

Sanhedrin Reborn

After 1,600 years

By Irvin Baxter Jr.

In a dramatic but unpublicized move, members of the newly established Sanhedrin ascended the Temple Mount, Judaism's holiest site, on December 6, 2004. Photo courtesy of Natan Gesher.



In the 12th Century, the revered Jewish sage Maimonides prophesied that, before the return of the Jewish people from exile was completed and before Jerusalem was totally rebuilt, the Jewish Sanhedrin would be reborn. The return of Jews to Israel is not yet complete, the Jewish temple is not yet rebuilt, and on October 13, 2004, the Sanhedrin was reborn.

Maimonides also foretold that Elijah would appear before the reinstated Sanhedrin to announce the identity of the Messiah. Will Elijah reappear as Maimonides predicted, or will it be the False Prophet masquerading as Elijah announcing the false messiah—the Antichrist?

Sanhedrin began by Moses?

The Sanhedrin points back to Moses as the source of its authority. In Numbers 11:16-17, God instructed Moses to appoint seventy men of the elders of Israel to share in the responsibilities of leadership for the nation. Since that time, the Sanhedrin has consisted of one leader plus 70 members.

The earliest record we have of the Sanhedrin was given by Josephus, who wrote of a political Sanhedrin convened by the Romans in 57 BC. It became the supreme religious body in Israel during the time of the Second Temple.

The Sanhedrin is mentioned frequently in the New Testament. It conspired to have Jesus killed by paying one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, thirty pieces of silver for delivering Jesus into its hands. When the Sanhedrin was unable to provide evidence that Jesus had committed a capital crime, false witnesses came forward and accused Him of blasphemy. Because the council was deprived of the ability to condemn criminals to death, Jesus was brought before the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, for a decision concerning his fate.

The apostles Peter, John, and Paul, along with the first Christian martyr, Stephen, were all brought before the Sanhedrin at one time or another for the crime of preaching the name of Jesus.

The Sanhedrin diminished greatly in influence after the destruction of

the Second Temple in 70 AD. It was finally disbanded altogether in 425 AD.

Reborn: October 13, 2004

The recent ceremony to reestablish the Sanhedrin was held in the city of Tiberias because that was the location of its disbanding about 1600 years ago. Once the formal reinstatement of the council was completed, it immediately moved to its permanent home in Jerusalem.

One of the leaders of the rebirth of the Sanhedrin is Rabbi Yeshai Ba'avad of Beit El (Bethel). He said that the 71 rabbis on the new council received the special ordination, in accordance with Maimonides' rulings, over the past several months. Rabbi Ba'avad explained that the goal is to have one rabbinic body in Jerusalem that will convene monthly and issue rulings on central issues. "This is the need of the generation and of the hour," he said.

Rabbi Yisrael Ariel, who heads the Temple Institute in Jerusalem, is one of the participating rabbis. The Temple Institute has been the leading entity in preparing for the future building of the Third Temple and for the reinstatement of temple worship.

Sanhedrin visits Temple Mount

In a dramatic but unpublicized move, members of the newly established Sanhedrin ascended the Temple Mount, Judaism's holiest site, on December 6, 2004. The men, many ascending the Temple Mount for the first time, had immersed in mikvaot (ritual baths) that morning, and planned to ascend as a group. Despite prior approval from the Israeli police who oversee entry to the Mount, the officers barred the group from entering the Mount together, and allowed them to visit only in groups of ten. The visit took place on the eve of Hanukkah, which celebrates the rededication of the Holy Temple.

Role of the Sanhedrin

The Temple Institute's Rabbi Chaim Richman, also a member of the Sanhedrin, hopes the new Sanhedrin will bring about a revolution in Jewish jurisprudence. Declining to discuss exactly what issues are on the Sanhedrin's agenda,

Richman said that one of the main long-term goals is to reunify Jewish observance in Israel. The Sanhedrin includes members of Ashkenazi, Sefardi, Hasidic, National-Religious and Hareidi communities.

Included in the Sanhedrin's discussions so far have been the status of the Temple Mount; rebuilding the Temple and the Altar; restoration of the Passover Sacrifice; restoration of the Davidic monarchy and the return of the Tribes of Israel!

"We can make a real difference," Rabbi Richman said. "Many cardinal issues are on the public agenda, and our body – which is totally based on Torah, even down to its rules and regulations – is naturally geared to deal with them. [Included are] issues such as agunot (estranged women whose husbands refuse to give them a divorce), abortions, traffic safety, economic issues, education, and so much more.

"Not only are we commanded to establish the Sanhedrin," Richman stated, "but this seems to be the perfect time to do so—a time of Divine will. On the one hand, there is a spiritual void in the 'establishment,' and on the other hand, there is a real thirst among the public for spirituality and guidance."

The rabbis were asked to prepare topics they thought the Sanhedrin should deal with, and a fascinating array of topics was produced. In addition to those mentioned above by Rabbi Richman, the list included such issues as:

- * uniform kosher certification
- * the precise length of the biblical cubit (with ramifications on many issues, including the location of the altar on the Temple Mount)
- * assisting Anousim from Spain and Portugal and others whose ancestors were forced to convert to Christianity
- * lost Jewish tribes from other parts of the world
- * an ethical code for Israel's army (as opposed to the present one, which is based largely on secular sources)
- * the establishment of regional "small Sanhedrins"
- * the long-missing "blue color" needed to create certain items for the temple

Though a lecture on renewing the

Paschal offering was delivered at a recent meeting, not all of the 71 are yet convinced that the time is ripe for it. Various opinions were put forth, including some by those opposed to the renewal of the Passover offering until the exact location of the Temple altar is determined through prophecy.

Where should Third Temple be built?

The Sanhedrin's February meeting was devoted to discussing the proper location for the rebuilding of Israel's temple on the Temple Mount. Two main opinions were presented by experts speaking on the subject.

Some held that the true temple site

is where the Dome of the Rock is presently located. Those holding this view contend that the Ark of the Covenant actually sat on the large rock that projects up through the floor of the Muslim shrine.

Other scholars contended that the First and Second Temples stood north of the Dome of the Rock. They believe that the small cupola located there, called the Dome of the Spirits, marks the original site of the holiest of holies. The attractiveness of this position to many is that the temple could be built without triggering the political earthquake that would be produced by tearing down the Dome of the Rock. Almost all observers believe that tearing down

the Dome, which has stood on the site since 690 AD, would ignite a world war.

After hearing the different opinions, a subcommittee was appointed that would take everything presented under advisement. It was determined that, after hearing the report of the subcommittee, the Sanhedrin would then make the final judgment as to where the Third Temple should be built.

“The vessels and utensils needed for the renewal of temple worship have now been completed.”

The rebuilding of the temple on the Temple Mount for the times just ahead was prophesied in scripture around 2,000 years ago. It was specifically foretold in II Thessalonians 2:3-4 and in Revelation 11:1-2. Both of these prophecies place the rebuilding around the time of the Antichrist.

Because of Yasser Arafat's death and the new peace initiatives that are making progress as a result, the Roadmap for Peace, which addresses the status of the Temple Mount, appears to be back on track.

The vessels and utensils needed for the renewal of temple worship have now been completed.

Now, the Sanhedrin is reestablished and is studying where to build the Third Temple, where to build the altar, and when the Passover sacrifices should be resumed.

All of these things have a direct bearing on the prophecies of the end-time and the prophesied building of the Third Temple. Can the Antichrist, the mark of the beast and the Second Coming of Jesus be far behind? **G**



Photo courtesy of Natan Geshet.