

# The Peace of Jerusalem

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## **A Half Mile From WWII**

When I was in Jerusalem last February, the group I was with had dinner with Daniel Rubinstein, the American Consul to the Palestinian authority. He functions as the American ambassador to the Palestinian people.

At the end of the dinner, I asked him where he lived and he said, "I live a half mile from where World War III could break out at any moment." We all knew this meant that he lived in the Old City of Jerusalem, the area within the ancient fortified walls and that he lived a half mile from the Temple Mount.

This is the one place in the world that houses the most sacred site in Judaism. It is the third most sacred site in Islam, and it is arguably the most sacred neighborhood for Christians, given that it is essentially the place of Jesus' final teaching, trial, death, burial, and resurrection.

This is a place with an amazing religious resume. It is the most sacred piece of turf in the world and, ironically, it is one of the most tortured places on the planet. It has a glorious history and a horrific history. Today it is the nexus point of incredible religious and political tensions. What happens here affects the whole world.

## **The Temple Mount & Herod the Great**

The Temple Mount is the top of Mt. Zion, the holy hill at the center of Jerusalem. This is the place that formerly housed The Temple,

the central sanctuary of Judaism. It was the place that was believed to house God's presence on earth. The natural topography of Mt. Zion is not ideal for the building of a city or a sanctuary. The top of Mt. Zion is a curved slab of rock.

Around the time of Jesus, Herod the Great did an amazing thing. He leveled off the top of Mt. Zion by walling in 35 acres in a rectangle around the temple and then creating a landfill. The concept is simple enough but the execution is mind-boggling.

The wall around the Temple Mount is awe inspiring. It is built with rectangular stones the size of limousines. In an engineering feat that is hard to understand, huge stone is stacked upon huge stone going up as high as 150 feet in the south corner. This is probably the pinnacle from which the Devil tempted Jesus to throw himself down.

## **The Western Wall and The Temple Mount Today**

The so-called Western Wall, the most sacred site in Judaism, where you often see pictures of Orthodox men doving, is the segment of Herod the Great's wall around the Temple Mount which is below and closest to where the Temple once was. The area above the Western Wall, the 35 acres where the Temple used to be, is now controlled solely by the Islamic authorities and only Muslims are allowed to enter. There is a huge wooden gang plank near the Western Wall that leads to the top. I am told there are Muslim guards

at the top and one must recite the first sentence of the Koran in Arabic and believe it in order to enter.

Periodically pious Jews will go up to the top but this move nearly always sets off a riotous meltdown.

The Temple Mount now houses two mosques: the so-called Dome of the Rock, with its glittering gold roof; and a lesser known and less ornate mosque that is actually the more sacred place that honors the place where it is believed that Muhammad ascended into heaven.

The Temple Mount is the place of David and Solomon, and Jesus, and Mohammed. It is the most religious place in the world, sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Without certain precautions, it would also be one of the most dangerous places.

Whether or not one is an Orthodox Jew dressed in black or a Muslim woman in a black burka or a Christian pilgrim in a black leather jacket, everyone entering the area goes through an airport-like metal detector, overseen by Israel soldiers, that seeks to prevent guns and bombs from blowing up people or place.

### **History**

The area of Jerusalem is the place of Christian crusades, Islamic Jihads, and Israeli wars. Crusades and jihads are the same thing. Once one realizes this, it is difficult to regard seemingly innocent mascots like The College of the Holy Cross in Worcester Massachusetts who call themselves the Crusaders. This is the equivalent of the a Muslim religious college calling themselves the Jihadists and instead of knight with a sword, having a man in a turban and an AK 47.

### **History**

The history of these few acres is extraordinary. It all started with King David,

who sought to unify Israel with a new capital in Jerusalem on the rocky top of a place called Mt. Zion

The Temple in Jerusalem was conceived by David in 1,000 BC and then lavishly built by his son, King Solomon. The city was fortified, but not well enough.

The Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC, as they sacked the city and took the leaders into exile by the waters of Babylon.

Forty years later, with the Persians in control of the fertile crescent, the Temple was rebuilt in what became known as the Second Temple period.

Roughly 350 years later, as the Greeks took control, The Temple was desecrated by the Greeks and then recaptured and cleansed by the Jews in 164 BC in a ceremony that was to become Hanukah.

The Romans then took over, and while paying tribute to them, the Jewish King, Herod the Great, flourished. He was a ruthless despot and a genius engineer.

From 19 BC to 63 AD, Herod the Great leveled the Temple Mount. This is the so-called third temple period, a time during which Jesus lived.

### **Jesus and The Prediction of the Destruction of the Temple**

The scriptures record Jesus' life at the Temple. He made a pilgrimage to the Temple as a twelve-year-old. The Gospels record his cleansing of the Temple. He taught in the Temple and he predicted its destruction. Here he was operating as a prophet, speaking the word of God and predicting the future.

The Temple was magnificent. The Gospel this morning says, "the Temple was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to

God. It was the central institution; the practice of Judaism was literally centered around this place. It was the only place where Jews could make sacrifices. It was the central place of teaching. It was a major economic center as pilgrims poured in. It was the Vatican and the Capital all wrapped into one.

There Jesus stands, predicting its destruction. “As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left on another; all will be thrown down.” A nightmare at best.

### **Jesus prediction comes true.**

Nearly 40 years after Jesus death his prediction came true. From 66 to 70 AD there was a Jewish Revolt. The Jews sought to throw off their Roman oppressors. They failed.

The Romans sought to crush the will of the Jews by destroying their central institution, their most sacred possession, the Temple. This was no small task.

Do you remember that I said the stones at the foot of the Temple Mount are as large as automobiles. So it probably was for the Temple. But the Romans would not be dissuaded. They systemically pulled the Temple apart. The stones were all thrown down. The devastation was complete.

If you can believe it, this space eventually became a garbage dump when the Christians were in control because they believed the Temple should not be rebuilt because Jesus said the stones would be thrown down.

Then the Muslims took it over and returned it to sacred turf, but in a way that was satisfying to the Jews.

### **Today**

In 1967 during the so-called Six Day War, the Israelis captured East Jerusalem, including the Old City, the Western Wall and the

Temple Mount from the Jordanians. [This was also the time they captured the Gaza from the Egyptians and the Golan Heights from the Syrians.]

As you know the current Israeli – Palestinian peace process has stalled. A particular flash point is the issue of settlement construction in East Jerusalem. Is Jerusalem unified in Israel or is it the future home of the Palestinian nation?

### **Making the Impossible Possible**

It sometimes seems impossible that there will ever be peace. But do you remember Jesus’ line in another context, “For mortals it is impossible but for God all things are possible.”

We must be committed to the Godly possible. Things that seem impossible and stuck can change very rapidly. Do you remember how fast it suddenly seemed when the Berlin Wall came down? Do you remember the toppling of apartheid in South Africa?

The same can be true in Israel/Palestine. There was news in the paper today of another possible 90-day settlement construction freeze. For there to be peace in the Jerusalem

So pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Pray for the peace process. If you were ever looking for a piece of property to pray for, pray for that 35 acres on the Temple Mount and its neighborhood.

Then, let’s let peace unfold.

Amen