

Light



...on **Israel**

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Editor: Colin Dryland

Assistant Editor: Ken Dennis

Correspondence Secretary: John Carpenter

Publications Secretary: Matt Goddon

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Note: All Bible quotations are taken from the New King James version except where another version is indicated after the text.



Introduction

IF we talk about Israel or mention the Jews in company, it may arouse mixed emotions and questions in the minds of the hearers – questions such as: *‘Why is Israel always in the news? Why are the Jews so disliked by some people and yet admired by others? Why have they been so persecuted down the ages? Why are they seen as the cause of the current problems in the Middle East?’*

People today are not the first to wonder what is unique about the Jewish people. Just over a century ago the celebrated American author Mark Twain asked the same sort of questions and expressed his puzzlement about the Jewish people like this:

‘If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one per cent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous dim puff of star dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly the Jew ought hardly to be heard of, but he is heard of, has always been heard of.

He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his commercial importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk. His contributions to the world’s list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine and abstruse learning are also away out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvellous fight in this world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendour, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and

made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind.

All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is **the secret** of his immortality?’

[Mark Twain: Harpers Magazine, September, 1899]

What then is the ‘**secret**’ of the survival of the Jewish people? This special issue has been published to help our readers understand the ‘**secret**’ of the Jews’ continued existence despite the many attempts to destroy them. But really it is no ‘**secret**’ – for the answers and the reasons are set out for us in God’s Word the Bible. The ‘**secret**’ is that they are God’s chosen people and the Bible tells us why.

The celebration by Israel of the sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of their State, has led to questions being asked about this unique people which are no less pertinent now than they have ever been. Many see the Jews and the State of Israel as the world’s greatest problem! Is that fair? Is it true? What can be done about it? Is there an answer? We say very positively – Yes, there is an answer!

For the benefit of our readers we have arranged this special issue of ‘Light on a New World’ into three main sections: ‘Israel in the Past’, ‘Israel in the Present’ and ‘Israel in the Future’. We urge you to read the booklet, Bible in hand. Look for yourself and see the outworking of God’s purpose with His people. The Bible tells us about the birth and mission of Jesus Christ, the Jewish Messiah. It also tells us clearly that despite their troubled history, God’s purpose with the Jewish people is far from finished. The future of the whole world is linked to the return of Jesus Christ – and that could be vitally important to you!



Israel in the Past

Origin and Birth of a Nation

AS the introduction asks – ‘What is it about the Jewish people that arouses so much emotion and so many questions?’ We believe the correct answers to any questions about Israel and the Jews can only be found in the Bible, which we firmly believe is the Word of God. We maintain that without a diligent study of the Bible there is no way of finding the answers to the enigma of the nation of Israel – to the world-wide dispersion, persecution and survival of this ancient people.

The Jews have been known during their long history as the Hebrews, the Children of Israel or the Israelites. Their religious beliefs and practices, known as Judaism, are based on the Law of Moses, contained in the early books of the Old Testament.

THE ORIGINS OF ISRAEL

Where did this people come from? How far back does their history go? It really begins some 4,000 years ago in Sumeria, the cradle of civilisation in the Middle East, in what was once called Akkad and Chaldea. In later times it became known as Mesopotamia (a Greek name meaning ‘between the two rivers’). This area is now called Iraq, where these two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, flow southward into the Persian Gulf. Here the first empires were born and great cities were built.

The remains of some of those cities can still be seen – cities such as Uruk, Babylon, Ashur, Nineveh and Ur. Museums around the world have many interesting exhibits on display that have been found by various archaeological excavations, testifying to these once great cities.

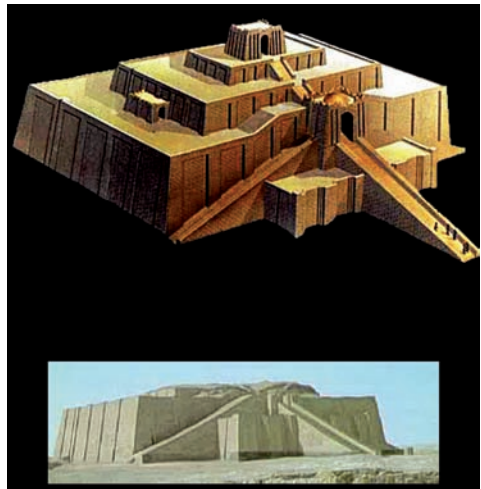
Each of these cities had their own forms of religion based on superstition and the worship of pagan gods.



Map of Ur

THE CALL OF ABRAM

Living in Ur with his family, around 2,100 BC, was a man called Abram. This man was surrounded by various forms of idol worship in Ur including the worship of the Moon. However, Abram was guided to seek the one true God, the Creator of the whole universe. The Bible tells us that he was also commanded to leave this civilised but idolatrous society and travel to an unknown destination.



Reconstruction of Ziggurat or temple dedicated to moon worship at Ur

In the first book of the Bible we read that God said Abram:

‘Get out of your country...and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed’ [*Genesis 12.1-3*].

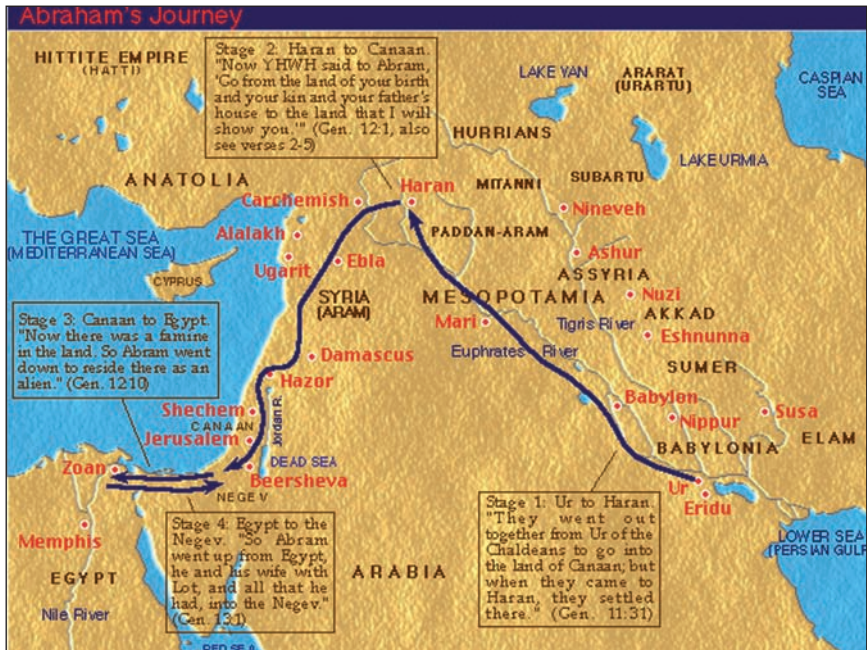
The willingness of Abram to depart from his homeland and to obey God’s command has led to him being described in the Bible in a unique way. We are told that he *‘believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. And he was called the **friend of God**’* [*James 2.23*].

ABRAM A MAN OF FAITH AND FRIEND OF GOD

To be described as the *‘friend of God’* surely makes this man Abram stand out as a very special individual – which of course he was, a man of great faith and righteousness! The special faith of this man can be seen by the way he gathered his servants and flocks, with Sarai (later re-named Sarah) his wife and Lot his nephew, and set out as he was commanded - to go where?

