

# JERUSALEM, SACRED TO WHOM?

By Clarence H. Wagner, Jr.

"The city of Jerusalem, sacred to Christians, Moslems and Jews, is at the heart of the Middle East conflict," - so wrote the pastor of a Palestinian congregation in Jerusalem. The idea that there is an equally shared importance of Jerusalem is a common misconception. Even Israeli tour guides, in their introduction to the city, monotonously repeat, "Jerusalem is holy to the three great monotheistic faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam," as if this were a wholly accurate description.

It isn't, and it is a tragedy that visitors to Israel are not told what G-D Himself has to say about Jerusalem, and HIS vision for HIS Holy City. Certainly, G-D does not envision an ecumenical, internationalized "mecca" for all faiths. His Word, the Bible, is clear on G-D's view of the city He calls, "His own." Let's look at the place of Jerusalem in light of the Bible and with respect to Judaism and Islam.

## **JERUSALEM "SACRED TO MOSLEMS"?**

To describe Jerusalem as the third most holy site in Islam is 20th century revisionist history and PLO/Arab propaganda. It is a contrived attempt to wrestle the land of Israel and Jerusalem from Jewish sovereignty, which is seen as an affront to Islam.

Jerusalem is not mentioned even once in the Koran. In the 7th century, Mohammed did make a brief attempt to get people to pray towards Jerusalem in a vain effort to convert Jews to his new religion. However, he soon reverted the direction of Moslem prayer back to Mecca. To this day, all Moslems pray facing Mecca, and in most cases actually turn their backs on Jerusalem. During the entire 19 years of Jordanian occupation (1948-1967), only one Arab leader, King Abdullah of Jordan, came to pray in Jerusalem in 1953. He was shot by a Palestinian! The place of pilgrimage (haj) for Moslems, according to the Koran, is Mecca and its sister city, Medina in Saudi Arabia, not Jerusalem.

But, even more importantly, Allah, the G-D of Islam, is not the G-D of Israel. The G-D of Israel gave us His personal name, YaHWeH. This name has become so sacred to Jews, that it is never said, or even written, in order not to accidentally "take the Lord's name in vain." It has been replaced with the title "Adonai," which means "Lord." This is the same G-D worshiped by Christians, but not by Moslems.

In contrast to the G-D of Israel, Allah has no personal name. The word, Allah, simply means "G-D" in Arabic. Furthermore, when you study the history of Islam, you discover that when Mohammed went to Mecca, there were 365 Gods being worshipped. He destroyed the altars to these various Gods, except one, who became THE Allah. This Allah was connected with the worship of the moon, thus the crescent seen on the

top of all mosques. He also had three daughter Goddesses, who were conveniently forgotten. The "new and improved" Allah of Islam is a remade God of the desert. Yes, Islam is monotheistic, but the God worshipped is not the G-D of the Bible - the Lord G-D of Israel. It is time that the world, especially the leaders of the Middle East churches, realized that Moslems worship another G-D, not YaHWeH of the Bible. YaHWeH first revealed His name to Moses. (Exodus 3:13-15, 6:2,3).

Mohammed chose another God and the Moslems walk another path. Islam also means, submission. The goal of Islam is to bring the world under the submission of Allah - first the individual and the State, and then other religions - particularly Christianity and Judaism. Just as the existence of Israel, or freedom of religion for Jews is a blasphemy to Islam, so is Christian belief or practice (witness the demise of Christianity and the outright murder of Christians in Islamic countries, even today).

The Moslem goal of control of Jerusalem is designed to limit Christianity and Judaism and the plans of the G-D of the Bible.

#### **JERUSALEM - "SACRED TO JEWS?"**

A resounding, Yes! The Temple Mount, at the heart of the Old City of Jerusalem, is sacred ground to the Jews. David was told by the L-rd to go to Jerusalem to make it his capital. (Jerusalem has only been the capital of one nation in history, Israel.) There David was instructed to buy the threshing floor of Aravnah to be the place for the tabernacle for G-D's presence (II Sam. 24). This place is the Temple Mount which has been the focal point of Judaism throughout the ages. The very ground was sacred. The fact that there are now three Moslem mosques there is because Islam evicted the Jews and took it!

