



Meditation....Conflict in The Holy Land

One could not help but feel a deep sense of sadness at the recent outbreak of violence in the middle-east. Yes, a truce of sorts is now in place, but it is inevitable that it will be short-lived. The two sides just cannot seem to reconcile their differences. That part of the world is no stranger to violence, and while the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) isn't necessarily a totally accurate record of early history, we get a pretty good idea of the violence, barbaric at times, that prevailed in those days.

In his book "Christianity; The First Three Thousand Years," Diarmaid McCulloch" notes that in its "very remote past," this land was called Canaan, but "its later turbulent history left it with two names, Israel and Palestine, both which are in use today, and both of which carry a heavy weight of emotion and contested identity."

There are three monotheistic religions to whom this land, along with the city of Jerusalem, is revered; "Christians have their own name for Palestine or Israel: they call it the Holy Land, because Jesus Christ was born and died here." "For one people, the Jews, the land is the Promised Land, granted to them in the solemn pronouncements made by God to a succession of their forefathers" and "it is the setting for one of the most ancient and revered shrines of Islam, built on the site of the Temple which long before had been the centre of Jewish worship." "So, Jerusalem is resonant for all three linked monotheistic faiths, often with tragic consequences," as we have seen in the previous weeks.

It is sometimes difficult to figure out who the bad guys are in the conflict. The Israeli response to attacks from Palestinians has always been disproportionate, and tragically, although they do give advance warning of intended targets, many innocent non-combatants, women and children, were killed, with many homes destroyed in the most recent conflict. Extremists on the Palestinian side, such as Hamas, Al-Qaeda, IS, and Hezbollah have often tried to make it look like a religious war, and their response is often crude and totally indiscriminate, e.g., the 9/11 attacks.

Since the 1947 United Nations partition plan that split Palestine into two, with 52 per cent going to the Jewish State of Israel, and the balance, including the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank (see map) going to the Palestinians, it has been a steady litany of full-out wars, terrorist attacks, smaller skirmishes, occupation, and oppression, always with innocent women and children caught in the

middle. For the most part, western nations have thrown their support behind the Israelis, although a few countries, Canada in particular, have at least tried for more of a more balanced response. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are like him, renegade Jews, and I would expect much of our sympathy lies with the Jewish state, but as followers of Jesus Christ, our hearts and our prayers should be with the innocent men, women and children of both sides, and we should support a once and forever peaceful solution to this conflict.

The Israeli-Palestinian affair has been a seemingly never-ending, tragic conflict, with a sickening cost of innocent life. I have included a chronology of some of the highlights of political and military events over the years. You may or may not wish to read it....

In 1947 the United Nations voted to partition British-ruled Palestine into two states -- one Arab and one Jewish. It made Jerusalem, sacred to the three Abrahamic religions and claimed by both sides as their capital, an international zone.

Almost immediately, fighting broke out that would eventually see more than half the Palestinian population -- 760,000 people -- fleeing or being expelled from what was to become Israel.

As the British mandate ended in 1948, Israel declared statehood.

The next day its Arab neighbours declared war. The conflict ended with Israel controlling 78 per cent of mandate Palestine.

In the so-called Six-Day War of 1967, Israel occupied both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

It also occupied and later annexed east Jerusalem, which contains many of the sites holiest to Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

WEST BANK

By far the larger of the two Palestinian territories, the West Bank covers 5,655 square kilometres and is sandwiched between Israel and Jordan.

It has been occupied by the Israeli army for the past five decades.

The Palestinian Authority, headed by Mahmud Abbas, has limited powers over just 40 per cent of the territory, mainly urban centres.

Israel, which controls all the entry points, administers 60 percent of the territory including its Jewish settlements, as well as its vital water resources.

Israel has also erected a security barrier partly following its armistice line with the West Bank but also cutting deep into the territory.

About 400,000 Israelis live in the West Bank, alongside 2.7 million Palestinians.

EAST JERUSALEM

The sparks for the current crisis were clashes at the flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound and a years-long bid by Jewish settlers to take over homes Palestinians say are theirs.

The status of Jerusalem is possibly the most sensitive issue of the whole conflict.

After capturing it in 1967, Israel annexed east Jerusalem, including the Old City, in a move never recognised by the international community.

Israel views the whole city as its capital: a stance backed by former U.S. president Donald Trump, who moved Washington's embassy there.

Palestinians want East Jerusalem as the capital of their own future state.

The Old City, a UNESCO World Heritage site, includes the golden Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa mosque compound, Islam's third holiest site.

This lies directly above the Western Wall, the holiest place where Jews are allowed to pray, a short walk from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where Christians believe Jesus was crucified and buried.

More than 200,000 Israelis live in east Jerusalem, alongside around 300,000 Palestinians.

GAZA STRIP

This strip of territory bordering Israel sits on the Mediterranean Sea, and also shares a border with Egypt.

It is one of the world's most densely populated areas, with some two million people squeezed into a strip just 41 kilometres long and at one point less than six kilometres across.

After occupying Gaza for 38 years, Israel unilaterally withdrew in 2005, but soon afterwards imposed a stifling land, air and sea blockade.

Islamist movement Hamas, which won Palestinian elections in 2006, seized the territory from the Palestinian Authority the following year.

Israel, which like most western governments considers Hamas a terrorist organisation, has carried out three full-scale military offensives against Gaza since 2008.

Around half of the population is out of work, two thirds of them young people, according to the World Bank. More than two thirds of the population depends on humanitarian aid.

Half of Gaza's residents live below the internationally recognised poverty line.