‘By faith Abraham (Abram) obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterwards receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign country...’ [*Hebrews 11.8, 9*].

By putting ourselves in Abram’s position at this time, we can begin to understand how great his faith was! God had promised that He would make him a great nation - but he had no children! He was promised a land - but where was it? In view of his situation these Divine promises must have raised many questions in his mind. However, his great faith shines through this record, showing that he firmly believed that Almighty God would do what he had promised.



Map of Abram's journey to the promised land

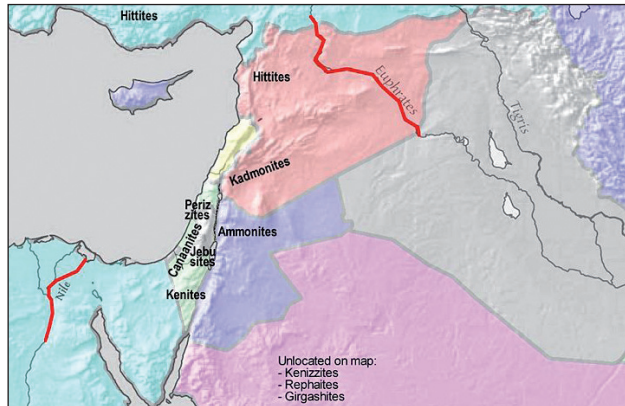
THE LAND OF PROMISE

Abram obediently trekked north westwards through what is known as the 'Fertile Crescent' with his family, servants, flocks and herds. God guided him and eventually he came to the 'promised land' called Canaan.

This land with its western boundary on the Mediterranean sea-board, has also been known since Roman times as Palestine and later as 'The Holy Land'. The land at the time of Abram was largely uninhabited. There were localised tribes but there was plenty of room for Abram's family and pasture for his animals. While he was living a nomadic life in Canaan, Abram received further promises and assurance that this land would be his:

‘...the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: “To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates.”’[Genesis 15.18]

As you can see from the map, this covenanted land covers a much larger area than just Canaan. It takes in modern Israel and parts of the present territories of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.



The land promised to Abram

ROOTS OF CONFLICT

But despite these repeated promises, Abram still had no children and we see a temporary lapse of faith, on the part of both he and Sarai his wife. Perhaps they thought that they could hasten the fulfilment of God’s promise by using Sarai’s handmaid, Hagar, as a surrogate mother to give them an heir. The Biblical record shows that this led to trouble in their lives and in the lives of the generations that followed them [See Genesis 16.1-16]. As they hoped, Hagar did bear a son who they named Ishmael, but his birth was also the beginning of a conflict that has continued through the generations of Abram’s descendants, for thousands of years down to the present day.

After this God appeared to Abram again and reiterated the covenant. At the same time his name was changed from Abram (meaning ‘the father is exalted’) to Abraham (meaning ‘the father of a multitude’) [Genesis 17.4-8]. Despite their efforts to help fulfil God’s

purpose through the birth of Ishmael, God said to Abraham: *'...Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish my covenant with him...and with his descendants after him...as for Ishmael...I have blessed him...I will make him a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac...'* [Genesis 17.19-21].

ISAAC THE SON OF PROMISE

The true son of promise, Isaac, was born later to Abraham and Sarah. **We cannot emphasise enough** that God's covenant, especially with regard to the inheritance of the land of Canaan, was with Isaac, not with Ishmael or his descendants. The lands given to the Ishmaelites and inhabited by them are clearly described in the Bible [Genesis 25.12-18]. The same applies to the other descendants of Abraham. The lands inhabited by them are recorded in Genesis and we note that none of them were given any part of Canaan, which became the land of Israel.

Isaac the chosen son of Abraham lived in Canaan. He also led a nomadic life and God's promise was repeated to him:

'Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven...and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge...' [Genesis 26.3-5].

Isaac and his wife Rebekah were blessed with twin sons, who, in their turn, were the cause of conflict. Rebekah was told by God: *'Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger'* [Genesis 25.23].

JACOB AND ESAU

Again we see the hand of God in the lives of Abraham's descendants. Esau the elder twin despised his birthright and it went to Jacob, the younger brother, who was the favoured 'seed' (descendant) of promise. This was the cause of further hostility between the descendants of Jacob and Esau. From Esau came the Edomites who settled on the mountains of Seir, an area to the south east of the Dead Sea, in what is Jordan today (see Genesis chapter 36).

Because of the animosity of Esau toward his brother, Jacob was urged by Isaac to go back to family members in Haran, to his uncle Laban. He lived there for some 21 years, during which time he married Laban's daughters, Leah and Rachel. He also took as wives, as was the custom in those times, Zilpah and Bilhah, the handmaids of Leah and Rachel. Jacob had twelve sons and a daughter named Dinah. The sons were, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad and Asher [*Genesis 35.23-26*].

The Bible record shows clearly that Jacob also received a promise, and like his grandfather Abraham, God changed his name:

'And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob any more, but Israel shall be your name." So he called his name Israel. Also God said to him: "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land"' [*Genesis 35.10-12*].

Here is the Divine record of the beginnings of a nation. From the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel), came the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. The three men to whom the promises were made, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, have become known in history as the 'Patriarchs of

Israel'. The path this family would take to become a nation had already been laid out earlier by God, when Abraham was told: *'Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve its people and be afflicted by them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterwards they shall come out with great possessions'* [Genesis 15. 13, 14].

JOSEPH A SAVIOUR

This prophecy was fulfilled by a sequence of events where we can see God's hand clearly at work. Jacob had a favoured son called Joseph, who was cruelly sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt. Joseph suffered first as a slave and then was falsely accused and imprisoned. However, we can see how the hand of God turned events around in a most amazing way, so that Joseph was not only released from prison, but became a ruler in Egypt, second only to the Pharaoh (see Genesis chapters 39 to 41).

This political elevation of Joseph proved to be the salvation of both Egypt and the family of Israel, when famine later affected the whole region. Joseph was a gifted leader and was blessed by God. He built storehouses, where in times of plenty a large stock of grain was kept. When the region was gripped by famine, Egypt had more than enough grain to sell to others. We read that *'all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine was so severe in all lands'* [Genesis 41. 57].

Famine also affected Canaan and it resulted in the family of Israel going to Egypt to buy grain. This led eventually to the reconciliation of Joseph with his brothers and reunited the now aged Israel with the beloved son Joseph, who he had long thought was dead. The years of Jacob's mourning were now turned to joy with the result that Jacob and the whole of his family left Canaan and went to live in Egypt. This was just as that promise made to Abraham required.

ISRAEL ENSLAVED IN EGYPT

The Pharaoh invited the family of Israel to settle in an area of Egypt called Goshen: *‘And Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded’*[Genesis 47. 11].



In the Biblical record we see how God guided the development of this small family of Israel into a nation. They were now dwelling in the lush parts of the Nile Delta, and they prospered greatly, to a point where the Egyptians began to get concerned about their own security:

‘And Joseph died, all his brothers, and all that generation. But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly...and the land was filled with them. Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, “Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we...” Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens...But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel’ [Exodus 1. 6-12].

