

MID-EAST e-NEWS

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Welcome

For years now Arab children with heart defects have been successfully treated in Israeli hospitals. To achieve this is almost as difficult as the heart procedures themselves. We have featured some of these children, our first being baby Bayan (see *e-NEWS* 7). Some of the children have been able to go to the US for treatment, and last year about 40 were given free treatment at quality hospitals in India. This last month has seen another exciting move, as a group of Israeli doctors traveled to Jordan to meet their patients there, thus avoiding some of the visa complications that had been experienced when the children and their families traveled in the opposite direction. I'll let Jon's notes tell the story... Email your responses to pkclark@pmbx.net & check the web for back issues.

Israeli Doctors in Jordan

May 13th: We are on the verge of a breakthrough. On Wednesday, May 18 an Israeli medical team will travel for the first time to an Arab country to screen children for heart surgeries. Our team in Amman, Jordan is gathering 20-25 children from across Iraq to meet with the Israeli doctors. God willing some of these children will be taken immediately to Israel for surgery. Others will be sent to Germany and India. Some will return to Iraq to await an invitation.

May 17th: I'm now en route to Amman, where the first Iraqi children have already started arriving for Wednesday's screening by Israeli doctors. Please pray for them as they make the perilous journey overland through Iraq, and for their successful entry into Jordan. One family's passports were taken away at the border for collection later at the intelligence headquarters.

May 18th: We've just finished screening 25 Iraqi children in Jordan. Every single one we invited showed up, even though it meant a risk-filled and difficult journey. 11 have been referred for immediate surgeries in Israel, India, and Germany. Six more are waiting for later transfer and four need no surgery at all.

The Israeli doctors seemed relaxed and confident in Amman, and chatted freely in Hebrew in a hospital ward filled with mostly Palestinian patients. Nobody even looked twice in their direction. :-)

Tonight our whole Amman team met with each family individually in a hotel room to explain the results. Some were elated and full of thanks. Most difficult was telling four families that their children are inoperable, and unless God intervenes they must return home to die. Please pray with us for God's grace to touch the homes of Zaitun (one of the first families we visited in Iraq), Mateen, Anas, and Hussein (Shiite child pictured with his father). We spoke with each about the hope of the resurrection.

Please pray too for D__, J__, and A__, who will be hosting 11 families now in Amman while simultaneously working on visa and travel arrangements. So far we have received about \$2500 towards expenses of approximately \$8250 to help transfer them.

May 26th: Three Iraqi children are now due to fly out on Tuesday afternoon for heart surgeries in India. They are Rekar (7), Chero (2, pictured with mother); and Yahya (4).

Thank God, we've had just enough funds come in to purchase air tickets for them and their escorts, even as our volunteers in Amman are still phoning, faxing, and e-mailing between Amman, Baghdad and India for visas.

They're simultaneously doing the same thing for three children traveling to Germany, and seven to Israel, all in the next two weeks. Moreover, our Jordan coordinator D__ and his wife are housing nine of the families in their own home! "It's 20 souls all together," D__ says in good Middle Eastern parlance (both Arabs and Jews like to refer to people as souls). I praised our staff for doing the equivalent of a year's work within a few weeks;

one replied, not too unkindly, "Next time let's do a year's worth of work within a year."

They do need our prayer and support during these days. They will ask for another \$5000 for transportation for the remaining ten families, and visa fees (unless waived) will average close to \$200 per family. They're also spending \$200 a day to house and feed the families. Thank God he is always faithful, and this waiting period is allowing for meaningful discussion between them.



For more information go to www.shevet.org and click on **Newsletters**, or click on **Make a Secure Donation** to find out how you can contribute!

Jerusalem – the Second Century

After Titus' destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (see *e-NEWS* 40) Jerusalem was in ruins for a number of years. The Roman 10th Legion 'Fretensis' was permanently stationed in Jerusalem to prevent further uprisings. In AD 117, the first year of the reign of the Emperor Hadrian (see chart), a rebellion in Israel was put down by the Roman General Quietus. As a result of this he was appointed governor of the region by Hadrian. In AD 130 Hadrian visited Jerusalem and proposed to rebuild the city. The Jews were encouraged until they heard that he planned on building a temple to Jupiter on the ruined site of the Herodian Temple. Hadrian is known for having established the boundaries of the Roman Empire (notably *Hadrian's Wall*) rather than continuing with the expansionist policies of his predecessors. Other of his reforms include the prohibition of mutilation such as the castration of boys to make them eunuchs. It was in this context that tensions increased among the remaining Jews in the region, since the Jewish practice of circumcision was included in this ban.

In the early 130s Hadrian renamed the city Aelia Capitolina and began construction by 'ploughing up the temple', an event commemorated today by Jews on *Tisha B'Av*, the ninth day of the lunar month *Av*. When a portion of the new construction collapsed into the tombs of Solomon below the Jews took it as a good omen. The leader of the revolt was Simon Bar Kochba. His real name was Simon Kosiba, but Bar Kochba means 'son of the star,' and strengthened his messianic aspirations (see Numbers 24:17). The Sanhedrin was persuaded by Rabbi Akiva, a respected Jewish sage, to support the Bar Kochba uprising, and recognize him as the promised Messiah. The split between Christians and their non-believing countrymen deepened at this point, primarily because of Bar Kochba's messianic claims.

The revolt began in AD 132 and quickly spread across the country, catching the Roman legions by surprise and taking control of Jerusalem as they retreated. For nearly three years Bar Kochba was *Prince of Israel*, minting coins and establishing a civil administration over the region. Coins proclaiming the "Era of the Redemption of Israel" can still be found.

