



The Importance of Jerusalem



Teaching Letter by Derek Prince

Today's news media devote more attention to the Middle East than to any other area on earth. Here are centered the issues and conflicts that could—overnight—spark World War III. The main factor that has contributed to this dramatic increase in attention to the Middle East is the emergence of Israel as a sovereign Jewish State.

Unceasingly opposed and assailed since its birth, this tiny Jewish state has consistently confounded the experts and radically changed the political and military balance of the Middle East.

I spent five years of my military service in the Middle East—Egypt, Libya, the Sudan and Jerusalem (then called Palestine). This was followed by two more years of residence in Palestine as a civilian. During these years I witnessed and participated in the tumultuous events out of which the

present situation in the Middle East has emerged.

Near the end of the British Mandate in 1948, I received notification that some parcels were awaiting collection at the main post office in Jerusalem. One morning I set out to collect them, taking two children with me to help to carry them. When we arrived at the corner of the street in which the parcels office stood, we found that it was under fire from an Arab sniper. By then food was already becoming so scarce in Jerusalem that we could not afford to leave the parcels uncollected. There was nothing to do but to make a dash for it, as several people in front of us had done. We scuttled down the edge of the street like rabbits making for their burrow and reached the door of the parcels office—out of breath, but unscathed.

Inside the door a British constable of the Palestine police was standing on duty. He was looking somewhat scared, as a bullet from the sniper had just passed through a glass pane over the doorway in which he was standing. For some time we stood in the parcels office, recovering our breath and steadying our nerves. Then the British constable cautiously put his hand out to open the door and take stock of the situation. After awhile, he beckoned me to his side and showed me where he had located the sniper. About three hundred yards away, at the opposite end of the street from which we had entered, a concrete "pill box" had been built in

the road by the Arabs. Facing us was a narrow horizontal slit in the “pill box,” and in this slit there rested the muzzle of a rifle. The constable and I watched for some time while the rifle moved from one side of the slit to the other, as the sniper looked for a target.

Eventually, the formalities connected with the collection of the parcels were complete. They were handed over to us, and we withdrew by a different route than that by which we had come—slipping quickly around the corner of the parcels office and taking a narrow, steep path across some waste ground, which brought us out into a street where we were under cover from the sniper's fire. As we left, I heard the Arab official in charge of the parcels office announce that—on account of the sniping—he was going to close his department. The British constable remained standing passively in the doorway. As far as I know, that particular department of the post office did not open again for more than a few hours' business before the termination of the Mandate.

Clearly, any valid assessment of the overall situation in the Middle East must first come to grips with the unique role Israel has played and continues to play. Following are some relevant facts concerning the biblical significance of Jerusalem as it relates to present-day Israel. And, more specifically, I offer reasons why Israel should never be required to consent to a divided government of Jerusalem.

Central to History

Jerusalem has a unique place in the history of Israel, not shared by any other nation in the world. It was there that God commanded David to purchase ground that was destined to be the site of the Temple:

“Therefore, the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David that David should go and erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Or nan the Jebusite... So David gave Or nan six hundred shekels of gold by weight for the place. And David built there an altar to the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called on the LORD; and He answered him from heaven by fire on the altar of burnt offering.” (1 Chronicles 21:18, 25–26)

Later, Solomon built his temple on this site and God said to him: “My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually” (1 Kings 9:3).

It is Jerusalem that God has declared to be the city He has chosen for Himself. Solomon quotes the words that had been

spoken by the Lord to his father, David: “Yet I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name may be there”(2 Chronicles 6:6).

The Lord reiterates the permanence of Jerusalem again in 1 Chronicles 23:25:“For David said, ‘The LORD God of Israel has given rest to His people, that they may dwell in Jerusalem forever.’” In 1 Kings 11:36, God speaks to Jeroboam and says, regarding Rehoboam (Solomon's son and heir to the throne):

“And to his son I will give one tribe, that My servant David may always have a lamp before Me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen for Myself, to put My name there.”

The Jewish people are mandated by Scripture to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year:

“Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles.” (Deuteronomy 16:16)

In no other religion is pilgrimage to Jerusalem mandated.

The name Jerusalem occurs 778 times in the sacred Scriptures of the Jewish people. By contrast, in Islam's sacred book, the Koran, Jerusalem is not mentioned once.

Historically, Jerusalem has been the only capital of the Jewish people, both political and spiritual. Jerusalem has never been the capital of any other people throughout history. As a city, it only became politically important to the Arab peoples after the Six Day War in June 1967. Previously, under the Jordanian occupation, Jerusalem never had the status of a capital.