In their attempts to control the population growth of the Israelites, the Egyptians introduced a policy of infanticide, by ordering the Hebrew midwives to kill all the newborn Hebrew male children, by throwing them into the river Nile. But again we see the hand of God at work, by not only saving one of these condemned boys, but by having the child rescued from the river by none other than the

Pharaoh's daughter! She then adopted him as her son and named him Moses (*Hebrew Mosheh – meaning drawing out*) saying 'I drew him out of the water' [Exodus 2.1-10].

MOSES THE LEADER OF GOD'S PEOPLE

This man Moses grew up in the royal household and was groomed to be a prince in Egypt. But he realised, when he matured, that he belonged to the Hebrew race and by taking up their cause as an oppressed people he was forced to leave Egypt and live in Midian (now part of Saudi Arabia – (See Exodus chapter 2). The Divine comment on this faithful man is recorded in the New Testament: *'By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God...By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible'* [Hebrews 11.24,25,27 NIV].

Moses was chosen by God to lead the now numerous people of Israel out of Egypt. After 40 years of exile as a shepherd in the land of Midian, he was visited by one of God's angelic messengers who told Moses:

“I am the God of your father – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob...” And the LORD said: “I have surely seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt...So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites... Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt” [Exodus 3.6-8, 10].

With these assurances Moses went back to Egypt and pleaded for his people to be released from slavery. The Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let them go, so God brought ten devastating plagues on the Egyptians. The last plague caused the death of the firstborn of every

Egyptian family and their animals. The Israelite families were spared the effects of this last terrifying plague. By doing as God had commanded, the angel of death **passed over** their dwellings. The **Passover** is still remembered by the Jews throughout the world each year.

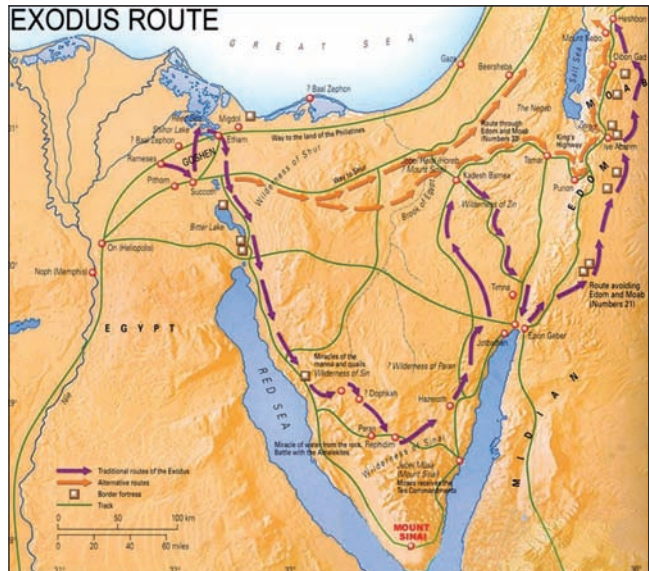
THE BEGINNINGS OF A NATION

This last devastating plague forced the Pharaoh to release God's people. So with Moses leading them, they began the Exodus ('going out') from Egypt. The Israelites probably numbered about two million people including the '*mixed multitude*' that went with them [Exodus 12.37,38].

The journey to the 'promised land' took them into the desert of Sinai where Moses was instructed to build a portable structure called the Tabernacle – a place for the Israelites to worship God.

At Mount Sinai God made a solemn covenant

with them and they were constituted a nation. God said to Moses: '*if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to me above all people; for all the earth is mine. And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*' [Exodus 19.5, 6]





The encampment of Israel at Sinai

Moses was also given God's Law at Mount Sinai. This Divine Law called the Law of Moses, which included the Ten Commandments, is still revered and kept by Jews worldwide. It has also formed the basis of the laws and moral codes governing many nations since that time.



Moses the lawgiver

The nation of Israel, under the leadership of Moses, now had a law to guide and regulate their national life as they journeyed to the land promised to their fathers. But we see from the Biblical record that the nation's faith and obedience didn't equal that of their ancestors for they failed to keep that Covenant made at Sinai. They behaved so badly that although they came very close to the borders of Canaan, they were condemned by God to wander in the desert for a total of 40 years, until that generation had passed off the scene.

The next article traces the history of the newly formed nation of Israel from the time that they entered Canaan – the land that had been promised to their ancestor Abraham.



Israel in the Past

Into the Promised Land

At the end of the period of desert wandering, the leadership of Israel passed from Moses to Joshua, another faithful man of God:

‘...the LORD spoke to Joshua...saying, “Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them – the children of Israel...From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea...shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you...I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage, **for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them**”’ [Joshua 1. 1-6].

There is no compromise in the Divine statement to Joshua about the giving of the promised land to Israel. The present inhabitants were to be dispossessed and the area to be inhabited by the children of Israel clearly defined (see map on page 6). No mention is made, or even a hint given of any of the land belonging to any other people.

Joshua was a man of courage and great faith. He believed the promises to the ‘*fathers*’ (Abraham, Isaac and Israel) and with God’s guidance he took the land of Canaan and divided it between the tribes of Israel. But we must note that the possession of the land was conditional, for God had also instructed Joshua to ‘*observe to do*

according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you...This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth...observe to do all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success' [Joshua 1.7, 8].

The implication in the Divine command is that if they did not follow the Book of the Law, they would not prosper or succeed (see also Deuteronomy chapter 28). Joshua himself followed this advice, but the Biblical history of the people of Israel and many of the rulers that followed Joshua, shows that they failed to heed these Divine instructions!

They settled in the land promised to the Patriarchs. At first they were ruled by judges and then kings, reaching the zenith of their power and prosperity under the rule of King David and his son Solomon around 1000 BC.

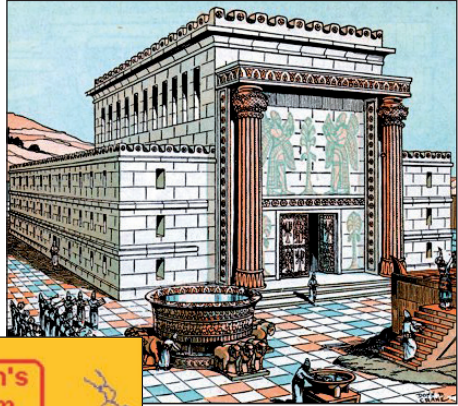
GOD'S PROMISE TO DAVID

David was raised from being a shepherd boy and chosen by God to be king over the nation of Israel. When his reign was firmly established he wanted to build a temple as a more permanent place for the worship of God in Jerusalem.

Because of David's sincerity, God said to him:

'I took you from the sheep-fold...to be ruler over my people, over Israel. I have been with you...and have made you a great name...Also the LORD tells you that he will make you a house...I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his Father, and he shall be my son...Your throne shall be established for ever' [2 Samuel 7. 8-16].

