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THE BATTLE FOR JERUSALEM - PART I

By Carol Rushton



It is one of the most ancient cities of the world. Its skyline is instantly recognizable the world over. It is known as the “Holy City” because of its importance to the three major faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Its actual name in Hebrew means “city of peace.” It is Jerusalem, recognized by Jews and evangelical Christians as the historic, eternal capital of Israel, past and present.

Because of its geographical location, Jerusalem has had a very tragic history. Since the city is at the crossroads between Central Asia, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East, armies throughout history have marched through this area when countries in these regions waged war on one another, even from the most ancient of times. This caused repeated havoc if not outright destruction and suffering for the city and its inhabitants during the centuries.

Jerusalem’s importance to the Jews cannot be minimized. Jerusalem has been recognized as the capital city of Israel since King David expelled the Jebusites and made it the preeminent city of the country. David so desperately wanted to build a temple in the city to house the Ark of the Covenant that he would not let his own death deter him but planned so diligently for its construction that his successor, Solomon, had no problem following his father’s instructions after he ascended the throne. Even when carted off to Babylon, the Jews did not forget Jerusalem. When Daniel prayed, “his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God” (Daniel 6:10). To this day when a Jewish couple is married, the groom smashes a wine glass with his foot at the end of the ceremony to signify that their joy cannot be complete until the Temple is rebuilt in Jerusalem.

Today, Jerusalem is amazingly the focal point of the world. Israel is the only country that is not allowed to decide what and where to build in its capital city without it causing a major uproar all over the globe and numerous United Nations’ resolutions of condemnation. Not one nation in the world has an official embassy in Jerusalem because to do so would be considered “controversial” (i.e., offensive to the Arabs and Muslims).

Most Americans do not understand any of this. They are clueless about why they should be constantly upset regarding a city in a far-away country that does not have an effect on their daily lives. Why is this city so controversial? Why does a neighborhood construction plan inflame passions around the world to the point of violence? Why can’t Arabs and Muslims accept that Jerusalem belongs to the State of Israel and the Jews and just “live and let live”?

To understand these issues, you have to know the history of this ancient city and the peoples who have lived there. That is the purpose of this two part article, written on the 50th anniversary of the battle for Jerusalem that took place in June, 1967.

JERUSALEM, ANCIENT BIBLICAL CITY OF THE JEWS

The history of Jerusalem goes back as far as Abraham. Most biblical scholars accept that when Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek, king of Salem, as recorded in Genesis 14:17-20, Salem was the city that eventually become known as Jerusalem. God told Abraham to offer his son, Isaac, as a burnt offering in “the land of Moriah” (Genesis 22:2). This place would eventually become known as Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. The Lord would later order King David to buy Mount Moriah from Ornan the Jebusite who was using it as a threshing floor and offer a sacrifice on the mount (II Samuel 2:24:15-25, I Chronicles 21:15-28).

The actual name of Jerusalem does not appear in the Bible until Joshua 10. The Book of Joshua recounts how the Israelites under the leadership of Joshua conquered the land of Canaan. “Now it came to pass, when Adonizedek king of Jerusalem had heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and had utterly destroyed it; as he had done to Jericho and her king, so he had done to Ai and her king; and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel, and were among them” (Joshua 10:1).

Jerusalem was one of the pagan cities that God had ordered Joshua and the Israelites to destroy. Although Joshua was successful in defeating the coalition army the king of Jerusalem had put together with other pagan kings, the Israelites did not capture and defeat the actual city of Jerusalem at that time. “As for the Jebusites the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out: but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem unto this day” (Joshua 15:63). It was not until after the death of Joshua that the Israelites followed God’s command and defeated the city. “Now the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and had taken it, and smitten it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire” (Judges 1:8). Even so, they failed to expel or kill all of the city’s pagan inhabitants: “but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day” (Judges 1:21).

Jerusalem did not actually become a prominent biblical city until King David, who reigned over the united monarchy from 1000 - 962 B.C. David’s first act as king of all Israel was to choose a site for the capital that would be acceptable both to the northern and the southern tribes. Jerusalem was to become that place. David built his palace on Mount Zion, the SE hill captured from the Jebusites (II Samuel 5:6-9).