After the return of Israel from the Babylonian captivity, when people from other nations sought to share in the restoration of Jerusalem, Nehemiah, the Jewish governor, said to them: “The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem” (Nehemiah 2:20).

Over the years, the Jewish people have adopted from Scripture a special name for their inheritance in Jerusalem. It is *Zion*.

“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.” (Psalm

48:1, 2)

This is where the term Zionism originates

Restoration of Zion

The prophet Isaiah depicts the rebirth of the State of Israel as a unique phenomenon:

“Before she was in labor, she gave birth; before her pain came, she delivered a male child. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion was in labor, she gave birth to her children.” (Isaiah 66:7–8)

The rebirth of the State of Israel is correctly presented in Scripture as a unique event and without historical parallel. On one day—May 15, 1948—Israel emerged as a complete nation with all its functions: army, navy, air force (one airplane), parliament, police force, medical and education systems, etc. I know of no other nation in history that has had a similar rebirth. It is staggering to try to imagine the consequences of opposing such a sovereign act of God.

The Return of the Lord

The restoration of Zion is seen as a prelude to the return of the Lord in glory: “For [when] the LORD shall build up Zion; He shall appear in His glory” (Psalm 102:16).

All the predictions of Scripture and all the developments of current history combine to focus our attention on one impending event of unique importance: The return of the Lord Jesus in power and glory. This gives special significance to the drama predicted to take place on the Mount of Olives:

“And in that day His [Jesus’] feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south.” (Zechariah 14:4)

There will follow a period when God will judge all the nations on the basis of the way they have treated the land and the people of Israel:

“For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the

Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up [partitioned] My land.” (Joel 3:1–2)

God’s purpose is to make Jerusalem a source of blessing to all nations, and He promises severe judgment on all nations that oppose His purpose for Jerusalem. Scripture makes it clear that when the Lord returns, it will be to a sovereign Jewish Jerusalem. Jesus said:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’” (Matthew 23:37–39)

In Matthew 24, Jesus refers to the “abomination of desolation” (v. 15) spoken of by Daniel the prophet. He then says, “Let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains....And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath” (vv. 16, 20). The warning against fleeing on the Sabbath assumes that Jerusalem will be under Jewish regulations, which would forbid the operation of either public transportation or places of commerce such as gas stations and banks. Only under Jewish government would this be a problem.

Let me briefly sum up my conclusion. In the eternal counsel of God, He has determined to make Jerusalem the decisive issue by which He will deal with the nations. Those nations who align themselves with God’s purposes for Jerusalem will receive His blessing. But those who follow a policy in opposition to God’s purposes will be severely dealt with. Commit yourself to pray that divine wisdom, discernment and understanding would be the portion of all who hold positions of influence over matters in the Middle East.

¹ This verse has a dual application referring to both the natural and spiritual Jerusalem.

Teaching Letter

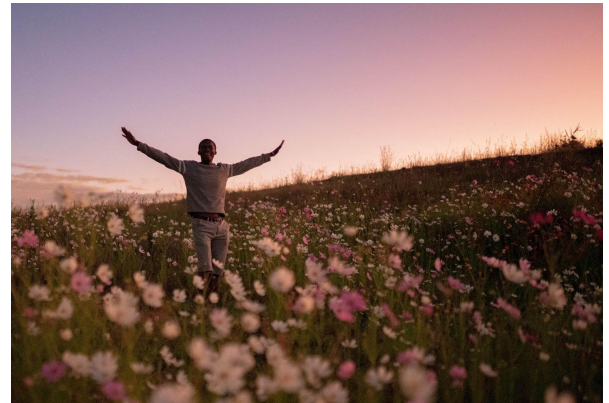
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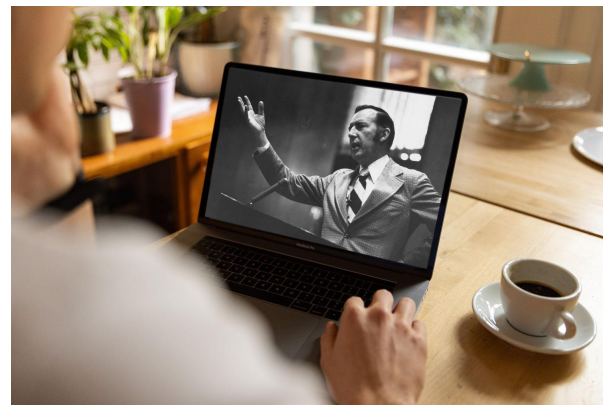
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