Solomon the son of David, did indeed build a temple for God's name in Jerusalem. His kingdom was probably the wealthiest that the Middle East had ever seen, but the Divine promise also related to a time in the future. David recognised this when he said: '...yet this



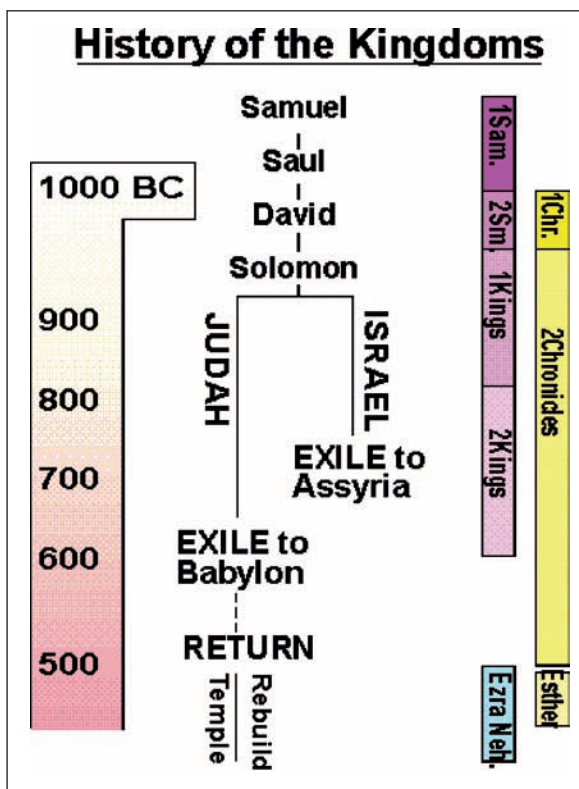
The kingdom of Solomon

Solomon's temple was a small thing in your sight, O Lord GOD; and you have also spoken of your servant's house for a great while to come' [2 Samuel 7.19]. We will come back to this promise later in this article (see page 20).

THE DECLINE OF THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

After this time of peace and prosperity there was a decline in Israel's fortunes. This was mainly brought about by King Solomon's behaviour in introducing idol worship to the nation. In the reign of Solomon's son

Rehoboam, the kingdom was divided into the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel. These two kingdoms slipped further into idolatry with a succession of evil kings. There were reformers like Hezekiah and Josiah, kings of Judah but eventually God punished His people by allowing other nations to attack them. The northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrian armies in 722 BC and most of the people were taken into captivity.



The prophets of Israel had warned them continually that God would remove them from the land if they failed to follow His Law:

‘And the LORD God of their fathers sent warnings to them by his messengers...because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling-place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised his words...until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy’ [2 Chronicles 36.15, 16].

THE END OF THE KINGDOM

In 586 BC the last king of Judah, Zedekiah, was deposed and taken to Babylon along with many of his subjects. The temple in Jerusalem was stripped of its treasures, burnt and left desolate. The prophet Ezekiel had warned Zedekiah of the disaster to come:

‘O profane and wicked prince of Israel...whose time of punishment has reached its climax, this is what the Sovereign LORD says...remove the crown...the exalted will be brought low. A ruin! A ruin! I will make it a ruin! It will not be restored until he comes to whom it rightfully belongs; to him I will give it’ [Ezekiel 21.25-27 NIV].

The Divine punishments brought upon Israel were never meant to banish them from the land for ever. You will note that the prophecy includes a pledge to restore the kingdom and give it *‘to whom it rightfully belongs’*. God, through the prophet Jeremiah also foretold the restoration of Israel as a nation:

‘So do not fear, O Jacob my servant; do not be dismayed, O Israel, declares the LORD. I will surely save you out of a distant place, your descendants from the land of their exile. Jacob will again have peace and security, and no-one will make him afraid...Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, **I will not completely destroy you.** I will discipline you but only with justice; I will not let you go entirely unpunished.’

[Jeremiah 30.10, 11 NIV]

70 YEARS CAPTIVITY

The Jews remained in captivity for seventy years until Babylon itself was overthrown by the Medo-Persian Empire. Cyrus the ruler of Persia made a decree which allowed them to return to their land. Led by Ezra and Nehemiah they rebuilt the temple and the walls of Jerusalem.

Reduced in numbers, the Jews were allowed to dwell in that land promised to Abraham as a subject people from 516 BC to 70 AD. During that time they were affected by the changing political scene, as great empires succeeded one another, leaving their mark on God's land and His people. After the Persians came the Greeks under Alexander the Great. They were eventually succeeded by the iron rule of the Romans. During the Roman occupation of Palestine, Herod the Great was appointed as a puppet king over the Jews, but he certainly was not the king who was promised the right to the throne of Israel!

This right belongs to Jesus Christ, who was born of the tribe of Judah at the time of Herod. He is the subject of those promises to the Jewish Patriarchs.

When we look back over Israel's turbulent past we can see that the call of Abraham and the development of the nation of Israel, was designed, planned and nurtured by God to bring Jesus Christ into the world, and it is Jesus who has come out of the nation of Israel to bring salvation, not only to the Jewish people, but to the whole world!

JESUS IS THE PROMISED 'SEED'

We said we would come back to the meaning of the promise to David, but it goes back even further to the time of Abraham.

The promise to Abraham that *'in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed'*, will only be realised through the work of Jesus Christ.

Abraham realised that the promise related to the coming of the Messiah (a Hebrew word meaning 'anointed'). We can read the words of Jesus himself. He said to his contemporaries: *'Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad'* [John 8.56 NIV]. Many of the faithful Jews recognised that these promises

related to the Messiah. Moses we are told *'regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ (the Messiah) as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward'* [Hebrews 11. 26 NIV].

The Jewish people nurtured this belief about the coming of one called the Messiah, a title that refers to the *'right'* of kingship. The message is there in the words of the Old Testament prophets and is repeated in the opening words of the New Testament: *'The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham'* [Matthew 1.1]. His birth was announced by the angel Gabriel in these words:

'He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

[Luke 1.32, 33]

When Jesus preached to the Jews of his day, some saw him as the Messiah but many did not, particularly the religious leaders. Instead they rejected him and conspired to kill him. Eventually, they arrested him and persuaded the Roman governor Pilate to sentence him to death. Jesus their promised Messiah, was cruelly put to death by Roman crucifixion. Even at this time his right to the throne of David over the kingdom of Israel was recognised by Pilate who put an inscription over his cross which read:

JESUS OF NAZARETH – THE KING OF THE JEWS

That was not the end – the Divine promises could not fail and by the miraculous power of God he was raised from the dead. After Jesus had ascended to heaven, the enormity of the crime committed by God's people was underlined by the Apostle Peter:

‘Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through him in your midst...you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it. For David says concerning him: “I foresaw the LORD always before my face...Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh will also rest in hope...” let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David...being a prophet, and **knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body...he would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne**, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ’ [Acts 2.22-31].

Many of those Jews listening to Peter recognised the gravity of what had been done to Jesus. They realised that they had slain the ‘seed’ promised to Abraham. We are told that 3,000 of those present were filled with remorse with the result that they believed and were baptised. But the nation as a whole did not repent – they firmly refused to recognise Jesus as their Messiah, persecuting the disciples of Jesus, until God removed them from the land of promise.

