Final status negotiations paving the way for the establishment of a Palestinian state began in earnest today, as Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni met with former Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei in Jerusalem. Following the Annapolis peace conference in November, the two sides agreed the form the meetings would take, and that they would commence final status negotiations following President Bush's visit to the region last week. Topics under consideration include the division of Jerusalem, the Israeli withdrawal from Judea and Samaria, and the right of return for Palestinian refugees. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had previously hinted that he would be willing to cede Arab-majority communities of Jerusalem to a future Palestinian state. It has also been reported that the Israeli government is planning to disengage from Judea and Samaria in several stages. And most recently Olmert is reported to have agreed to the absorption of some 50,000 Arabs displaced by the Arab-initiated War of Independence and Six Day War.

Quote: *"Channel Ten reported Thursday night that in a private meeting between Olmert and Palestinian Authority Chairman Abu Mazen, the two agreed that in the final-status agreement, Israel would withdraw from 92% of Judea and Samaria, including all the non-Jewish neighborhoods in eastern Jerusalem. It was also agreed that 50,000 "refugees from 1948" would enter and live in the State of Israel. Staffers in Olmert's office did not deny the report, and even hinted that it was at least partially accurate.*

Israel has already handed control of several key towns to the Palestinian terrorist organizations. Jericho - the first Canaanite city conquered by Israel under the command of Joshua, and Shechem - where the Jewish patriarch Joseph is buried. Shechem is the place where God made a covenant with Abraham that his seed would inherit the land of Canaan for an eternal possession (Genesis 12:6). The conquering of Jericho was the beginning of the realization of this promise. In handing control of these cities to their enemies, the present Israeli government has shown absolute disdain for Israel's historial and Biblical heritage, and its lack of faith in a God who has brought His people back to their land after 1900 years of exile. Now Abbas wants to get his hands on Jerusalem - the city of the Great King (Psalm 48:2), and Israeli politicians are only too willing to give it to him if peace can be achieved. Today Israeli President Shimon Peres stated that the peace process must go on, and must not stop for one moment.

Quote: *""We have a year, and that's very little time. We cannot spend this year talking. We have to negotiate, both openly and secretly, and we must not stop for one moment. I believe that moving from the opening positions to the interim positions will take a long time, several months. "US President Bush was here and said, 'I am your best friend. I'll do whatever you tell me, but I am here to tell you that there is not much time. Just talking will yield nothing. If you think it's time to move forward, then it's time to move forward. Time is the most crucial thing.'"*

But the Scriptures state in 1st Thessalonians 5:3 that there will be no peace. In Ezekiel chapter 13, God chastises the prophets and leaders of Israel who proclaim peace for Jerusalem, when there is no peace. Reading the chapter is almost like reading a news report of current events in Israel. The prophets see "visions" of peace for Israel. Today the international community has largely based its present Middle East peace initiative on President Bush's "vision" of two states. Ezekiel mentions a protecting wall that the people had built with untempered mortar. Former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon built a wall in an attempt to bring peace to Israel, which the international community is demanding be dismantled. God promises Israel's wall will be Divinely destroyed, while Ezekiel 38 seems to indicate that there will be a massive Arab invasion of Israel during a time when the land is unprotected by walls.

Ezekiel 13:15-16
Thus will I accomplish my wrath upon the wall, and upon them that have daubed it with untempered morter, and will say unto you, The wall is no more, neither they that daubed it; To wit, the prophets of Israel which prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and which see visions of peace for her, and there is no peace, saith the Lord GOD.

Peace can come to the Middle East. Not through wars or walls, but through the Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah 52:7 says, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! " We are bringers of good tidings. Our good tidings are that Jesus Christ has died, and though faith in the finished work of Calvary, all may have forgiveness of sins. Jesus Christ has made peace between God and men through the blood of His cross (Colossians 1:20). This is the salvation that we publish. This is our chief aim, to go into all the world and preach the good tidings to every creation (Mark 16:15), and to be witnesses to the Jewish people that their Messiah reigns. Have you made peace with God? Jesus Christ is our peace (Ephesians 2:14). Trust in Him for salvation today.

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