

lake in all its varied moods in hauntingly beautiful verse, and who is commemorated in a grove of trees by the lakeside through which the breeze whispers. Kibbutz Kinneret today earns its living mainly by two enterprises that are good examples of how modern-day Israel has succumbed to the spirit of the age. It runs boat trips of the lake—which sounds a very enjoyable thing to do, except that the blare of Middle Eastern pop music through loudspeakers is not very conducive to meditations about Jesus and the disciples.

Worse than this, however, is the baptismal site on the River Jordan close to where it runs out of the lake on its journey southward. When I first visited the site there were just some concrete steps leading into the river, enabling people to be baptized (I believe several Christadelphians have been baptized there) and a gift shop. On my last visit, in 1999, the whole area had been developed. A continual stream of American evangelicals were arriving by coach, were being dipped under the water and then

asked for their impressions as they came out. The kibbutz was raking in money from very expensive souvenirs sold in a huge gift shop through which everyone had to leave. It was a disturbing scene from more than one point of view: the razzmatazz of the 'baptisms'; the blatant commercialism of the place.

And so we conclude our journey round the lake, and with it our series of articles. The Sea of Galilee and the area surrounding it have many fascinating and moving associations with the ministry of our Lord, and much can be discovered there regarding the history of the Jews and their miraculous restoration to the land in modern times. We look forward to the time when all traces of false Christianity, rabbinical Judaism and modern materialism will be swept away from this lovely spot, and it becomes part of the restored Israel of the Kingdom age, in which God will be worshipped in sincerity and truth, and His Son Jesus Christ honoured as the one through whom God's great work of salvation has been achieved.

(Concluded)

The Temple Mount 'bulge'

David Burges

THE PROPHET Zechariah accurately predicted the situation which would exist in the Holy Land prior to the return of the Messiah, and which we see unfolding before us. The final conflict involving the regathered nation of Israel is to centre upon Jerusalem: "And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it" (Zech. 12:3). Thus today both the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority claim Jerusalem as their capital city, making it the most intractable barrier to a peace settlement.

The focus of the dispute over Jerusalem is undoubtedly the Temple Mount, known to the Arabs as al-Haram-al-Sharif. The walled plateau was originally constructed to support the temple of the Lord built by King Solomon (1 Kgs. 6:1ff.) and was subsequently enlarged by the Hasmonians and then by Herod the Great to its present size of fifteen hectares (nearly forty acres). The Second Temple, constructed by Herod, was

finally destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. It has been shown by Brother Leen Ritmeyer¹ that the most holy place in the temple actually stood over the rock marking the summit of Mount Moriah.

On the Temple Mount today stands the Muslim shrine known as the Dome of the Rock, constructed in the seventh century A.D. over the same summit rock to mark the place of the supposed ascent of Mohammed to heaven to receive revelations from Allah, and at the southern end the Al Aqsa Mosque. To one side of the mount is the Wailing or Western Wall, which has been made into an open-air synagogue by the Jews, but control of the Mount itself is exercised by the Palestinian Islamic authorities, known as the Waqf. The Israeli Government has refrained from

1. "The temple and the ark of the covenant", *The Testimony*, Feb. 1996, pp. 63ff.; "The ark of the covenant: where it stood in Solomon's Temple", *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Jan./Feb. 1996, pp. 46ff.

interfering with this arrangement, even after taking control of the city in the Six-Day War of 1967.

The southern wall bulge

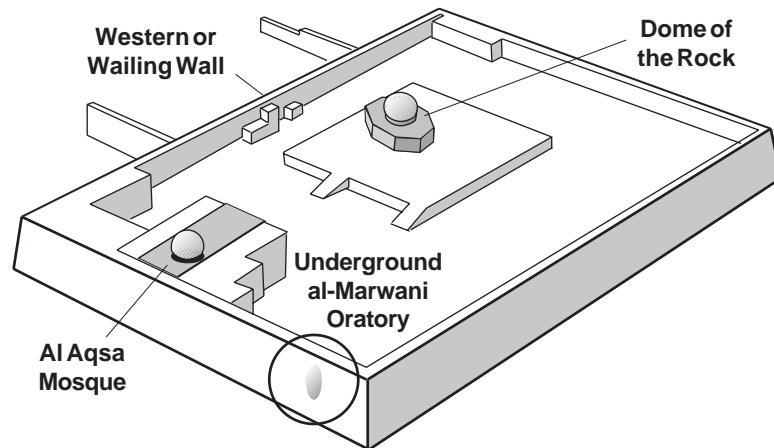
Over recent years a large bulge has appeared on the southern wall of the Temple Mount, measuring roughly thirty-three metres (about 110 feet) long and eleven metres (thirty-six feet) high, and projecting by around forty centimetres (about fifteen inches) from the wall. This has led to a bitter dispute between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities as to its cause and possible remedies. There were fears of riots last year when engineers of the Israeli Antiquities Authority (IAA) warned that the bulge had increased by five millimetres in the previous year and could collapse. With hundreds of thousands of Muslim worshippers visiting the site for Ramadan last November, a disaster was feared.