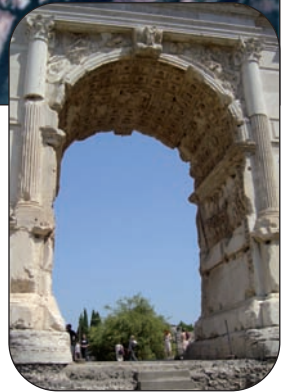
REBELLION AGAINST ROME

This was eventually brought about when the Jewish people rebelled against Roman rule. In AD 70 the Roman legions under Titus, in the process of putting down this rebellion, destroyed Jerusalem, including Herod’s magnificent temple and most of the population were either killed or sold into slavery throughout the Empire.



Detail from the arch showing Roman soldiers removing the sacred articles from Herod's Temple

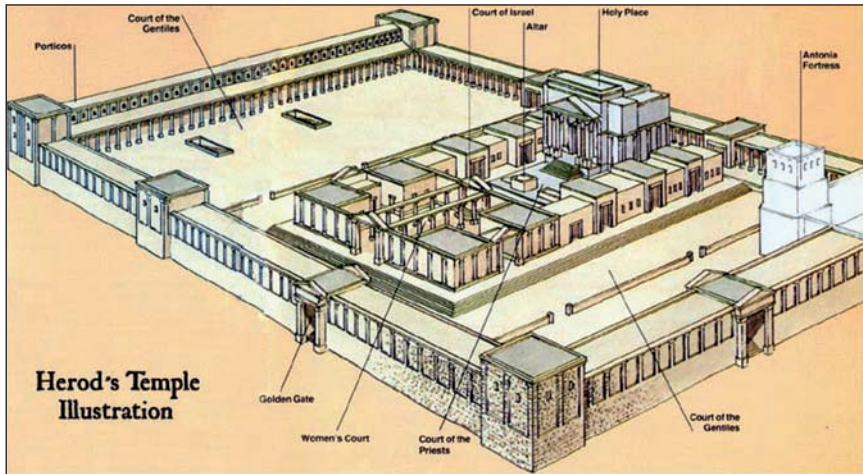
The dispersion of the Jewish people lasted from the first Century AD until the 19th Century when small numbers of Jews returned to their ancient homeland. Through the words of the prophets of Israel, God foretold that **the Jewish people would return and become a nation once more.**



Arch of Titus in Rome

In the Mount Olivet prophecy found in the Gospel accounts, Jesus foretold the destruction of the Temple:

‘Then as he (Jesus) went out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!” And Jesus answered and said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one

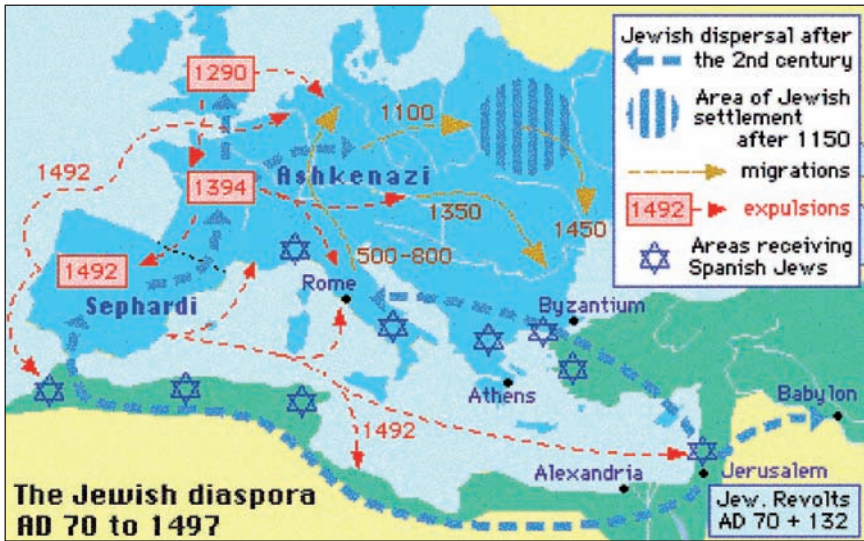


stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down” [Mark 13.1, 2].

The complete destruction of the city of Jerusalem and its magnificent temple by the Roman armies during a Jewish revolt in AD 70 is well recorded in history. However, in Luke’s account, Jesus also predicted that even though they would be scattered, one day the Jews would again recover control of Jerusalem:

‘And they (the Jews) will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles **until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled**’ [Luke 21. 24].

A succession of Gentile (non-Jewish) nations have indeed ‘trampled’ or conquered and occupied the chosen city of God, from the time of Jesus until, as Jesus foretold ‘the period of Gentile triumph ends in God’s good time’ [Luke 21.24 Living Bible]. The period of Gentile triumph has almost ended in an event that is full of importance for the world at large, as the following articles will explain.

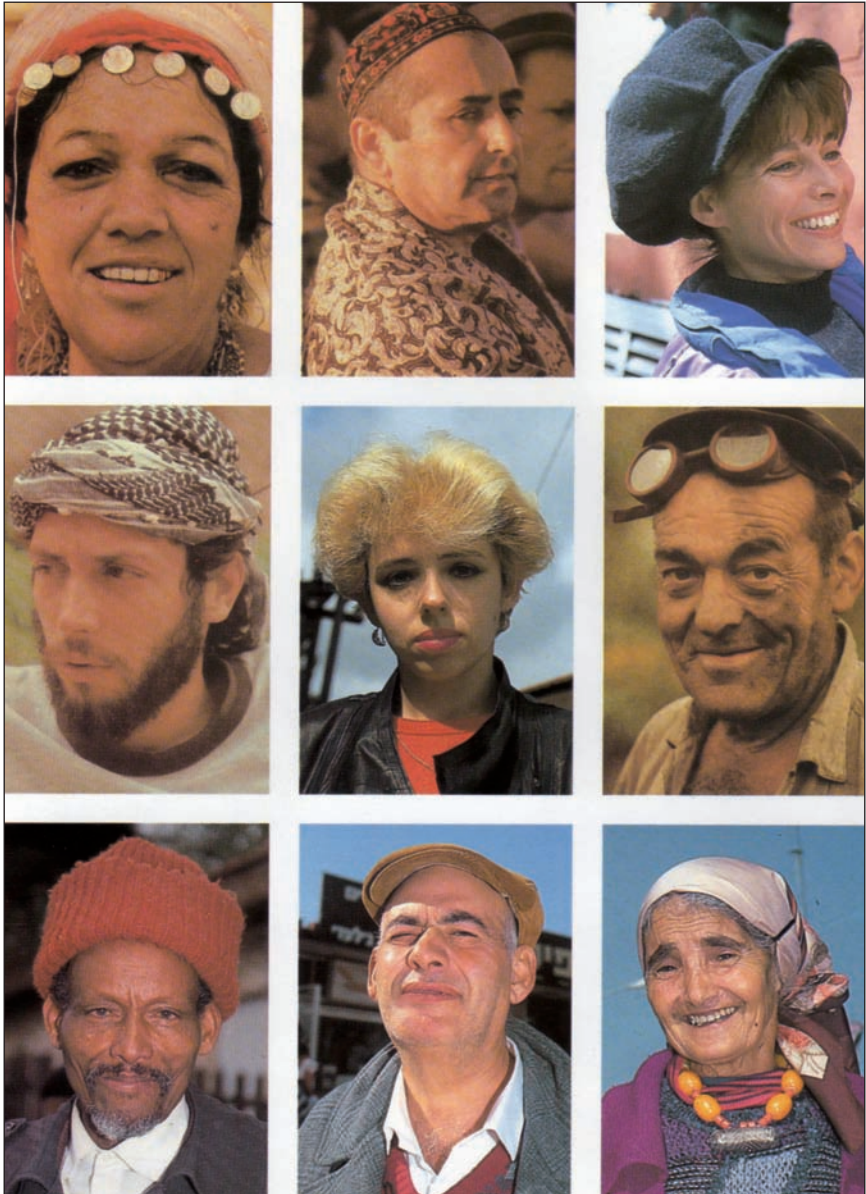


The question about the ‘secret of the immortality’ of the Jewish people asked by Mark Twain (see page 1), is answered completely when we study God’s Word:

‘For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers’ [Deuteronomy 7. 6-8 NIV].

