

## BRIEFING/MIDDLE EAST

## Third temple a dream of future for some Jews

## Israel dismisses construction on holy Muslim site

By Julia Duin  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

JERUSALEM — Anyone wandering about the Jewish Quarter here comes across a startling poster displayed in various gift shops: a photo of modern-day Jerusalem with all the Muslim holy sites excised.

The shrines — the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa mosque — have been on the Temple Mount along the eastern wall of the Old City for 1,300 years. Replacing them in the doctored aerial view is a "third temple" built on the site of Herod's temple. Razed by the Romans in 70 A.D., it replaced the first temple — Solomon's, which was destroyed in the 6th century B.C.

In the poster, the new, white marble temple is surrounded by courtyards. One shop, Levi's Gift World, sells the posters for a few dollars. A sign reads: "Buy now before the Temple is rebuilt and prices go up."

For many people, a third Jewish temple ranks on the same level as the lost continent of Atlantis: wildly improbable and almost certainly the stuff of legend. But for the devout, the 35-acre Temple Mount on Jerusalem's eastern edge is the world's most hotly debated piece of real estate, from where some Jews and many Christians believe the Messiah will someday reign.

## 'Center of universe'

"This place has been sanctified by God from the beginning of time," said Rabbi Chaim Richman of the Temple Institute. "The foundation stone underneath the Dome of the Rock was the center of the universe. Here Jacob laid his head. Here Abraham tried to sacrifice Isaac. The heart of the Garden of Eden is here. Adam's altar was located here."

To this day, Jews do not walk on the site because the Holy of Holies — the temple's inner sanctum — was there. Only the high priest was allowed inside and the profane were not allowed near it. Because no one is sure where the Holy of Holies was located, Jewish law bans the faithful from the area, lest anyone should accidentally step on the spot.

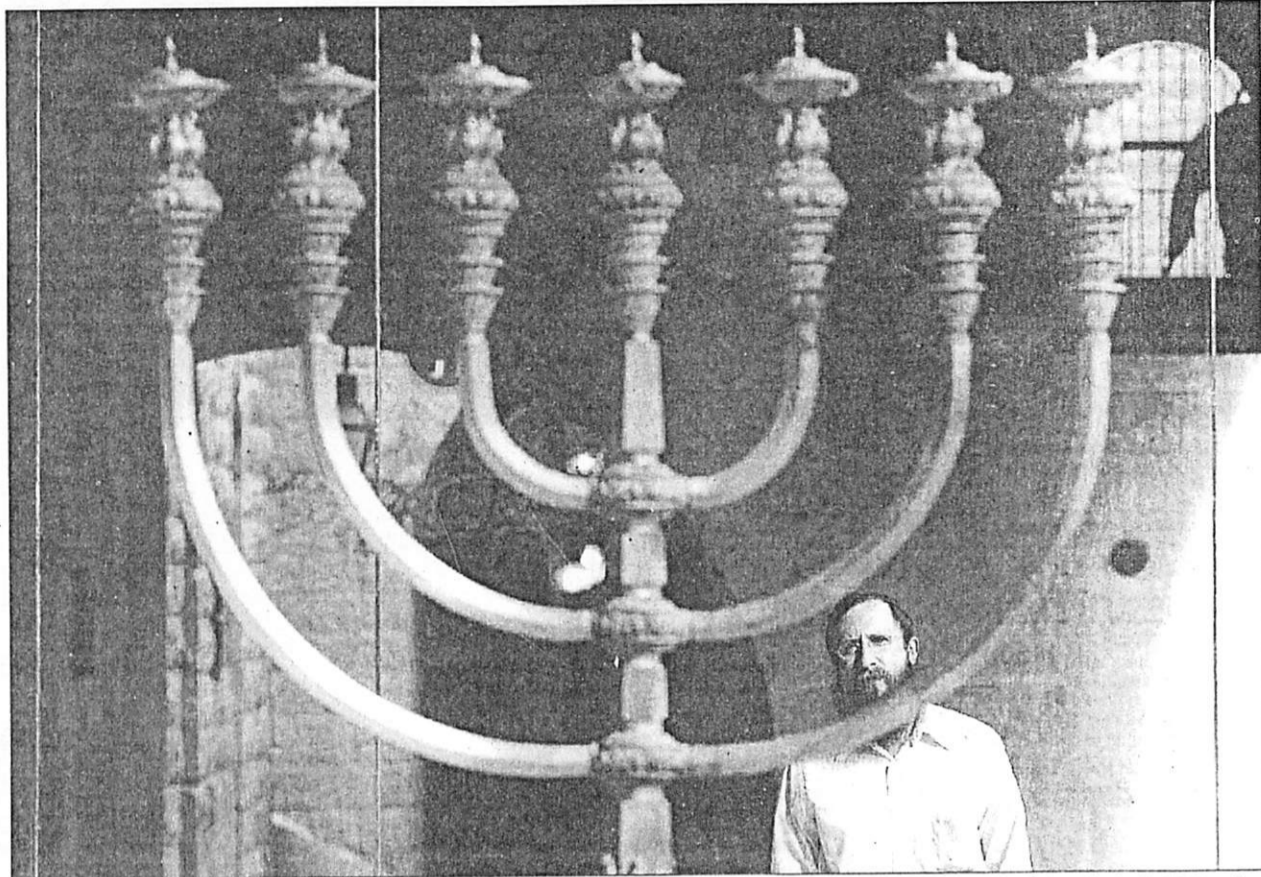
Muslims believe the site marks the spot from which the prophet Mohammed ascended to heaven from a large rock — hence the name Dome of the Rock, for the golden dome that covers a rocky area the size of an Olympic-sized pool. Islamic tradition says the prophet's footprint is embedded there, along with the handprint of the angel Gabriel.

