



## From Israel

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### **Sabbatical Year Stamp**

An ancient ceramic bread stamp has been found in a dig at Castra, near Haifa. The stamp is clearly marked in reverse with the Hebrew letters “Shin,” “Bet,” “Ayin,” “Yud,” and “Taf,” denoting Shvi’it (Seventh), for marking loaves during a sabbatical year. Excavators were particularly excited with the find since it is the only stamp of its kind found, and 2000 was itself a sabbatical year. Haifa’s Chief Rabbi used the stamp on 24 December, during Hanukkah, to mark a loaf of bread.

### **Temple Mount Stone Recovered**

Part of the gate to the Temple has been recovered from debris dumped in the Kidron Valley. Part of a carved marble lintel was identified along with other artifacts dating from the Second Temple era found last January after the Wakf (Islamic Council) dug under the Temple Mount to make a new entrance to an underground mosque. The lintel has been in the Antiquities Authority’s headquarters in Jerusalem’s Rockefeller Museum pending release of a report authenticating the find. Unfortunately, because the stone had been removed without recording the exact location of its position, it was difficult

to verify to which part of the Temple the stone had belonged.

### **Expansion of Staircase on Temple Mount**

Work continues on the Temple Mount with the expansion of a staircase towards the eastern wall. Instead of a proposed exit, archways forming the main entrance have been constructed, causing serious archaeological damage to an area dating to the sixth century including the Islamic period. The construction (some would say destruction) work on the Temple Mount being carried out by Wakf (Islamic Council) authorities has finally resulted in UNESCO’s sending a special envoy to Jerusalem by Israel’s invitation. The envoy is to investigate what is actually being taken off the Mount in the trucks filled with debris removed from the site. Grave concerns are held, especially by archaeologists, that important artifacts are being destroyed. Since the latest outbreaks of violence, archaeologists have been refused access to the site to supervise activities. Only Moslems are now allowed to visit the Mount.

### **Distortion of Islam**

The secretary-general of the Italian Moslem Association, a Sunni

sheikh, has charged the Palestinian-appointed mufti of Jerusalem with using religion for a political goal in a way that distorts the history of Islam. He points out that by denying Judaism’s connection to Jerusalem, the Palestinian Authority mufti is negating Islamic history as well.

### **Cardinal Greet Chief Rabbi**

The President of the Pontifical Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews, Cardinal Edward Cassidy, greeted Chief Rabbi Yisrael Lau on March 12, 2001. Cardinal Cassidy was in Jerusalem to give a lecture on “The Future of Jewish-Christian Relations in the Light of the Visit of the Pope to the Holy Land.”

### **Two Christian Conferences in Jerusalem**

Approximately 300 mostly evangelical Christians representing more than twenty countries attended the International Christian Embassy for the Fourth International Christian Congress on Biblical Zionism in February 2001. PM-elect Ariel Sharon, Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert and former PM Binyamin Netanyahu spoke. A visit to Yad Vashem and a prayer vigil at the Haas Promenade over-

looking the Temple Mount were planned. After the congress, participants toured communities in Judea and Samaria. Executive Director of the ICEJ expressed support for the achievements in Israel over the past 100 years in spite of adversities. More than 250 participants from twenty-one countries attended the fourth International Sabeel conference, with visits planned to Ramallah and Bethlehem and participation in a candlelight vigil at four gates of the Old City. Its organizers described their conference as an international act of solidarity with the Palestinian people. Palestinian Authority Minister of Information Yasser Abed Rabbo, MK Azmi Bishara, attorney Jonathan Kuttub, and *Ha'aretz* journalist Amira Hass addressed their conference.

#### **Messiah Stamp**

The Philatelic Services has issued a stamp of the Messiah riding on a donkey, with Elijah announcing his arrival at the gates of Jerusalem. The stamp is from a 1609 woodcut of a Venetian Haggada, and marked the opening of Jerusalem 2001, an international stamp exhibition in Jerusalem during March.

#### **Call for Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

Thirteen leaders of Jerusalem's Christian communities called for forgiveness and reconciliation on the part of both Palestinians and Israelis in a pre-Easter message. Only respect for each other's rights and affirmation of the dignity and worth of every human life would make it possible to end the current violence, the message stated. The church leaders also called on individuals and groups in Israel and overseas to help those who were suffering because of the conflict. Food, clothing and shelter were all desperately needed. Rabbi David Rosen, president of the International Council of Christians and Jews, supported the statement, calling it an appropriate statement of the pain and difficulties experi-

enced by Christian communities in Palestinian society.

#### **Baptist Leader in the Knesset**

The President of the World Baptist Federation, Rev. Kim, met Foreign Minister Shimon Peres in the Knesset on 26 March. The World Baptist Federation is a confederation of 196 Baptist unions and conventions in more than 200 countries, representing 100 million Baptists. The organization promotes evangelism and defends religious freedom. Pastor Kim is leader of the 15,000-member Central Baptist Church in Korea.

#### **Jewish and Moslem Clerics to Form Council for Peace**

A joint council of Jewish and Moslem clerics to work for peace is being formed. The Sephardi Chief Rabbi and the Palestinian spout are to set up the council. The two clerics agreed that religious leaders should help to encourage peace by bringing a positive message to their followers.

#### **Christians Hold Repentance Service in Jerusalem**

More than 1,100 Christians representing different denominations came to Jerusalem from around the world for a three-day conference, *Changing the Future by Confronting the Past*. An important feature of the conference was a service held at Kibbutz Ramat Rahel to express repentance for two-thousand years of anti-Semitism carried out in the name of Christianity. The two-hour service included readings from the Bible, the singing of hymns, music, and historical narratives of persecutions against Jews by Crusaders, during the Black Death, and throughout the Middle Ages to the present time. The reading of an almost 300-word-long confessional moved many Christians and Jews to tears. Christians and Jews alike gained a greater understanding of the role of Christianity in anti-Semitism.

#### **Jerusalem YMCA an Oasis of Cooperation**

A letter to the editor of the Jerusalem Post by the president of the Jerusalem Rotary Club pointed out that the Jerusalem Rotary Club, the Gan Shalom kindergarten and the many activities of the YMCA are examples of the cooperation among all citizens demonstrated at the Y. The Jerusalem Rotary Club has been meeting regularly for more than sixty years, both Jewish and Arab children are catered for by the kindergarten, and there is a balanced employment policy. The resolution of the Geneva-based World Alliance of YMCAs was one-sided and anti-Israel and was rejected by Jerusalem's Rotarians.

#### **International Repentance Conference**

More than 720 Christian pilgrims visited Jerusalem for a five-day conference to coincide with Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Day. The group included people from 22 countries including ten German mayors and forty government officials.

#### **Second Temple Reconstruction—Virtually**

Visitors to Jerusalem can now (virtually) ascend to the Second Temple as it existed before 70 CE, thanks to a project linking the ancient stones with modern hi-tech. The interactive computer presentation is located near the Dung Gate in the Old City, enabling visitors to examine the actual context of the original temple and to view photographs of the archaeological finds on which the reconstruction is based. The project is on the Internet at [www.archpark.org.il](http://www.archpark.org.il).