The birth and growth of this nation to maturity, its chequered history, its persecution and survival, can only be explained when we accept that it is all in God’s hands. However the story doesn’t finish here as the next article will show.

LIGHT ON A NEW WORLD



Jewish faces from different cultures (see pages 39 and 49)



Israel in the present

Their Miraculous Survival

As the previous article has demonstrated, it was Israel's rejection of Jesus Christ their Messiah, which finally brought about the destruction of the nation, including the city of Jerusalem and its temple, and the dispersion of the Jews into other lands.

Since AD 70 the land of Israel and its capital city Jerusalem, have been under the control of Gentile (non-Jewish) nations until recent times. The partial fulfillment of the Mount Olivet prophecy (page 24) only took place as recently as 1967, when the Israeli army defeated the occupying Jordanian forces and took full control of Jerusalem.

A NATION REGATHERED

However, centuries before this, the prophets of Israel - Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, had also predicted the re-gathering of Israel to their land and capital city:

'For I will take you from among the nations, **gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean...I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh'[Ezekiel 36.24-26 – see also Isaiah 52.1-10; 62.1-7; Jeremiah 30.10,11; Ezekiel 37.1-14].**

In addition to this, there are some amazing prophecies found in the Books of Leviticus chapter 26 and Deuteronomy chapter 28 that read

like Israel's history written in advance. In these chapters we read about the Divine blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience – curses that predicted the many persecutions that would come on the Jews if they disobeyed God.

History records what they have endured in the long period following the exile from their land. These persecutions really began when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and scattered the Jews, selling them as slaves throughout the Roman Empire. The persecutions have continued right up to recent times, culminating in Hitler's attempt to wipe out the Jews of Europe during the Second World War (1939-45).

However, despite being persecuted to such an extent, the Jews have miraculously survived, because they are God's chosen people and for the sake of the covenant made with their fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Not only have they survived but the nations who scattered and persecuted them in the past have in the main disappeared. This was one of the remarkable things about the Jewish people and their persecutors, that amazed Mark Twain (see page 1) and still puzzles many people – but here in these Biblical prophecies is the answer to the puzzle.

ISRAEL'S RECENT HISTORY

We now want to focus attention on the last hundred and fifty years of Israel's history. By the middle of the 19th Century, Palestine had for many centuries been ruled over by the Turkish Ottoman Empire and had, for the most part become a desolate wilderness. The Turks were certainly not in favour of any mass immigration of Jews back to Palestine, even if it were able to sustain the millions of Jews scattered across the globe.

Settled as they were in Europe and the America's, Jewish immigrants had been integrated into their host countries. Many of them enjoyed a level of prosperity that was hardly likely to motivate them to leave their homes and businesses for the hardships of the

deserts of Judea, or the malarial swamps of Galilee. Yet Bible prophecy demanded that the Jews **must** return to their land. Here are some examples from the words of the Old Testament prophets, recorded under Divine inspiration more than 2,500 years ago.

“For behold, the days are coming”, says the LORD, “that I will bring back from captivity my people Israel and Judah”, says the LORD. “And I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it” [Jeremiah 30.3].

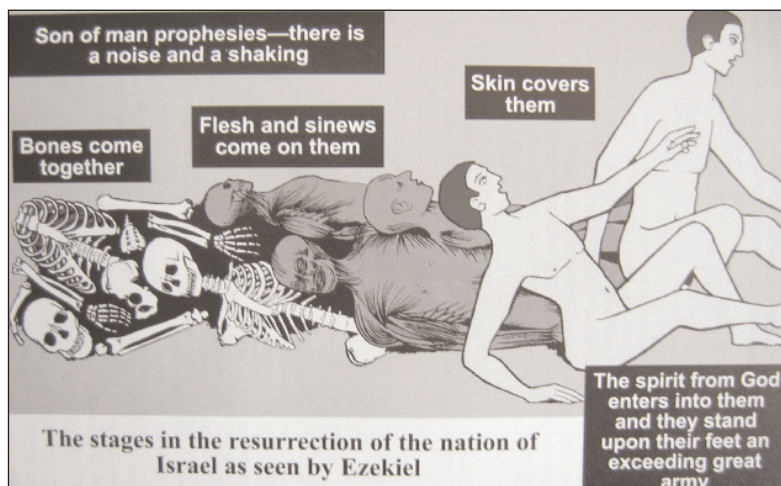
‘Behold, I will gather them out of all countries where I have driven them...I will bring them back to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely. Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land...’ [Jeremiah 32.37, 41].

Jeremiah chapters 30 to 33 could profitably be read at this point, because these chapters come after many prophecies of coming judgment on the idolatrous and corrupt kingdom of Judah at the hand of the Babylonians. But interestingly, we find that these prophecies are punctuated with assurances from God that He would eventually restore the nation.

The prophet Ezekiel takes up the same theme. He saw a vision of a valley full of dry bones. The bones were brought to life at God’s command and Ezekiel saw that they ‘*stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army*’ [Ezekiel 37.10]. The meaning of the vision is given in the following verses and the whole chapter is important to an understanding of God’s purpose with the nation of Israel. God said to Ezekiel:

‘...Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land...and I

will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again' [Ezekiel 37.21,22].



These are just a few of the many references from Israel's prophets that predict their ultimate return to the land of Israel, the true worship of God and the restoration of their ancient kingdom.

THE RETURN TO THE LAND

In fulfillment of these Bible prophecies that speak of the return of the Jews to their land, it is worth noting the following events in Israel's recent history.

In 1882 there began a series of anti-Jewish riots, or 'Pogroms' in Tsarist Russia. This caused around one million Jews to emigrate to the USA and other countries that offered them shelter. At the same time, with the permission of the Turkish occupiers of Palestine, there began what was called the first 'Aliyah' or 'Return' of small numbers of Jewish immigrants from the Russian Empire.

A few years later in 1894, Theodor Herzl, an Austrian Jew, was appalled by the open display of anti-Semitism in France, when reporting as a journalist, on the trial of Dreyfus, a Jewish army officer. He published a book entitled **Der Judenstaat (The Jewish State)** calling for the creation of a Jewish State. Through the efforts of Herzl, the first Zionist Congress was convened in Switzerland in 1897, which led to the creation of the Zionist Organisation. Its aims were to seek *'to establish a home for the Jewish people in Palestine, secured under public law'*.



Theodor Herzl and 1st Zionist conference

By the turn of the 20th century a second 'Aliyah' began and Jews migrated to Palestine, mainly from Russia and Poland. In 1909 the first modern all-Jewish city called Tel Aviv was founded in an area of sand dunes beside the Mediterranean Sea.