After a series of good and evil kings in Judah, Jerusalem was finally conquered by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 597 B.C., after which he set up a series of puppet kings. When the last Jewish king Zedekiah rebelled, Nebuchadnezzar returned to destroy Solomon’s Temple and Jerusalem after a prolonged siege which ended in 586 B.C. with the razing of the city and most of the remaining Jews being carted off to Babylon for 70 years of captivity.

While some Jews returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple and the city under the reigns of Persian kings Cyrus and Artaxerxes, Jerusalem never regained its prominence or glory. The surrounding nations fought war after war, with Jerusalem often being in the middle, suffering the brunt of successive marauding militaries. Although the city enjoyed a brief period of liberty after the Maccabees defeated the Greek King Antiochus Epiphanes, it did not last long. The great Jewish historian Flavius Josephus detailed the corruption of the Jewish leaders in *Antiquities of the Jews*. This corruption eventually led to Jerusalem and the Jews becoming enslaved by the Romans.

From time to time, Jewish zealots would arise to try to throw off the Roman yoke. The Romans were forced to station troops in Jerusalem and throughout Judea and Samaria to keep the population subdued and to quickly stamp out any rebellion that might threaten its hold on country. It wasn’t until Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection and the start of Christianity that Jerusalem came to prominence among people other than Orthodox Jews. Since Jerusalem was the

“home base” of the apostles and the place where Jesus was crucified and rose again, Christians came to recognize the city as being a sacred and holy site.

It is clear from the Apostle Peter’s speech in Acts 3 that the believers at that time believed that if the Jews en masse would accept Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus would return at that time and set up the kingdom, ruling from Jerusalem. “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:19-21).

Although some Jews did accept Jesus as Messiah and Lord, the Jewish nation as a whole still rejected Him. After a number of violent outbreaks against Roman troops by Jewish Zealots who thought they could break off the yoke of the Roman Empire, Rome had enough and decided to send General Titus to put down the Zealots once and for all.

In 70 A.D., Titus destroyed Jerusalem and Herod’s Temple after a long siege, not coincidentally on the 9th of Av, the same day Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and Solomon’s Temple in 586 B.C. Titus’ original objective was for the Jews to surrender and spare both the city and the Temple, but after they rejected an attempt by Josephus to broker a peace settlement by launching a hail of arrows at the negotiating team, Titus had no choice. Josephus’ account of the suffering of the city’s inhabitants during the siege is truly horrifying. As food became more and more scarce, some turned to cannibalism.

I will quote Josephus’ account of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple from two different sources:

As the legions charged in, neither persuasion nor threat could check their impetuosity: passion alone was in command. Crowded together around the entrances many were trampled by their friends, many fell among the still hot and smoking ruins of the colonnades and died as miserably as the defeated. As they neared the Sanctuary they pretended not even to hear Caesar’s commands and urged the men in front to throw in more firebrands. The partisans were no longer in a position to help; everywhere was slaughter and flight. Most of the victims were peaceful citizens, weak and unarmed, butchered wherever they were caught. Round the Altar the heaps of corpses grew higher and higher, while down the Sanctuary steps poured a river of blood and the bodies of those killed at the top slid to the bottom (Peter Schafer, *The History of the Jews in Antiquity*).



The Siege of Jerusalem by David Roberts

Now as soon as the army had no more people to slay or to plunder, because there remained none to be the objects of their fury (for they would not have spared any, had there remained any other work to be done), [Titus] Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and Temple, but should leave as many of the towers standing as they were of the greatest eminence; that is, Phasaelus, and Hippicus, and Mariamne; and so much of the wall enclosed the city on the west side. This wall was spared, in order to afford a camp for such as

were to lie in garrison [in the Upper City], as were the towers [the three forts] also spared, in order to demonstrate to posterity what kind of city it was, and how well fortified, which the Roman valor had subdued; but for all the rest of the wall [surrounding Jerusalem], it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it [Jerusalem] had ever been inhabited. This was the end which Jerusalem came to by the madness of those

that were for innovations; a city otherwise of great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind (Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*).

And truly, the very view itself was a melancholy thing; for those places which were adorned with trees and pleasant gardens, were now become desolate country every way, and its trees were all cut down. Nor could any foreigner that had formerly seen Judaea and the most beautiful suburbs of the city, and now saw it as a desert, but lament and mourn sadly at so great a change. For the war had laid all signs of beauty quite waste. Nor had anyone who had known the place before, had come on a sudden to it now, would he have known it again. But though he [a foreigner] were at the city itself, yet would he have inquired for it (Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*).

