

Mid-East e-News

An electronic journal of the Middle East, for those who want to be informed.

Issue No. 35 Texas

February 14th, 2005

<http://www.morethantourists.com>

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Welcome

So, an election in Iraq alerts us to the possibility of religious control of the country, but does not yet lead to a reduction in the violence there... A peace summit between Israel and Palestine has a high rate of acceleration – return of Jericho & other towns to PA control, return of prisoners, militants being arrested by PA security – but settlements in Gaza still suffer from mortar/rocket attacks. Is the Intifada over? What if the Palestinians are really in a mood for peace (absence of fighting)? Will that enable the true Peace to reach them and others who still have not heard the gospel?

Do we have all the answers in e-News? No, but you can read on anyway! Email your responses to pkclark@pmbx.net & check the web for back issues.

Islamic Interface – A Religious War?

In issue 27 we proposed this discussion of whether or not we are involved in a Religious War, and suggested the following topics for consideration:

A – What defines a religious war?

B – What other kind of war could it be? (e-News 31 covered some of this)

C – What is the evidence for/against it being a *religious war*? (see e-News 29 & 30)

D – How is the war seen... 1. by the West?, 2. by the opposition? , 3. by the rest of Islam?

E – What difference does it make?

We shall consider the last two topics later, but in this issue I would like to look at the issue of **what defines a religious war?** In e-News 27 we proposed these questions: *Would it be a religious war if it was fought...*

1. because the enemy is a different religion?
2. when the enemy *happens* to have a different religion?
3. when opponents can be *identified* by their religion?

to which we should now add the more direct possibilities...

4. when the goals of either party will *incidentally* impact their opponents' religious beliefs or practices?
5. when either party *intends* an influence upon their opponent's religious practices?

Perhaps we can do this – and promote your involvement – by looking back at earlier wars, and asking (a) which of the above five categories they correspond with (or none!) and (b) what type of war we would identify them as (*political, cultural, territorial, economic, of independence*).

Past wars	1-5	Type of war
1066 Norman Invasion		
1099- Crusades		
1337- Hundred Years War		
-1492 Reconquista		
1588 Spanish Armada		
1642-51 English Civil Wars		
1776 US Independence		

Past wars	1-5	Type of war
1898 Spanish-American War		
1912-13 Balkan Wars		
1931-45 Sino-Japanese War		
1939-45 WW II		
Korean War		
Vietnam War		
1990/91 Gulf War		

Perhaps you can add other conflicts which could give us more to think about? I have left space for you to do so. Write back with your suggestions, and we'll continue with this in two weeks time.

Jerusalem – Hasmonean Period

Since the period between the Old and New Testaments is not so familiar to us, our Jerusalem History will take two issues to review the historical events.

The Seleucid king Antiochus IV defeated the Egyptian Ptolemies in 169 BC. Josephus records him attacking Jerusalem while returning from Egypt (en route to Syria). The book of Maccabees, included in the Septuagint version of the Hebrew Scriptures, records:

²⁰ Now in the year 143 [= 169 BCE] after Antiochus (IV) had defeated Egypt he returned by way of Israel and went up to Jerusalem with a strong army. ²¹ And in his arrogance he entered the sanctuary. And he took the golden altar and the menorah, with all its lamps for light; ²² and the table for the bread of the presence; the cups, the bowls, the golden censers and the veil (to the holy of holies). He even stripped the cornices and golden ornament from the temple facade. ²³ And he took away the gold and silver and precious vessels. He also took all the hidden treasures he could find. ²⁴ Now taking all of this he returned to his own country [Antioch, Syria], having committed murder and spoken with great arrogance. (Septuagint, *1 Maccabees* 1:20-24)

Two years later Antiochus returned, imposing strict restrictions on Jewish worship, and threatening death to any who possessed a Torah. Destroying the Jewish holy books, Antiochus entered the temple and sacrificed a pig on the sacrificial altar.