During the First World War the Turkish Ottoman Empire allied itself with Germany against the British and French. A successful military campaign by Britain and her allies, under the command of General Allenby, liberated Jerusalem in 1917 and ended the Turkish occupation of Palestine soon afterwards (see picture on page 32).

LIGHT ON A NEW WORLD

At that time, Chaim Weizmann, a British Jew was involved in the Zionist cause. Weizmann had already given invaluable help to his country during the First World War, by his inventions for the munitions industry. These achievements no doubt helped Weizmann in his political dealings with the British government.



General Allenby entering Jerusalem

In 1917, there were lengthy negotiations between Weizmann and Lord Rothschild, with the British Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour.

Lord Balfour made a statement that the British Government '**view with favour**' the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. What a joyful event this must have been for those Jews who had for so long been exiled from their land.



Lord Balfour

Then in 1922 the British Mandate over Palestine was legally confirmed by the newly formed League of Nations. A document was issued by the League of Nations, which included the following statement:

‘...the Principal Allied Powers have also agreed that the Mandatory (i.e. Britain) should be responsible for putting into effect the declaration originally made on November 2nd, 1917...in favour of the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, it being clearly understood that nothing should be done which might prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.’

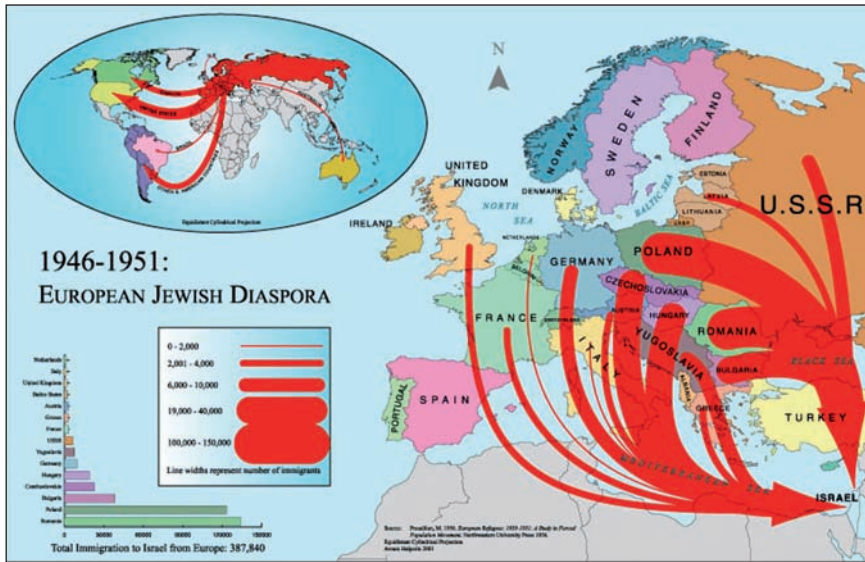
In the years that followed, the British allowed small numbers of Jewish immigrants to return to Palestine, despite resistance by the Arabs. This trickle of Jewish settlers continued until Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933. Nazi Germany then began a systematic persecution of the Jewish people and many tried to escape from Germany. There began a human traffic of Jewish refugees seeking illegal entry into Palestine and between 1933 and 1936 some 133,000 Jews managed to get there.

In 1939 when the Second World War began, millions of Jews found themselves trapped in Europe. The horrific events that followed in Germany and the surrounding countries that Nazi Germany invaded, have gone down in history as one of the worst examples of genocide ever perpetrated by any nation on another people. Adolf Hitler called this the ‘Final Solution’ of the Jewish problem and set up the notorious death camps such as Auschwitz. At least 6 million Jews perished at the hands of the Nazis in the Holocaust that followed.

LIGHT ON A NEW WORLD



Nazi persecution of the Jews - 'the final solution'



Map of the return of the Jews from the lands of their dispersion (diaspora)

Despite these terrible events, Nazi Germany including Hitler and his murderous cohorts have gone but the Jewish people have survived! With the end of World War II in 1945, the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust headed in their thousands for Palestine. But the British, faced with violent Arab opposition, interned many of them on the island of Cyprus.

International sympathy towards the Jewish refugees was stirred up, when in 1947 a British warship rammed the 'Exodus' a boat with 4,500 Jews on board and towed it into the port of Haifa where the immigrants were put on another ship and sent back to Germany. On November 29th 1947, the United Nations organisation, the newly formed successor to the League of Nations voted for the partition of Palestine and a Jewish State. At the same time, the British Government announced its decision to terminate their Mandate over Palestine in May 1948. The surrounding Arab powers and Palestinians made no

secret of their intention to 'drive the Jews into the sea' when the British withdrew their forces.

Chaim Weizmann quickly visited Washington and persuaded President Harry Truman to recognise the State of Israel. He also gained from the USA a loan of 100 million dollars, a huge sum of money at the time. On May 14th 1948, just hours before the expiry of the British Mandate, the Jews proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel.



David Ben Gurion reading the declaration of Independence

Immediately five neighbouring Arab countries invaded the newborn state. Despite being heavily outnumbered and having only home made armour to use against tanks and heavy artillery, the Jewish people again miraculously survived and began to prosper as a nation, now restored to their ancient homeland.

Amid great rejoicing, Chaim Weizmann was elected the first President of the State of Israel. The new democratic state now surprised the world with its energetic and rapid progress in making the long neglected land to prosper economically. This was in direct fulfilment of the words of the Old Testament Prophets. However, Israel was still surrounded by its old enemies and threatened with extinction. This led to further amazing developments as the next article will show.



Israel in the Present

A Nation Re-born

THE establishment of the State of Israel paved the way for a massive immigration of 648,000 Jews to Israel from Arab countries and Europe between 1948 and 1956. However, tensions mounted in October 1956, when the Egyptians seized control of the Suez Canal, as part of an Arab campaign to prevent shipping using it to go to or from Israeli ports. Israel went to war against Egypt, occupied the Sinai Peninsula and landed forces on the western side of the Suez Canal. The Israelis were then in a position to open the blocked sea communications through the Straits of Tiran into the Gulf of Aqaba, and use their seaport at Eilat. Israeli forces eventually withdrew from the occupied territory in March 1957.



The Suez Crisis

In June 1967 Arab and Israeli forces clashed again, in what became known as the ‘Six-Day War’. Syria and Egypt mobilized their forces near Israel’s borders. The Israelis didn’t wait to be attacked but mounted swift strategic strikes, destroying the Egyptian air force and establishing air superiority. The Israelis recovered the Old City of Jerusalem and enlarged their borders to include the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the Jordanian occupied territory west of the Jordan River, known as the West Bank and the strategic Golan Heights on the Israeli-Syrian border.



Israeli forces on the Golan Heights during the ‘six day war’

The next war came in 1973, when the Arab nations carried out a surprise attack on Israel, during their national holiday of Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). They almost managed to overwhelm them but the tide was eventually turned again in Israel’s favour and they defeated the attacking forces. A peace treaty was signed in 1979 by Golda Meir the Israeli Prime Minister and President Sadat of Egypt. The Arabs objected strongly to this treaty and denounced Sadat as a traitor. The Egyptian president was assassinated at a military parade in October 1981.