Although Israeli soldiers guard the Mount, a Muslim political-religious trust called the Waqf administers the area. It allows non-Muslims there for very limited amounts of time — mainly early mornings — and forbids Christians and Jews to pray there. The Waqf has been accused of destroying artifacts from pre-Islamic times.

## Christians also interested

As for Christians, they believe the entire area was much loved by Jesus, who frequented its precincts 2,000 years ago. The New Testament (Matthew 24:15) suggests a third temple must be in place before the Second Coming.

Barbara Ledeen, executive director of the Independent Women's Forum, a Washington-based neo-conservative women's organization, remembers being a staff writer at the Biblical Archeology



Rabbi Chaim Richman of the Temple Institute stands beside a glass case protecting a gold menorah in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City. Photos by Kenneth Lambert/The Washington Times

Review when the magazine published an article in the early 1980s about the location of the Holy of Holies. What astonished her were the calls from Christian readers.

"I was amazed Christians were remotely interested," she says. She and her husband, Michael, ended up writing more on the matter in a 1984 article in the New Republic.

"What's happening is there's a fight for position around the Temple Mount," she said. "Jews have been buying up property from the Arabs so their access to the Temple won't be blocked. The tinderbox is right there. In order to understand what the fight for Jerusalem is all about, you have to understand the Temple Mount."

"The secular Jews aren't reliable about it, either," said Mrs. Ledeen, who attends a conservative synagogue in Chevy Chase. "[Former Israeli Defense Minister] Moshe Dayan took control of the Temple Mount during the [1967 Middle East] war, but gave it to the Waqf because he's a secular Jew. He didn't want to deal with it."

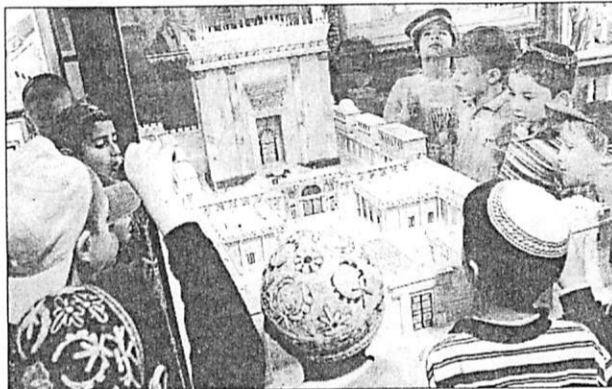
## Earlier temples destroyed

The first Jewish temple was destroyed by the Babylonians on the ninth day of the Jewish month of Av, which works out to Aug. 10, 586 B.C. It was partly rebuilt by Jews from Babylon 70 years later, starting in 516 B.C.