⁴⁴ The king sent messengers to hand-deliver scrolls to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, ordering them to adopt customs foreign to the land... ⁴⁹ They were to forget the Torah and change all their observances. ⁵⁰ And whoever refused to act in accordance with the king's word was to be executed... ⁵⁴ On the 15th day of Chislev in the year 145 [6 Dec, 167 BC], the king erected **the abomination that desecrates** on the altar of burnt-offerings. And in cities around Judah they built high altars. ⁵⁵ And they sacrificed incense at the doors of houses and in the streets. ⁵⁶ Also, when they found Torah scrolls they tore them up and burnt them. ⁵⁷ And whenever someone was found with a scroll of the covenant or observing the Torah, he was put to death under the king's decree. (Septuagint, *1 Maccabees* 1:44-57)

For devout Jews who had suffered persecution, this was not something they could bear. Mattathias and his sons, Judas and Simon, led the revolt against the Seleucids. After achieving a military victory, Judas Maccabaeus recovered the Temple for the Jews, and re-established the sacrifices there. The victory is celebrated by the Jewish festival of Hanukkah. Eventually, in 140 BC, Simon had himself crowned king of the Jews – a title that had been in abeyance since the Babylonian captivity. The dynasty of the Maccabees is better known as Hasmonean, after an early ancestor.

This dynasty survived through various family conflicts, culminating in a civil



From the walls of Jerusalem, these Hasmonean tombs can be seen in the Kidron Valley.

war that brought the intervention of Rome, under the general Pompey. Antipater (father of Herod the Great) was installed as ruler by the Romans, while Hyrcanus, a Hasmonean, served as High Priest. Antipater was an Idumenean (descendant of Esau) but a convert to Judaism.

Next Issue:
Herodian Jerusalem

History of Islam

Muhammad – His message

Along with others of the period – this in the context of Christians and Jews living among the Arabs of the Hejaz – Muhammad was rejecting the pagan polytheism of his homeland. His new religion, Islam, means *submission*, and he put forward belief in one God, resurrection of believers, and a final judgement of mankind.

Muhammad's message was rejected by the leaders of Mecca, perhaps as much because he was not an educated man (he was unable to read and write) as that the Meccans were worried about the loss of income their city might suffer if the pilgrimage traffic was reduced.

It has been observed that Muhammad's teachings varied according to the intended audience. His biographers report that in an early sermon he promoted Mecca's leading deities (al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat) as being worthy of devotion, that they were able to appeal to God on behalf of mankind. These verses, the *Satanic Verses*, were later removed, Muhammad by then being convinced that they were a device of Satan's.

Muslim tradition records that Muhammad, while he still lived in Mecca, was taken by Gabriel from Mecca to Jerusalem, and from there visited the seven heavens. In the seventh heaven he is reported to have been taken into the presence of God.

This vision increased the Meccans hostility to him. On the other hand, the leaders of the city of Medina accepted his message and invited him to come there. This led to him fleeing from Mecca, having sent his followers ahead, in an event known as the *Hegira*, arriving in Medina on Sept. 24, 622. This date begins the Muslim calendar.

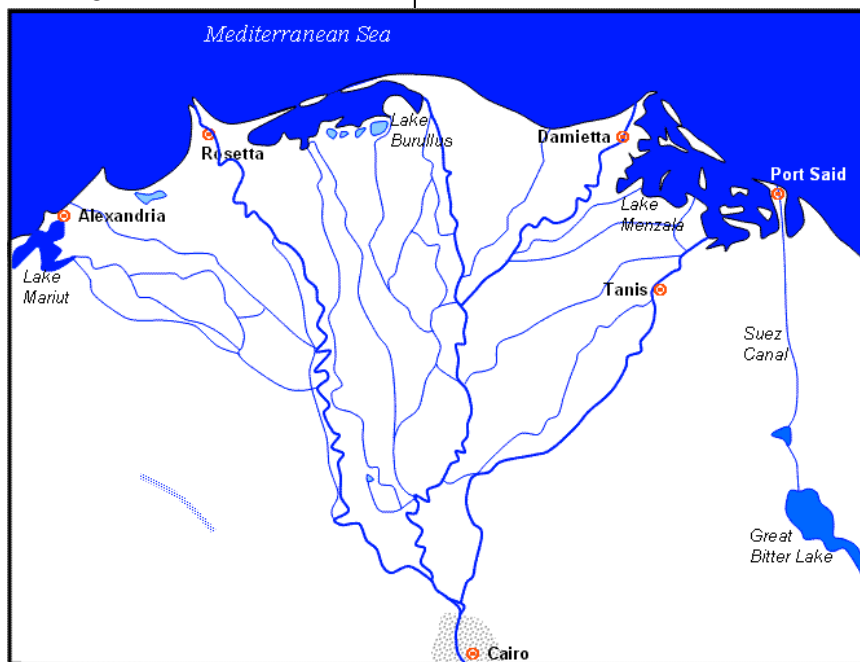
(Much of this information was obtained from: *Answering Islam*, Geisler & Saleeb, 2002)