The Jewish people, because of disobedience against G-D, have twice been exiled from Jerusalem. These exiles followed repeated warnings that they would indeed be dispersed. But, along with these warnings of the coming exile, G-D also gave His promise of a return in the "last days:"

"'I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; They shall build the cities and inhabit them;...I will plant them on their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them,' says the Lord your G-D" (Amos 9:14,15).

That day is coming and the Jewish people are now back in Jerusalem and in the land of Israel - a land that was promised, from the beginning, only to Israel!

"Also I give to you (Abraham) and your descendants after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession" (Genesis 17:8).

In case there is any confusion, the promise to the descendants of Abraham is the line of promise through Isaac and Jacob - not Ishmael, as some like to believe (see Gen. 17:21; 21:12b; 28:13-15).

G-D did make promises to the descendants of Ishmael, comprising many of the Arab groups of today. These promises, however, did not include the land of Israel (Genesis 16:9-12; 17:19-21). Furthermore, it should be pointed out that most of the Arab people do not even worship the G-D Who made those promises, yet they try to claim rights by Abraham. The descendants of Ishmael turned from YahWeH, first to worshiping their 365 Gods, and then to the one Allah, as decreed by Mohammed.

Only for the Jews, did Jerusalem remain the center of their hopes and longings. Jerusalem is the city about which G-D says: "I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name may be there" (II Chronicles 6:6; II Chronicles 33:4). And again, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever." (II Chronicles 33:7). Jerusalem may be important to Christians and even special to Moslems, but it is a city that is sacred for the Jews.

### **WHOSE JERUSALEM?**

We are living in prophetic days when the Jewish people are being returned from all the places where they had been scattered over the past 2000 years, in fulfillment of Bible prophecy (Isa. 11:11-12; 43:5,6, etc.)

We are living in the days about which G-D says: "I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great zeal...I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy;...My cities shall again spread out through prosperity; the Lord will again comfort Zion, and will again choose Jerusalem" (Zech. 1:14-17). Under Jewish/Israeli sovereignty, there has been freedom of access and freedom of worship in Jerusalem. Under no other historical regime, Christian or Moslem, has such freedom been granted. Israel is Jerusalem's rightful guardian - not Islam, not the Vatican, not some other Christian denomination, and not a secular, international, UN overseer.

Today, even with Israel's open policy, the Temple Mount is controlled by the Moslems, and this is the one place where free access stops. Jews are forbidden to enter! In fact, even Christians who want to pray or read their Bibles there are speedily removed. The Moslem authorities who have control over the Temple Mount say that the area is an Islamic shrine, and only Moslems may pray there.

The Temple Mount is at the heart of Jewish longings. It is the place where the G-D of Israel says the Temple will be rebuilt, and the place where the Jewish Jesus spent His most important days and hours. Nevertheless, it is clear that Islam will not give up its unique position of control over the Temple Mount, regardless of historical precedence.

Yasser Arafat's stated goal is to make Jerusalem the capital of a Palestinian state. On September 1, 1996, Arafat declared in Nablus, "Soon we will declare the establishment of the Palestinian state on the lands of the homeland. I tell Israel, that if it doesn't carry out the agreement in practice, the Palestinians will not have an alternative."

Even if Arafat were only partially successful and took only the eastern part of the city, it would include the Old City. Freedom of worship for all faiths, which exists today, would be limited.

Once again, biblical Jerusalem would be placed completely under Moslem (Gentile) sovereignty, contradicting G-D's Word and His purposes. However, since that is the intention of the Moslems, a battle for Jerusalem will surely ensue. Arafat's October speech in Bethlehem, calling upon Moslem women to have 12 sons, "two for you and ten for me" for the struggle for Jerusalem, only underscores the potential of a new war that will be fought over Jerusalem. A handbill distributed by the Israel Islamic Movement on Sept. 29, 1996, read, "No east, no west, only Moslem Jerusalem."

The bottom line of this complex situation is that the struggle for Jerusalem goes much deeper than secular politics. It has spiritual and eternal implications. One thing is certain: The Jewish people have the longest history and most significant claims on the city, including a biblical mandate. They will not give up Jerusalem and will hold on until Messiah comes. Therefore, remember to "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Ps. 122:6) - G-D's peace and rule, not man's.