

Josephus' Chronology and Other Things

Commentary for October 13, 2006 — David's Tomb, Palestinian State

We had a great and positive response to my article "[The Location and Future Discovery of King David's Tomb](#)." However, some noted a difficulty with the chronology of Josephus and have asked about it. Here is the relevant text:

[*Sepulchers of David in Josephus*

Josephus tells of an event that took place 1,300 years after David, during the reign of John Hyrcanus, King of Judah, son and heir of Simon the Hasmonean. Hyrcanus **"opened one room of David's sepulchre, and took out three thousand talents"** (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 7:393).]

The text of Josephus was wrong about John Hyrcanus entering the tomb 1,300 years after King David. There is some question about whether Josephus wrote that information, or whether that was a copy error.

Note what translator William Whiston wrote in an essay "Dissertation 5: Upon the Chronology of Josephus" in the back of *The Works of Josephus, Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, trans. by William Whiston, New Updated Edition (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1987 [1736]) p. 860:

"Thus also, Antiq. [book] 7 at the end, we have, in our present copies, 1300 years from David's burial to Hyrcanus's opening his sepulchre; and so Freculphus read this number in the 9th century. And yet Josephus's own larger chronology will allow no more than 980, or at most, in a round number, 1000 years.

These, and perhaps some few other numbers which I may have overlooked, seem to me too grossly erroneous, and too contrary to the known chronology of Josephus, to be supposed derived from himself; and accordingly I ascribe them all to the transcribers, correctors, or corrupters since his time."

There are two possibilities. Either there is a transcription or copy error in the text (as Whiston contends), or Josephus made a gross mistake and contradicted his own chronology throughout his two historical books of *The Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Wars of the Jews*. The important point is that an historical event involving David's sepulcher took place during the time of Hyrcanus.

The writings of Josephus are usually historically valid, reliable, and authoritative, especially regarding events he was witness to himself. Further, as in the case of the Hyrcanus passage of *Antiquities* 7.391, Josephus used historical sources.

However, Josephus' works in no way compare to the validity of the Holy Scriptures.

H. St. J. Thackeray in his translation of *Antiquities* (made some 200+ years after Whiston's translation) makes this comment about this passage:

"The siege of Jerusalem, here referred to, took place in 135/134 B.C. Josephus thus places David's death in 1435 B.C., which is almost 500 years earlier than the generally accepted date (c. 970 B.C.)."

(In Thackeray, transl., *Josephus with an English Translation*, vol. V, *Jewish Antiquities*, Books V-VIII [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967], p. 569.) It is clear, then, that this error in the text of Josephus' *Antiquities* is well known to translators and scholars.

The important information is that Josephus tells us that John Hyrcanus entered into the sepulcher chambers of David. The sepulchers were real at the time of John Hyrcanus. Their location was known to John Hyrcanus, and later to King Herod. The sepulchers were real and known to the apostle Peter, and later to Rabbi Akiba after the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem.

However, in order to avoid confusion, I shall delete the words **"1,300 years after David"** from my article on the ASK website in the near future.

Palestinian Civil War?

On August 12, 2005 I wrote an article titled "[Civil Wars](#)" in which I set forth evidence and various scenarios of possible unrest and civil strife within various Middle East nations that could lead to civil war. One of the countries I listed was Palestine, currently split into two areas of occupation, one small portion is along the Gaza Strip on the Mediterranean coast, while the other larger portion is west of the Jordan River close to Jerusalem (see the map below from the BBC website at the article on "[Israel/Palestine](#)"). The West Bank and Gaza are separated at their closest point by only 28 miles.



More information is coming forth about civil unrest among the Palestinian people. In an October 11, 2006 Reuters News Service article titled "[Rival](#)

[Fiefdoms Eclipsing Dream of Palestinian State](#),” the current situation is described in which two powerful Palestinian political factions are building up their armed forces. Civil war appears to be an increasing possibility. The Hamas Party holds primacy in the Gaza Strip and Fatah holds primary power in the West Bank.