After three years the Roman General Severus (Hadrian had recalled him from Britain) pursued a scorched earth policy as he besieged the rebels. The final stand was made at Betar, a few miles west of Jerusalem, where Bar Kochba was killed along with his troops.

The consequence of this was that Hadrian permanently banned Jews from Aelia Capitolina (except for one day a year, the 9th of *Av*, when they could visit the Western Wall). Perhaps as many as a half-million Jews were killed in the course of the insurrection and its suppression by Severus. This ban remained in force until the sixth century.



Hadrian's Gate has been excavated and can now be seen beside the Damascus Gate, but 20 or more feet below.



For an impression of the layout of Jerusalem after the reconstruction begun by Hadrian we can refer to the Madaba Mosaic Map. Forming the floor of St. George's Church in Madaba, Jordan, it shows much of the Holy Land, from Galilee to Egypt. The map has been noted for its depiction of significant buildings, particularly in Jerusalem. In the next issue we shall look at what it tells us about Jerusalem during the Roman-Byzantine era.

History of Islam

Qur'an – Abrogation

As Muhammad's ministry developed, certain rulings were reversed, and one sees contradictions between earlier and later writings. This has led to the doctrine of *abrogation*, or progressive revelation, where earlier instructions are nullified by later revelations.

16:101 *If it were our will, we could take away that which we have sent thee by inspiration.*

16:101 *None of our revelations do we abrogate or cause to be forgotten but we substitute something better or similar – knowest thou not that Allah hath power over all things?*

There are multiple examples of this. The need for abrogation tends to confound those who claim that the Qur'an must be of divine origin because it has no internal contradictions (Sura 4:82).

Examples:

Who can be saved?

2:62 *Jews, Christians, Sabians are believers*

9:30 *May Allah destroy them...*

How to deal with unbelievers

43:89 *Leave the polytheists alone*

2:191 *Slay the idolators*

2:256 *Let there be no compulsion in religion; truth stands out clearly from error.*

9:73 *Prophet, make war on the unbelievers... and deal harshly with them.*

The *progressive revelation* of the Qur'an led to multiple examples of abrogated texts. The later version abrogates the earlier, but the sequence of the suras complicates this. Muslim teachers are not in total agreement over which suras are the earliest and which the most recent, and even within a sura can be found verses that were added at a later date. This complicates attempts to give a precise chronological sequence to the Qur'an (see e-NEWS 41).

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

Islamic Interface - Religious War or Civil War?

I have a review in front of me of a book* that asserts that “what is taking place now in the Muslim world is an internal conflict between Muslims... The West is merely a bystander – an unwary yet complicit casualty of a rivalry that is raging in Islam...” (Houston Chronicle, May 29, 2005). That the west may be on the periphery of a civil war amongst Muslims is something I would like to consider here.

In e-NEWS 39 we summarized the various Muslim sects. The sectarian conflict that we see in Iraq today is not just between Sunni and Shia branches of the faith, but also – and primarily – within the Sunni tradition itself.

First, let us review some news items of the last few months, for examples of Sunni-Shia conflict.

Pakistan: Attacks on Sunni and Shia mosques have occurred frequently over recent years. On Friday (5/27) 19 Shia died when an Islamabad mosque was bombed, and another bomb on Monday (5/30) in a Karachi mosque killed 5 and led to riots in the area in which another 6 died.

In March Sufi shrine was bombed and 43 people died, from a crowd of thousands of Shia and Sunni Muslims. Sufism is an emotional rite amongst Muslims, not part of mainstream Islam, but with adherents worldwide. In March '04 and July '03 suicide attacks killed more than 100 Shia. Since 1980 more than 4,000 have died in sectarian violence.

Nigeria: Two weeks ago, on May 15th, Sunni worshippers tried to prevent the minority Shia from entering the shared mosque in Sokoto, the central city for Nigerian Muslims. In April stones were thrown at a Shia procession through the town, and in February clashes between Sunni and Shia resulted in 3 deaths.

India: The large Muslim population in Lucknow has experienced frequent riots, usually over their funeral processions. In February (2/20) Sunnis and Shia clashed during a Shia procession, resulting in three deaths. India has 145 million Muslims, 13% of its population of 1.08 billion. (Also in February, Shia Muslims left the Indian Muslim legal board, citing discrimination against their traditional family law practices.)

That these have been initiated in the main by Sunnis points to a change in Sunni society that has instigated these actions. This change is an increase in activism by the Salafists (aka 'Wahhabis') who want to return Islam tradition to where it was in the first three generations after Muhammad.

It is not that radicalism does not exist among the Shia. Muqtada As Sada and his Maadi militia are evidence of Shia militancy, as was the 1979 revolution in Iran against the Pahlavi regime. In the main, however, whatever Shia militancy exists is primarily against Western influences, and (As Sadr notwithstanding) has avoided intercommunal conflict. Ayatollah Sistani's influence has generally been a non-violent pressure to influence decisions made by the coalition, and now the government, in Iraq.

Sunni militants, however, do not only attack Shia targets. The characteristic feature of Sunni militants is that they condemn *any* teaching that is not their own interpretation. For the fundamentalists of Sunni Islam, any compromise made with modern thought ('modern' being since the 1400s, if not earlier) is despised as immoral and un-Islamic.

More on this topic in the next issue.

*Reza Aslan. 2005. *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution and Future of Islam*.

