

## The Orange Peace Clock by Robert Gordon Brown

We had just returned to our hotel room in the Christian Quarter of Jerusalem to freshen up before lunch when my wife, sort of self-satisfyingly said, “The clock you bought in the marketplace has already stopped running.”

I was disappointed on two levels. First, I just had to have a clock. Our Holy Land tour guide had warned, “Bring your own clock. You can’t rely on hotel wake-up calls in the Holy Land.” So, although the hotel’s wake-up service was one hundred percent reliable over the two days we had been there, I just felt I had to have one. Second, the clock represented the trust I was willing to put in a man living and trying to survive in a culture foreign to me half way around the world. The clock was a cheap, orange, China made model probably worth \$3.95 at any American Wal-Mart; well, maybe \$4.95. The merchant wanted to start at \$20.00. Did he think I was born yesterday?

“Ridiculous,” I said and started to turn to go.

“Well, what you give me my friend?”

“In the U.S. I could get that clock for no more than \$5.00.”

“Oh no, not this clock, it has an extra strength battery. It is guaranteed to run eighteen months on just this one battery.”

I laughed as he showed me the battery and turned to walk away although it was the only 8’x10’ concrete open-air shop of the many I had checked out in the quarter mile long alley with any clocks.

“How about \$15.00?” he asked.

“No. I could only give you \$5-\$10 at most.”

“\$11.00.”

“No.”

“Here in the box, new.”

I peeled off \$11.00. I handed him the money feeling in the spirit of friendship, brotherhood, and peace, which is lacking in Jerusalem, the most holy of places.

After we returned from lunch I examined the clock. It had run all of eleven hours. I shook the clock and played with the battery. The second hand sat in one spot banging against some unknown force getting knocked back with each try. I threw into my open suitcase thinking I might have time to bring it back at lunch tomorrow.

“I knew it was a piece of junk but thought it would get us through till we left Israel,” I said.

“Let’s see, you paid \$11.00 and it ran eleven hours, so it cost you \$1 per hour for your clock,” my wife smirked.

Our tour that afternoon included the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, and the very road Jesus had entered on Palm Sunday and concluded at the Rock of Agony. Agony. I thought about it for a while. It seemed to me that there was far too much agony in this land. It seemed to be the prevalent emotion throughout Jerusalem. It was displayed by the Jewish men praying at the Western Wall, bowing deeply and rhythmically as they chanted their prayers pausing to lean against the wall to weep. It was in the distrustful stares of the Palestinians we had met and in the eyes of those who roamed the streets begging for money. Over the past few days I noticed little happiness, so few smiles.

That night after dinner we fell into bed exhausted from the day.

I lay there thinking about everything that happened that day, when my mind lingered to consider what to do about the broken clock. I decided that I would bring the clock back and demand my money.

If the man I bought the clock from balked or tried to bargain with me I was going to pronounce in my loudest voice, "Fellow merchants and tourists! Gather here and see how this man sells cheap plastic clocks from China for three times their price. He says he guarantees them to run eighteen months with their new high energy batteries. Well my friends, this clock ran only eleven hours and stopped." Then I would drop the clock to the ground and stomp on it several times smashing it to bits. "Do you really want to buy from shopkeepers like this?" Then I would stalk away.

As I lay there thinking that I had arrived at a solution to the failed clock, the clock dilemma took on another dimension. How could there ever be peace in this part of the world? A Palestinian or Arab Christian would never buy a clock from a Jew. A Jew would consider a clock from a Christian as unclean. And so it goes, mutual distrust fed by hatred learned from the age of a child's earliest memories.

Some would point at Jerusalem and say, "But look we have the Jewish Quarter, the Christian Quarter, the Muslim Quarter and the Armenian Quarter and many minorities and others besides." But are cities that must be divided into quarters truly an indication of peace? No more so than schools within the U.S. that operated under a doctrine of separate but equal. So long as one party to a division of resources has greater political and economic power, a doctrine of equality is not what its name implies.

Throughout Jerusalem, it was obvious that neighborhoods inhabited by Israeli Jews had substantial homes and efficient government services. Not so the Palestinian Christian neighborhoods. There, trash was everywhere waiting to be picked up as cats roamed the streets feasting on discarded food. This was true in even the better neighborhoods with hotels, such as ours, that catered to bringing tourist dollars into the country. As an example of how unresponsive the government had become to caring for these neighborhoods, we came across neighborhood men trying to repair a burst pipe under the cobblestones in their street one night knowing that the government would do nothing about it.

You would think that after the indignities the Jews had suffered before and during World War II at the hands of the Nazi regime, they would not be forcing others of different faiths to live in conditions similar to those they had to endure. Or maybe they had learned their lesson well.

The Israeli government appears to have adopted a doctrine to segregate those who are not of their faith into ghettos and diminish living conditions there to the point that those living in them must leave or slowly perish.

I fought for sleep as I continued to wrestle with the question, "But what can I do?"

The answer is I don't know yet. Hidden deep within the Israeli/Palestinian peace issue are people who share a claim to have descended from Abraham, who all believe in the basic teachings of the Bible's Old Testament, who share in the revelations of many of the same prophets and who acknowledge that Jesus walked in this holy land, yet display an outward feeling of mutual distrust and hatred toward each other. Is there a way to breach generations of hostilities toward one another?

"Honey it's our wake-up call. We have to get our bags outside the door in half an hour," I heard from somewhere distant.

"Oh, Okay. Start your shower and I'll be awake by then."

"Boy, you look tired."

“I started thinking about the clock and couldn’t sleep”

“Over that clock?”

“Yeah, in a way. I’ll explain it when we have more time.”

Late that night, after a long day of visiting other Christian pilgrim’s sites and a hurried dinner I started to sort through the upper layer of clothes in my suitcase. As I hit the second layer, there sat the orange plastic clock. Out of curiosity I unfolded the clock and stared in disbelief. It was running. I checked the time against my watch and yes, it was accurate to the minute. I thought about how the clock’s failure the night before had led me to disturbing thoughts about the peace prospects for Israel.

So has the time for peace ended? I can only say that like the cheap orange clock, the current peace accord does not appear to be put together well, and at times it appears to falter. Yet, given a chance, peace, just like my cheap orange clock, might just continue to work. Let us pray that it does.

*Sent to MPT via Facebook from Robert Brown*

***Orange Peace Clock***

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