Politically, such split national states are inherently unstable and not viable. **Historically**, national states or peoples with divided territories never had a long-term existence. **Prophetically**, a split-state Palestine will not have a long existence. As the Reuters news article notes:

“The result, political scientists say, is the emergence of two increasingly antagonistic and well-armed ‘fiefdoms’ with competing ideological, social and political visions.”

These two areas and factions could very well fight and compete against each other in a struggle for power and dominance, each led by a faction, both unfriendly to Israel. In fact, Hamas promotes the destruction of Israel as a nation. The power struggle could lead to a complete break between the two factions and territories:

“It is a very feasible possibility that Gaza becomes a Hamas state and the West Bank a Fatah state,’ said Mordechai Kedar, a lecturer in Arab affairs at Israel’s Bar-Ilan university. ...

‘There would be two separate entities wanting to be Palestinian states ... I don’t see the West Bank going all the way to civil war, but that might well happen in Gaza,’ he said.”

Everyone hopes that civil war can be avoided in the Palestinian territories, but events appear to be heading in that direction. Abdel Jawad, a Palestinian political scientist hesitates in his opinion:

“Civil war? I don’t know. I would not call it civil war,’ he said. ‘But we will go to bloodshed, yes.”

Bible prophecies indicate there will be a Palestinian state, but it will largely be contiguous and unified by virtue of it being given additional territory along the Mediterranean coastline, land given by Israel likely in exchange for West Bank territory. See Dr. Martin’s seminal article, [“The Prophesied State of Palestine”](#) where a “snapshot” of the Middle East in the future is presented, based on Psalm 83 and other prophecies of the Bible, just before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ back to this earth.

Let us hope and pray that civil war can be avoided in Palestine, in Israel, in Lebanon, in Iraq, and in all countries of the Middle East. Let us hope and pray that the borders are redrawn as God intends with a minimum of bloodshed, economic dislocation, strife, and destruction. Peace in the Middle East will be a great benefit to all the peoples of the region. The creativity (and greatness) of all the nationalities of the Middle East is just waiting to come forth. Each nationality and people has a tremendous gift to give the rest of the world.

A resolution for the current situation for the Palestinian territories will be that at some time in the future Palestinians living in the West Bank will either move to the Palestinian Mediterranean territory (which will expand to include Israeli cities along the coast), or they will content themselves to live under Israeli rule.

At present, living conditions are simply horrible for all Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as the internal political situation worsens. Watch the Middle East, and particularly watch the countries around Israel. Even more, be watchful of happenings in Jerusalem and the area around the City of David. God's will shall prevail in international affairs:

“Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he takes up the isles as a very little thing. ...

All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him as less than nothing, and vanity.”

• *Isaiah 40:15, 17*

This includes all nations, even the greatest, even the United States and China. God loves the individuals within the world's nations, but as powers and corporate entities, **“all nations ... are as nothing”** before God and His power.

God will have His way with the nations. The nations shall do as He wishes in fulfillment of His purpose and as He directs His representatives (including Satan the Devil) to fulfill His prophecies, whether willingly or unwillingly. Many, if not most, of the thrones, dominions, principalities, powers, rulers of darkness, and spiritually wicked beings (Romans 8:38–39; Ephesians 3:10–11, 6:12; Colossians 1:16) actively oppose God while they fulfill His will, knowingly or unknowingly — just like the nations of the world.

Housekeeping

As you noticed when you clicked on this Commentary, it opens as an Adobe Acrobat PDF document, which is different from the usual format.

This format gives me greater flexibility in composition, allowing the addition of graphics, maps, charts, text in side-by-side columns, tables, and other elements that will be useful from time to time. My purpose is to clarify the arguments and analysis, but more importantly, to highlight, explain, and make the Scriptures as open and understandable as possible.

Dr. Martin's great gift was to make Scriptures clear. To the extent I can make his work and the Scriptures even more clear by typesetting techniques, then it will be useful to us all.

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