . ." It's striking how many times in history that has been true. What has never been quite true is that there's never been a day when "all the nations of the earth be gathered together against Jerusalem." But the King James Version doesn't require that; it says, ". . . though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it" and that's probably correct.

The Six Day War

I was in England at the time of the Six-Day War in 1967 and I remember following it very carefully. I have little doubt that the Syrians, Jordanians, and Egyptians thought they were going to crush Israel like a bug. They had the power—they all had air forces, they all had tanks, they had big armies. They had everything they needed, and poor little Israel had. . . not that much. Those three countries were sent reeling back into their own land. It was one of the most remarkable military events in history and I recall all of us staring in amazement when it happened. It was miraculous. And the whole thing was totally unnecessary. What it did was give Israel still more land and it helped create the situation we have today.

John's Vision of the Last Days

One wonders if this vision of Zechariah's lay at the roots of John's vision of the last days. In John's vision you have a sequence of events. If you read through the Book of Revelation carefully, you'll spot this. It starts off with a scroll sealed with seven seals and each of these seals is opened in order. When the seventh seal is opened, seven angels come out with seven trumpets which they're going to blow. The seventh seal is comprised of seven trumpets. When the last trumpet is blown, it ushers in seven vials of God's wrath. So the seventh is divided into seven, and the seventh of that seven is divided into seven again, and finally we come down to the sixth angel of those seven vials of God's wrath in Revelation 16:12: "And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared." I don't know how long this has been true, but today it's hard not to see the armies of Islam in this vision. The River Euphrates flows right through Baghdad—in Iraq. The drying up of the River Euphrates, symbolically, is to open the way for the kings of the east, for the whole massed armies of Islam to come west. "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (vv. 13-14).

People call the battle that was about to take place "The Battle of Armageddon." Armageddon has come into our language as the last great battle of all mankind. But that's not the name of it. The name of it is the "Battle of the Great Day of God Almighty." "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon." I've been there. It's the Valley of Megiddo. In fact, if you go to Israel and go up on Mount Carmel, you can look down over the Valley of Megiddo, the place where these armies are to assemble.

What's Going to Happen in the Middle East?

History has a way of repeating itself. Isaiah tells us so. In the 41st chapter he's actually challenging the false gods and false prophets. "Produce your cause, saith the LORD; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. Let them bring them forth, and show us what shall happen. . ." (Isaiah 41:21). That's what we all want, isn't it? We all want to know what's going to happen in the Middle East. "Let them show the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them. . ." We're told, categorically, that the former things that happened in the Middle East are a help to us in understanding the latter end of it. He says, ". . . or declare us things for to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods. . ." If you follow this back into biblical history, you will find a fascinating prophecy that connects to it.

In Isaiah 10:22 he says, "For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return: The consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness. For the Lord GOD of hosts shall make a consumption, even determined, in the midst of all the land. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD of hosts, O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian: he shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt. For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction. . ."

Assyria did take Samaria and the house of Israel captive, but did not take Judah. "And the LORD of hosts shall stir up a scourge for him according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb: and as his rod was upon the sea, so shall he lift it up after the manner of Egypt. And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off your shoulder, and his yoke from off your neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing."

What follows in the tenth chapter of Isaiah is what caught my attention. There follows a list of towns. So I took the trouble to get out my Bible atlas and look up all the cities listed in verses 28, 29 and 30. When I found them, village by village, they went down to a place called Nob, and Nob is within sight of Jerusalem. Verse 32 says, "As yet shall he remain at Nob that day: he shall shake his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem. Behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, shall lop the bough with terror: and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled. And he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one." Time and again throughout history Lebanon has gotten caught in the crossfire between those trying to destroy Jerusalem, only to find herself destroyed. This echoes what John saw at the gathering at Armageddon, when armies moved south from Armageddon toward Jerusalem and died before they got there.

The Burden of Jerusalem

Returning to Zechariah, the point was made that all nations which concern themselves and burden themselves with Jerusalem are going to go staggering off, like drunks into the dark. Zechariah 12:5 says, "And the governors of Judah shall say in their heart, The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the LORD of hosts their God." I have a feeling that, when

they miraculously defeated three nations at the same time in Israel, the men of Jerusalem did say they were strong because the Lord Almighty was their God. And they were able to make mincemeat out of the south of Lebanon. I don't care what they say about how surprised everyone was at the resistance of Hezbollah. Hezbollah lost bad. Zechariah continues, "In that day will I make the governors of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left: and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place. . ." That could make your blood run cold. First of all, keep in mind we're reading history—a prophecy that is set in history. But the principle is still there, and history does repeat itself.

