

## **From Randall in Jerusalem**

Jerusalem has always been a city that has been larger in symbolism than it is in size. Even though no major democratic government (including the United States) will recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital by placing their embassy in the city, it remains the center of Israel's political life (the Knesset, Israel's Parliament is located here) and spiritual destiny (with the Mt. of Olives – Zechariah 14:3 and the Temple Mount – Isaiah 2:2-3).

For this reason, events that happen in Jerusalem are viewed as having greater significance than in similar-sized cities in other places. As an example, consider an incident that took place this last week when a Palestinian (Israeli-Arab) got into a large tractor and began overturning buses and crushing cars and people. The event was broadcast around the world on the evening news, even though much worse things happen each day in other parts of the globe. The motive of the Palestinian was unclear as he hardly ever attended the mosque and had a home and family. Was it the result of being disgruntled at his work or a disagreement with a supervisor – as is often the case with rampage killings in the U.S.? Since he was shot on the scene we may never know, but the press, especially the local media, decided it was a terrorist act. Because it happened in Jerusalem, the city where most such attacks are focused, it was concluded that terrorists are now employing new weapons to attack the civilian population since the security fence has been so effective in keeping suicide bombers at bay.

Such news cannot be welcome in this city already daily reports such as today's headline that the left-wing Israeli peace-broker President Shimon Perez has declared "no chance of peace with the Palestinians" and that of U.S. Admiral Michael Mullen (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon) that an "Iranian strike on Israel is likely." I've talked with numerous Jewish and Palestinian merchants who are convinced that there will be some kind of renewed conflict by the end of the year and that tourism – and their livelihoods – will come to an abrupt halt. Add to that the striking dismissal here of the U.S. dollar, once the standard in Israel, with many businesses not accepting them (at least not in large denomination) or asking for euros instead. Most merchants I have talked to in the shops believe that the U.S. economy is in shambles and that we are about to elect a Muslim to the highest office (both untrue). But, misconception and misinformation is standard fare around here.

Having said all of this, let us not forget that Jerusalem is also the Holy City and the place from which worldwide blessing is prophesied to go forth to the nations once Christ has returned and God's Word becomes the proper information source for Israel. I experienced a little taste of this on Shabbat as I attended the Jerusalem Assembly (House of Redemption) congregation on Prophets street. Here was a doctrinally sound and spiritually-fervent body of Jewish and Gentile believers worshipping the Lord and learning how to reach the world with the gospel of Christ. Just a week and a half ago this city hosted the annual congress of the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC) in which Jewish pastors (Messianic rabbis) from Israel, Europe, and the Americas joined together to strengthen their commitment to reach Israel and the world with the good news of Yeshua (Jesus) and that He is soon returning to Jerusalem. These events remind us that despite the always ominous threats from fallen man toward this city - the object of God's love (Psalm 87:2) – the Lord has not failed to keep a witness to Himself and to His promise to one day make Jerusalem "a praise in the earth" (Isaiah 62:7).

Even my own work here in archaeological excavation has been a part of this witness. Just yesterday I met with a leading parasitologist and two geneticists from the Hebrew University as I showed them my presentation on our discoveries at Qumran and brought them on board to help with the analysis of our 2,000 year-old animal bone deposits that may have connections with the Jewish ritual from the time of the Temple. In sharing with them my own theory for the interpretation of these ancient bone burials I spoke of their forefather's belief in the coming of the Messiah to Jerusalem to bring the awaited physical deliverance, but especially spiritual salvation (Isaiah 25:6-9), a text that may underlie the reason those at Qumran performed this strange act. Most Israelis, certainly secular ones, have no understanding of this biblical hope and why their ancestor's embraced Jerusalem as the key to realizing their destiny as Jews. Planting seeds concerning this ancient – and modern hope – with academics and professionals is one of the wonderful by-products of what God has led me to be a part of in this Land.

Finally, saving the best till last, one of the most incredible confirmations of God's promise is His bringing His people to faith in the Messiah. A few weeks ago, my wife Beverlee and I had the opportunity to visit with a longtime Israeli friend here in Jerusalem. He took that occasion to share with us that he and his wife had recently accepted Jesus into their lives and wanted us to be the first to know! We had been praying for this friend for almost two decades and he told us that the witness of people like us had been instrumental in he and his wife's decision. What wonderful news and what a wonderful display of the patient power of the Lord that works through the years to accomplish His glorious purpose.

May each of you, our dear friends and partners in reaching the world with the Word be blessed as you enjoy your summer and remember His promise “that men may tell of the name of the LORD in Zion, And His praise in Jerusalem” (Psalm 102:21)!