On the other side of the bulging wall is a structure known, inaccurately, as Solomon's Stables, and now the site of a recently created second, underground, mosque, the al-Marwani Oratory. The Waqf has extended this underground area by illegally removing large amounts of spoil and tipping it into the Kidron Valley below. Some Israeli engineers attribute the growth of the bulge to this activity, whilst the Palestinians in turn blame Israeli archaeological excavations outside the southern wall. Israeli concern over the growth of the bulge was viewed by the Waqf engineers as a cover to gain control of the Mount. In fact the bulge is mentioned in a document from as long ago as 1974, although it is not clear how big it was then.

After more than a year of political wrangling, the two sides reached a compromise involving an impartial investigation by a team of engineers from Jordan,² which commenced in October 2002. To find the cause of the problem the team took five core samples straight through the two-metre thick walls, at points in and around the bulge. The Herodian walls employ a common construction pattern from the period, having two layers of carefully cut limestone blocks (known as ash-lars) with a filling of debris and lime-based mortar in between. Such walls are known to deteriorate from repeated cycles of heating and

cooling, which cause the outer layers to expand and contract more than the core mortar, stressing and breaking the bond between them.

However, the engineers also discovered a more serious problem, in the form of voids of up to forty centimetres where the lime filling was missing altogether. The most likely cause of such voids is water seeping into the wall and washing



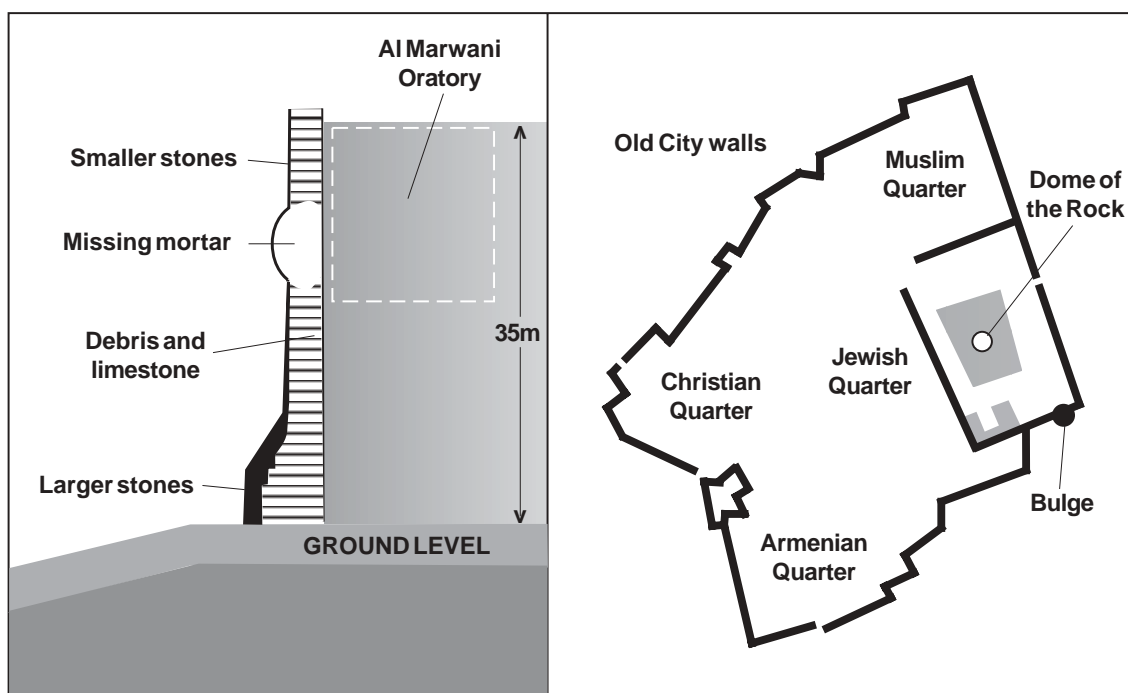
the lime away. Centuries of similar water damage to the Roman walls of the city of Pergamon caused the collapse of hundreds of square metres of a twelve-metre- (about forty feet) high wall in the early 1990s.

The Jordanian engineers consider that a collapse of the bulge in the outer wall would not necessarily lead to a major disaster, but Israeli engineers fear that intact mortar binding the outer and inner walls might pull out the floor or roof of the al-Marwani Oratory. The cause of the water infiltration is also unclear, and work is planned to divert water falling on the roof into drainage pipes.

A temporary solution

The solution to the voids, recommended by the Jordanian team and agreed by both sides, was to fill them with a quick-setting cement-based grout. Over the course of twelve days in January, nine tons of this concrete grout was injected behind the bulge. Subsequently the stones of the outer wall were removed and replaced with thinner limestone tiles, effectively flattening the bulge. Some conservation experts are seriously con-

2. Eli Kintisch, "Holy Stones", *New Scientist*, 26 April 2003, p. 42.



cerned that this 'quick fix' will lead to more problems in the future; concrete contains high concentrations of soluble salts which can leach out and damage the stones lower down the wall. They would have preferred a lime-based mortar compatible with the ancient filling. However, Israeli officials and the Waqf are so far satisfied with the work and relieved that the immediate danger seems to be past.

The strife over the bulge, and the preference for a quick and easy solution with the potential for future disaster, seems to be an obvious metaphor for the whole situation in the land of prom-

ise. God's prophet has foretold that all efforts at peace based upon man's politics are doomed to failure. It is only the coming of the Prince of Peace that can resolve the strife between nations and establish righteousness and justice for all. And at that time the present flawed and decaying structures of the Temple Mount will be replaced by a new and glorious temple: "And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles" (Zech. 14:16).

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