Shimon Peres is due to visit Italy this week for his first meeting with the Roman Pontiff since assuming the Presidency of Israel. He will also meet with Italian President Giorgio Napolitano and Prime Minister Romano Prodi. The last time Peres visited the Vatican was in April of last year.

**Quote:** *"Peace in the Middle East and the resolution of property and tax disputes with the Roman Catholic Church will top the agenda of President Shimon Peres's September 6 meeting with Pope Benedict XVI. On Friday, Vatican Radio announced the two will meet next month at Castel Gandalfo, the Pope's summer palace outside Rome.*

What Peres' fascination with the Vatican is, or why he is visiting the Pope so soon after his election as President, I do not know. But President Peres, who is a Freemason and received his education in a Jesuit school in Poland, had previously promised in 1993 to grant the Catholic Church special status in Jerusalem in the event of a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. In February 2000 the Vatican also signed an agreement with the Palestinian Authority guaranteeing this special status. Pope Ratzinger commended Peres following his election as President of Israel, hoping his presidency would become a "vehicle for peace" in the Middle East. Now that a Declaration of Principles is in the offing between Israel and the PA, my suspicions are that Peres may be seeking a final blessing from the Vatican and his Jesuit masters. Peres has announced that he is hopeful that an agreement could indeed be made between Israel and the Palestinians within the next few months...

**Quote:** *""I think we have a good chance now because the whole world is supporting Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas", he told the paper. "To work out the details of the political if not the geographical outline of a future Palestinian state will take more time, but (as for) principles, yes, we can achieve an agreement" before the autumn peace conference, he said.*

Peres announced that he would adopt a twin-track approach to the conflict, promising economic incentives for Palestinian areas willing to abide by a political agreement. My guesses are, these economic incentives are a reference to his " Peace Valley " plan, in which Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Jordan would all benefit from a " corridor of peace " created along the banks of the Jordan river.

It will be extremely interesting to see what comes of Peres' trip to the Vatican. Due to the religious nature of the conflict, with Muslims and Jews both vying for the Temple Mount, I expect that the Vatican will inevitably become more involved in the Middle East peace process in the days ahead, eager to bolster its own position in Jerusalem in the hope of placing a Pope in the city before the return of Christ. In any case, it seems that Shimon Peres will live up to his name, "Hearkening to the division" of God's land.

Daniel 5:28
PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.

Source Jerusalem Post , Daily Times