Another more resplendent version was built by King Herod starting in 22 B.C. Built by 10,000 laborers over a 46-year period, this temple was known for its magnificent white-marble walls and gold and silver-plated exterior. The glittering vision inspired worshippers arriving for the three major feasts of Passover (Pesach), Pentecost (Shavuot) and Tabernacles (Sukkot).

Herod's temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., again on Aug. 10, and only one wall, the famous "Wailing Wall" remains. It was renamed the "Western Wall" in 1967 when Israel seized the city, it being the closest structure to the west end of the Holy of Holies.

Every August, a two-day holiday, Tisha b'Av, marks the destruction of the temple.



Boys from the Israeli city of Efrat study a model of the second temple, which once stood on the Temple Mount. A Muslim trust runs the area.

There have been attempts to occupy the site by force, including several attempts in the early 1980s by extremist Jews planning to blow up the Dome of the Rock or assault the Mount itself. Followers of Islam say a Jewish takeover of the site would provoke a jihad (holy war) from the world's Muslims.

## Israelis 'Judaize the city'

"Attempts have taken place," said Khalid Turaani, executive director of American Muslims for Jerusalem. "This is consistent with an official Israeli policy to Judaize the city. Native Christians and Muslims have become tourists in their own city."

"Without a temple, Palestinians and Christians are subjected to humiliation by the Israelis. What will happen if they build a temple?" Mr. Turaani asked.

Several activist groups in Jerusalem are ready to spring into action should a third temple be built. These include yeshivas said to be preparing boys for positions as future temple priests. People with the tribal priestly surname of Cohen and its derivatives — who live in Israel and could be called upon to do temple service, are said to be maintained on secret databases.

Others, such as the House of

Harrari, a harp-making shop just west of the Old City, makes cypress, rosewood, walnut, maple and cherry instruments for temple worship. Micah Harrari, who owns the business with his wife, Shoshanna, is a descendent of the Levites, the tribe responsible for music in the temple.

There are also efforts to breed red heifers in Israel, so they can be sacrificed and their ashes used to sprinkle the high priest in preparation for temple service. As the shedding of blood is associated with the remission of sin in the Torah — the first five books of the Old Testament — the restoration of animal sacrifices in a properly consecrated third temple is crucial to some Orthodox Jews.

## Activists held 'fringe'

The official Israeli government policy is: No future temple is in the offing.

"They're fringe," Yaakov Levy, the Israeli government's deputy director for public affairs, said of temple-oriented groups. "They are not mainstream. The Israeli public is not making preparations for a third temple in the near future."

Although things have been relatively quiet on the Temple Mount for the past decade, plenty goes on underneath the radar. A Web site, www.templemount.org, details

everything from the site's history to prophecies of a third and even a fourth temple.

In the Cardo, a shopping center in the Jewish Quarter, the Temple Institute has placed a giant, 90-pound gold menorah. The menorah, said Rabbi Richman, is the first of its kind to be built since the destruction of the Second Temple.

The American-born rabbi, wearing a black yarmulke and wire-rimmed glasses, has devoted his life to educating the world about a third temple from the institute's Jewish Quarter showroom at 24 Misgav Ladach St. Three rooms are filled with huge canvases of scenes from a future third temple.

"Of the 613 commandments in the Torah, 113 of them depend on the existence of a Jewish temple," he said. "We have not received a cancellation order for any of the commandments issued at Mount Sinai."

He insists that his organization has no connection with groups that would seize the Mount by violent means.

## Rabbi rejects violence

"People assume those who are interested in the Temple are radical elements opposed to peace," he said. "It's the hallmark of the greatest era known to man, so it can't come through aggression."

Of the 93 vessels described in the Bible, half have been recreated by the institute and are displayed behind glass cases. Some items remain mysterious.

Things were done on a grand scale in previous temples. As many as 120 harpists and trumpeters were employed to lead daily worship. The offerings were made in enormous rooms with ceilings 40 to 50 feet high. Men in turbans, red belts and white robes presided over a multitude of sacrifices.

But the paintings at the Temple Institute do not show the vast amount of plumbing needed to wash away all the blood from the sacrifices, nor are priests shown with bloodstained garments. And there are no women in these pictures, save in the outermost courts.