

## Peace in Israel

By Jamie Buckingham

**T**he night before I left Jerusalem there was a riot on the Temple Mount. Fifteen thousand Moslems had gathered inside the 40-acre area surrounding the Mosque of Omar, the huge golden dome which dominates the Jerusalem skyline.

The *mufti*, or Moslem priest, had just finished a hate-filled sermon, calling on all Arab Palestinians to join the *intifada* (Arab word for uprising) and drive the Jews out of the "occupied territories."

Most of the Palestinians who attended the service were not interested in fighting the Israelis. Despite hardships, they know they are thousands of times better off than they were under Arab rule. They returned to their homes peacefully. However, a group of about 300 young people, ranging in age from 10 to 20, stayed behind, chanting Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) slogans. As darkness fell over the Holy City they picked up rocks—some as big as grapefruit—and began throwing them across the backside of the Western Wall, the Wailing Wall, at peaceful Jewish worshippers.

The Temple Mount police—blue-uniformed Arabs—moved in. Suddenly the youths turned on the police, calling them traitors and Jew-lovers. One young policeman, surrounded by crazed Moslem teenagers, panicked. He fired his gun into the air. Instantly he was struck with a barrage of stones and knocked to the ground, bleeding and unconscious. The children mercilessly kicked his body, trying to bash his head with stones. The other policemen moved in, firing their guns—loaded with rubber bullets—and throwing tear gas canisters. When it was over, 30 Arab youths had been wounded and seven policemen were hospitalized.

While all this was going on, American and European TV cameramen—who had been notified earlier of the planned demonstration—filmed merrily away. When the 30-second stories hit the morning news the next day, they showed Israeli policemen shooting Arab children and hitting them with clubs. No mention was made of the PLO instigators, the *mufti's* sermon, or the fact that the



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policemen were not Jews but Arabs.

Nor was any mention made that the PLO had forced the Arab merchants in Jerusalem and in Bethlehem to close their shops every afternoon to protest Jewish rule of Israel. Since most Jews do not shop in Arab stores, preferring the kosher Jewish shops, the only ones hurt by the strike are the poor Arabs.

I visited an Arab shop in Jerusalem where I had been many times before. The night before, it had been burned out by the PLO—in retaliation for the owner having sold merchandise to tourists on a strike day.

The problem in Israel is not between Jew and Arab. It is between freedom-lovers (Arabs, Jews and Christians) and the PLO, which is backed by Moslem fanatics.

Yet while these isolated instances do occur, the rest of the nation is at peace—another item never reported by the media. Only in the eyes of the press is Israel a war zone. TV sound bites of Israeli soldiers beating Arabs have turned world opinion, including the opinion of many American Jews, against Israel.

There is no easy solution. Arabs in Bethlehem, which is virtually shut down, blame the Jews because there are 15,000 Arab college graduates in the area working at menial jobs. What they do not point out is 20 years ago—under Arab rule—there was no problem. Why? Because there were no colleges. The Israelis who "occupy" the territory have built a num-

ber of universities for Arabs. However, Moslem fanatics have prevented the Arabs from building industry to provide jobs. Instead the PLO is constantly calling strikes, intimidating Arab merchants and pulling Arab children out of school to teach them to hate. If only half the Arab oil money spent to supply guns to the PLO was used to build industry in the West Bank, Israeli Arabs would be the most prosperous people on earth.

It's a crazy mentality.

I traveled more than 2,500 miles during my 16-day stay—covering the nation. In the Galilee area I stayed on a kibbutz, and I traveled into the Golan Heights and through the high mountains of northern Israel. From there I went to the Dead Sea region, Eilat, and did some mountain climbing in the southern Negev desert. My last days were spent in Jerusalem. At no time did I sense danger. The nation, except for the few hot spots (which are "contained" by the Israeli army), is peaceful—and prospering.

I was there for two reasons. First, to tape more than 50 "on location" video devotionals. My nine-member camera crew accompanied me in a minibus.

Second, I was checking out the sites I will walk in September when I lead a hiking/teaching tour to out-of-the-way places. I love Israel but will never be satisfied seeing it from a tour bus. The only thing that satisfies is to touch the soil—walk the land. (If you're interested in the tour contact CBU Tours, P.O. Box 1000, Montreat, NC 28757.)

Israel remains the land of promise, but only God can bring peace.

One afternoon I prayed at the Wailing Wall. The cracks between the stones were filled with slips of paper where people had stuffed written prayers. I removed one and read it. "May the wonderful people of this troubled land, Jew and Arab, find the Messiah—Jesus."

I returned it to its place with an "Amen."

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem... May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels" (Ps. 122:6,7). ■