It may well be that God intends that to be an end-time prophecy. It could mean that Judah, the leaders of Judah, would be like a firepot in a woodpile. They could consume the nations around them, while Jerusalem remained intact. When you understand that Israel has nuclear weapons and they have long said that they're not going to go peacefully into that dark night... it leaves one to wonder. "The LORD also shall save the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem do not magnify themselves against Judah. In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; [David was one of the greatest fighting men ever to walk the planet.] and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the LORD before them. And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem." If anybody takes the Bible seriously at all, you would think it would be wise to just leave Jerusalem alone, but somehow they can't. "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn."

Every Christian reader of the Bible associates this statement with one made by John in his gospel. In chapter 19, one of the soldiers with a spear pierced Jesus' side, ". . .and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that you might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced." I knew the connection. What I didn't know was that some ancient Jewish sources saw this as a reference to the Messiah, the son of David—not Christ—but their own Messiah. It was only in recent years, with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, that we came to understand that some Jews, not all, expected a Messiah who would suffer and die; not necessarily one who would conqueror their occupying forces.

Returning to Zechariah 12:11: "In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddo. And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; The family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; All the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart." You would think that the destruction of the Assyrian would be cause for great celebration among the Jews. This prophecy seems to be confounded

by this awareness of the piercing of a messiah and the whole nation grieving at his death or his loss.

This brings to mind a strange thing. The Jews did not celebrate the victory in this situation. They mourn for having caused the Messiah to suffer.

There was a strange moment after the recent cease fire between Israel and Hezbollah. Israel hunkered down and dug in; Hezbollah celebrated. Their leader declared it a victory. Imagine: Thousands of homes in southern Lebanon were destroyed; thousands of Lebanese people were displaced from their homes and sent away; a thousand of them were killed; roads and bridges were destroyed; and the Lebanese economy was in a shambles. The Israeli army was dug in on their hillside. Not one of the fighters of Hezbollah had set a foot into Israel, and it was a victory?

These people are so accustomed to the lie, they have their own story of themselves, their own belief in themselves, and it persists against the obvious truth that they caused a terrible destruction of their host country. For indeed, the ones creating the most problem were not Lebanese. Who knows what they were? A people so accustomed to the lie, that they have no idea of the truth left in them. And Jerusalem is divided and fought over.

The Joy of Jerusalem

Psalm 122 seems devoted to the joy of Jerusalem, the happiness of Jerusalem. The author of the Psalm says "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD. Our feet shall stand within your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together: Where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, unto the testimony of Israel. For there are set thrones of judgment, [that's where the Supreme Court was] the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem..." There's a command ringing down through history, to all of us and all mankind: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek your good." It's odd that Jerusalem, even though it came to be the centerpiece of the Jewish faith, was not the center of Israelite religion from the first.

For a long time, the ark and the tabernacle were at a little town called Shiloh, north of Jerusalem. They were there until the ark was moved down to the house of David, and David took Jerusalem from the hands of the Jebusites who lived there. Even then Jerusalem was not the center. It was a long time before the ark was placed in the temple of God during the reign of Solomon. It became the centerpiece of Israel's religion, their heart, their love, their desire—even after it had been destroyed, even after they had been carried off into captivity. From the rivers of Babylon, along the banks of the Tigris and the Euphrates, Psalm 137 came forth: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yes, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If I forget you, O

Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember you, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Raze it, raze it, even to the foundation thereof" (Psalm 137:1-7). One wonders who the children of Edom are today.

God will Reveal His Secrets to the Prophets

"O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth you as you hast served us" (Vs. 8.)

I'm no prophet. I think if the Lord called me and told me to go prophesy, I'd be like Jonah and head off in the opposite direction. But, since that hasn't happened, I won't be presumptuous and attempt to tell you exactly what the prophets meant to say to our generation. Amos 3:7 says, "Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he reveals his secret unto his servants the prophets." Long since all this was written in the books of the Bible and because of the principle of type and anti-type, because history repeats itself, there may be things in the prophets that we would do well to think about.

In Isaiah 33:1-6, there is this prophecy: "Woe to you that spoilest, and you were not spoiled; and dealest treacherously, and they dealt not treacherously with thee! when thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled; and when thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee. O LORD, be gracious unto us; we have waited for thee: be thou their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble. At the noise of the tumult the people fled; at the lifting up of yourself the nations were scattered. And your spoil shall be gathered like the gathering of the caterpillar: as the running to and fro of locusts shall he run upon them. The LORD is exalted; for he dwelleth on high: he hath filled Zion with judgment and righteousness. And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of your times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the LORD is his treasure." We've seen this happen before. "Behold, their valiant ones shall cry without: the ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly" (v. 7). They will think they have brought peace at last, and it will fail. "The highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceaseth: he hath broken the covenant, he hath despised the cities, he regardeth no man. The earth mourneth and languisheth: Lebanon is ashamed and hewn down: Sharon is like a wilderness; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their fruits."

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