The Fifth Crusade

Innocent III called for a renewed Crusade in 1213 to the Holy Land, but did not want it led by the European monarchs, whom he blamed for most of the failures of the previous Crusades. The Crusaders would meet at Brindisi, and each would receive a papal *indulgence*, which would also be granted to those who provided the costs for a knight to make a Crusade. They did not leave for Acre until 1217, there joining the prince of Antioch and Cyprus and John of Brienne (the 'nominal' king of Jerusalem).

The dynasty assembled by Saladin that controlled Syria, Palestine and Egypt, the Ayyubids, refused to meet the Crusaders in combat, and by 1218 many of the Crusaders were returning home. Another group, however, was arriving, and they decided to join with John of Brienne to attack the Ayyubids at Damietta, Egypt. The Sultan of Rum (in the NE Turkish corner of the Mediterranean) was supposed to assist them by creating a second front there, to give the southern force more time.

Though the tower outside Damietta was taken in August 1218, it was not until November 1219 that the city itself succumbed to the Crusaders. During this time Pelagius (sent in 1219 by the Pope to lead the Crusaders) had refused to consider peace negotiations with the Muslim leader, and Francis of Assisi had failed in his attempts to bring the two together at the bargaining table.



During the siege Francis had crossed the opposing lines of forces and approached the Muslim ruler, Kamil. It was his intention to witness to him, converting him and thereby avoiding a major conflict. It is worth noting that Kamil was not unaware of Christianity, having himself a number of advisors who were Coptic Christians.

One story relates that Francis offered to enter a fiery furnace (reminiscent of Daniel in Babylon) on condition that, if he survived, Kamil would accept Christianity. Kamil is said to have responded that "gambling with one's life is not a valid proof of one's God," but sent Francis away with many gifts.

John of Brienne returned from Acre in 1221 and in July the Crusaders marched towards Cairo. The Nile delta was, even in those days, carefully managed, with a system of controlled dykes, canals and floodgates. Sultan Al Kamil ordered the gates to be opened, and the floodwaters prevented the Crusaders from reaching the roads to Egypt.

He then surrounded the Crusaders, forced a peace from Pelagius, and saw them leave Damietta and the region, having accomplished nothing in the three years they were in the region.

During this campaign the walls of Jerusalem were demolished, to prevent the Crusaders from taking advantage of them if they should assault and conquer the city.

Insight: Elections are counter-cultural in the Middle East. Though one finds outspoken speech in the region it may be inflammatory, but it is not personal. In an argument one tries to avoid a win-lose situation, where the loser may be embarrassed. Elections run counter to this, particularly, for example, a win-lose election for President. This was one reason why Hamas chose not to present a candidate in the recent (Jan 9th) Palestinian elections. They were able to participate in the municipal elections later in the month, however, since they knew that they could expect a respectable turnout in their favor, and seats were not allocated on a winner-takes-all basis.

Many of the Sunni Arabs did not participate in the Iraq election (Jan 30th). Their leaders had prohibited it (so a 10% turnout in violence-ridden Mosul was high, given the circumstances), claiming that the whole election was invalid. One concern they have is that they will not have the power they had before (under Saddam), but to actually be seen to vote and lose that power would be a humiliation to them, so it is preferable not to vote. Calls from them to invalidate the election can be expected, as can a general willingness from the victors to be inclusive in the government. After all, a united Iraq is to everyone's benefit.