Josephus added that "Jerusalem. . . was so thoroughly razed to the ground by those that demolished it to its foundations, that nothing was left that could ever persuade visitors that it had once been a place of habitation."

This was the fulfillment of the terrible prophecy Jesus gave in Matthew 23:37-24:2.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? I say unto you, There shall not be one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

Multiplied thousands of Jews are said to have died or been killed in the assault. Thousands of others fled to other countries. Titus went on to become the next Roman emperor.

JERUSALEM AFTER 70 A.D.

The Roman Emperor Hadrian decided in 130 A.D. that he was going to turn Jerusalem into a homage to the Roman and Greek gods. So he built a temple to honor Jupiter, and renamed the city Aelia Capitolina. Simona Bar Kochba led a revolt against Roman rule, called the Bar Kochba Revolt, in a protest which the Roman military eventually crushed. Rome banned Jews from even entering Jerusalem except on Tisha B'Av, the 9th of Av and the date of the destruction of both Jewish Temples. After the decline of the Roman Empire, Jerusalem changed hands between the Persians and the Byzantines but was still known officially as Aelia Capitolina until 638 A.D. when Muslims captured the city and ironically allowed Jews to live in the city again. It was during this period of Muslim rule that the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa Mosque were built on the Temple Mount.

Jerusalem was ruled by a series of Islamic caliphates until the First Crusade in 1096-1099. Pope Urban II rallied the leaders of Europe to come to the aid of the Byzantine Emperor Alexios Komnenos who begged for help in repelling the Turks and saving Constantinople. Instead, the primary goal became the liberation of Jerusalem from the Muslims. The Crusaders were successful in expelling the Muslims from the city after a siege, but according to the Jewish Virtual Library, these European "Christians" brutally murdered Jews hiding in the city's synagogues by torching the buildings. The rest were sold into slavery.

Christian rule over Jerusalem did not last long. Saladin and Islamic military defeated the Christians in 1187. Once again, Jews were accorded more freedom under this period of Islamic rule than they had been under the Christians. Although there were more crusades from Europe, which succeeded in wresting Jerusalem from Muslim rule twice, these periods were short-lived. In 1250, the Mamluks vanquished the Crusaders once and for all. It was under the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent that the Eastern Gate on the Temple Mount, the gate the Messiah is supposed to come through, was walled up in 1541 and has stayed that way ever since (Ezekiel 44:1-4).

Muslims ruled Jerusalem and all that had once been the country of Israel from 1250 to 1917 under first the Mamluks and then the Ottomans. The Muslims did not care about Jerusalem or the land of the Jews at all. Under these two Islamic caliphates, the entire area deteriorated into a vast, barren wasteland with a declining population.

The paintings of 19th Century Scottish artist David Roberts vividly portray the bleakness and desolation of the Holy Land. Rarely can you find a tree or a bush in any of his paintings of Jerusalem or the surrounding countryside. It is as dreary and depressing place as you could ever hope to see.



Mark Twain actually visited the Holy Land in 1867 while on a trip through Europe and the Mediterranean and documented his travels in his book, *Innocents Abroad*. Twain's account of Jerusalem and other biblical cities verifies what the country looked like at that time.

“A desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds. . . a silent mournful expanse. . . [Mount Tabor] stands solitary . . . [in a] silent plain . . . a desolation . . . we never saw a human being on the whole route . . . hardly a tree or shrub anywhere. Even the olive tree and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country.”

Twain further describes the former country of Israel as “these unpeopled deserts, these rusty mounds of barrenness, that never, never do shake the glare from their harsh outlines, and fade and faint into vague perspective; that melancholy ruin of Capernaum: this stupid village of Tiberias, slumbering under its six funereal palms . . . Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes . . . desolate and unlovely.” Twain went on:

Nazareth is forlorn . . . Jericho the accursed lies a moldering ruin today, even as Joshua's miracle left it more than three thousand years ago: Bethlehem and Bethany, in their poverty and their humiliation, have nothing about them now to remind one that they once knew the high honor of the Savior's presence; the hallowed spot where the shepherds watched their flocks by night, and where the angels sang, 'Peace on earth, good will to men,' is untenanted by any living creature . . . Bethsaida and Chorzin have vanished from the earth, and the 'desert places' round about them where thousands of men once listened to the Savior's voice and ate the miraculous bread, sleep in the hush of a solitude that is inhabited only by birds of prey and skulking foxes.

THE 20TH CENTURY SEES JERUSALEM RETURNED TO THE JEWS

In the midst of this seemingly hopeless and impoverished region, an amazing thing began to happen: Jews started to return to their ancient homeland beginning in the early 1880s. A few came from Yemen but most were fleeing persecution in Russia and Eastern Europe. According to the Jewish Virtual Library, the vast majority started agriculture settlements, known as *moshavot*.

The First Aliyah settlers encountered many difficulties, including an inclement climate, disease, crippling Turkish taxation and Arab opposition. They required assistance and received scanty aid from Hibbat Zion (an early Zionist movement), and more substantial aid from Baron Edmond de Rothschild. He provided the *moshavot* with his patronage and the settlers with economic assistance, thereby averting the collapse of the settlement enterprise.

Some of the agricultural settlements failed outright. Of the 35,000 Jews who came during this first Aliyah - immigration - half left and returned to their previous countries of residence.

The struggles and failures did not deter future attempts by Jews from all over the world to try to reclaim *Eretz Israel* - the Land of Israel. Jewish immigration continued well into the 1900s, long before the modern State of Israel was established.

Theodore Herzl was the pivotal figure fueling Jewish immigration to Israel in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. After witnessing and also being the target of anti-Semitism, Herzl wrote books and articles encouraging Jews to establish their own country as the only way to fight anti-Semitism. Herzl was the driving force behind six Zionist Congresses between 1897 and 1902. This led to the creation of the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish National Fund.

Herzl is responsible for the phrase, "If you will it, it is no fairytale," which became the motto of the modern Zionist movement. He died in 1904 at the age of 44, having literally worked himself to death for the establishment of a Jewish homeland. Herzl's remains were moved from Austria to Israel in 1949 where they were reburied on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

Successors to Herzl, along with pro-Jewish evangelical Christians, worked tirelessly to convince governments of the need for a modern Jewish state but it wasn't until World War I coinciding with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire that Jews secured the promise of a Jewish state on the land that God had promised to Abraham and his descendants thousands of years ago.

Chaim Weizmann, a Russian Jewish chemist and ardent Zionist, had found his way to England by way of Germany. Weizmann was able to provide the British military with a way of producing acetone, used in weapons and ammunition, which the military desperately needed to help Great Britain win the war.

Weizmann had met British politicians Arthur Balfour and David Lloyd George some years before World War I. He was able to enlist both Balfour and George in the dream of a Jewish homeland in the Middle East.

Balfour already believed in the concept of a homeland for the Jews but favored one in Uganda, believing that there were too many problems to establish a Jewish country in the Holy Land, then under Ottoman rule. Weizmann persuaded Balfour to think otherwise.

Weizmann asked Balfour, "Would you give up London to live in Saskatchewan?" When Balfour replied that the British had "always" lived in London, Weizmann responded. "Yes, and we lived in Jerusalem when London was still a marsh."

When David Lloyd George became the prime minister of Great Britain in 1916 and appointed Balfour as foreign secretary, the stage was set. Years of diplomacy came to fruition with the Balfour Declaration issued in a letter by the British Foreign Secretary Lord James Balfour to Lord Rothschild. Following is the transcript of that historic letter:

Foreign Office

November 2, 1917

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you on behalf of His Majesty's Government the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet.

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Yours,

Arthur James Balfour

Five weeks after the Balfour Declaration was written, British General George Allenby strode into Jerusalem after his troops defeated the Turks. With the capture of Syria also from the Turks and the subsequent armistice signed with Turkey in October 1918, Great Britain gained possession of the entire Holy Land. In the next article, we will trace the city of Jerusalem from the British Mandate period to today, a span of nearly 100 years.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Carol Rushton lived in Jerusalem for eight years during the 1990s and has written many articles about Israel. She is an accomplished author and co-wrote, "The Christian Cleansing of America" with her late father, Noah Hutchings. Noah was one of the most prolific Bible Prophecy authors of the last 60 years.

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