The western or wailing wall in the old city of Jerusalem

Israel's enemies then changed their tactics from open warfare and in 1987 began the 'Intifada' or Palestinian uprisings against Israel within the occupied territories. In 1993 the efforts to end this tense situation led to America's President Clinton hosting a meeting in Washington USA, at which the 'Oslo Accord' was signed by Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and the P.L.O. leader Yasser Arafat, paving the way for Palestinian self rule.

Like other peace deals, this agreement has never been implemented and although Rabin was praised world-wide for his peace efforts, it has come to nothing. Rabin was assassinated in Tel Aviv in November 1995 by a young right-wing Israeli who disagreed with his peace policies. But the search for peace still went on and despite continued Arab hostility, between 1989 and 1999 over 1,000,000 Jews emigrated from Russia to Israel and the former Soviet republics, following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The picture on page 26 illustrates the extraordinarily diverse backgrounds from which the Jewish immigrants have come. It seems

almost beyond belief that they should still consider themselves a single nation. Surely this illustrates the strength of their Jewish identity and is a further confirmation that they are still God's people.

ISRAEL'S ENEMIES TODAY – PARALLELS WITH THE PAST

We have seen that since Israel was declared a state in 1948, the surrounding Arab countries opposed to its very existence have continuously attacked it in various ways, despite all the highly publicized peace efforts. This situation does not come as a surprise to Bible students. In the first article the writer refers to the 'root of the conflict' amongst Abraham's descendants (see pages 7-9).

This opposition to the re-gathering of Israel to their land was foretold in the Bible, in terms that reflect the age old enmity shown to Israel by its neighbours. Here are some verses from Psalm 83, with the equivalent modern nations shown in brackets after the ancient names. A careful study of this Psalm shows some remarkable parallels between these ancient nations and the present enemies of Israel:

'Do not keep silent, O God! Do not hold your peace, and do not be still, O God! For behold, your enemies make a tumult; and those who hate you have lifted up their head. They have taken crafty counsel against your people, and consulted together against your sheltered ones. They have said, "Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more." For they have consulted together with one consent; they form a confederacy against you: the tents of Edom (part of Jordan) and the Ishmaelites (Arab peoples); Moab (part of Jordan) and the Hagrites (Syrians); Gebal, Ammon (part of Jordan), and Amalek (part of Egypt); Philistia (includes the Gaza strip - Palestinians) with the inhabitants of Tyre (part of Lebanon); Assyria (Now Syria, Iran and Iraq) also has joined with them; they have helped the children of Lot (part of Jordan)' [*Psalm 83. 1-8*].

We urge you to read the whole of Psalm 83. It predicted that God would frustrate the attempts of the surrounding nations to dispossess His people, just as He did in the past, until Israel's own wickedness left them for a time without His protection and he allowed them to be conquered by their enemies. Will this happen again?

Since the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948 by the earlier Jewish settlers, we have seen that successive wars have been fought with the nations surrounding Israel, whose stated intention has been to drive the Jews into the Mediterranean Sea. When we consider the wars of 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973, we note that each time Israel has miraculously survived and emerged victorious. We believe they have been helped by an unseen hand – **the hand of God**, who has **controlled** events to fulfill the many prophecies that foretold the return of the Jews to their land and their development into a strong and prosperous nation.

However, we must emphasise that the nation of Israel is protected by God, not for their own righteousness but because it is His purpose to bring them to truly acknowledge Him and His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah who they rejected and crucified (see Zechariah chapter 12 verse 10).

Some of their immediate neighbours, firstly Egypt and then Jordan, have made peace agreements with Israel. Even Syria, whose government supports the more extreme anti-Israel elements of Arab society, has had to recognize the futility of trying to defeat Israel through open warfare. While refraining from open attack, Syria together with Iran, has resorted to fighting a form of proxy war, arming various Palestinian factions, including Hamas and Hizbollah to fight a guerilla campaign against God's people.



Suicide bomb attack on Israeli bus

But none of these incursions or attacks on Israel have brought peace any nearer. In fact they have left the Arab population poorer and more dependant on outside aid and assistance. In the case of Hizbollah operating from Lebanon, it has left that country devastated and thrown into political turmoil and certainly no nearer solving the real problem.

THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM

Some of the causes of the present problems in this part of the Middle East, it has been suggested, could perhaps be blamed on the way the British Government 'carved up' the lands covered by the Mandate of Palestine. Although the lands to the east of the River Jordan made up as much as 75% of the area within the British Mandate, this large area of land (Transjordan), was left out from the clauses covering the establishment of a Jewish national home. The intention, no doubt, was to make this large area available to the Arab peoples by creating the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, leaving the narrow strip of land from the River Jordan westward to the Mediterranean coast as a home for the Jewish people.

This tiny strip of land was chosen for the Jewish home by the British, because of its very well known ancient Biblical connections and because Zionists like Weizmann saw it clearly as theirs, on account of its historical Jewish connections. Whatever the political ‘carve up’ intended, this small area of land became a distinct political entity for the first time in centuries, known as Palestine. As far as the Zionists were concerned, they accepted the plan, but the Arabs rejected it completely. The Arabs made it plain, even then, that they did not want the Jewish people there at all!



Map of Middle East under the British Mandate

This decision, put into effect by the British government, created many problems and challenges for both the Palestinian Arabs and the Zionists. Both parties realised that by the end of the Mandate period, the region’s future would probably be determined by the size of their populations and the amount of land they owned. So throughout the Mandate period the Jews were bent on increasing immigration and land purchases. While the Arabs were doing their best

to slow it down or halt it completely! Conflict over these issues often escalated into violence, and the British were forced to take action against both sides at times.

It must be said that British rule in Palestine during the Mandate was generally, very conscientious and responsible. The British government developed laws with a fair judiciary and a good civil service. It laid water pipelines, expanded ports, extended railway lines and supplied electricity. In spite of their efforts, the British were hampered because they had to deal with outbreaks of violence between Arab and Jewish communities and also violence against themselves. The aims and aspirations of the various parties in Palestine appeared incompatible, which, as events have proved, was the case and unfortunately still is, sixty years later!

THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM

It is interesting to note that the term 'Palestinian' has not always been used by the Arab population in Israel. The term Palestinian has come to be used when referring to the Arabs of the former mandated Palestine, **excluding** the Jews.

Interestingly, the name Palestine (Palaestina) was first used by the ancient Greeks and Romans to describe the territory of the Philistines, Israel's old enemies from the times of the Judges. One of the Philistine cities was called Gaza (see for example Judges chapter 16 concerning the death of Samson).

Although the Arabs of Palestine have been developing a Palestinian identity for some time, the idea that Palestinians form a distinct people is only a relatively recent one. The Arabs living in Palestine have never had a separate state and until the establishment of the State of Israel, the term 'Palestinian' was used by Jews and foreigners to describe the inhabitants of Palestine, but it was rarely used by the Arabs themselves.

Under the British Mandate, the majority of Arabs refused to be called 'Palestinians'! They saw themselves mostly as part of the larger Middle East Arab or Muslim community. The irony is, that you can travel to Israel today and speak to the older Jewish people who have lived there all their lives and they will tell you that they are 'Palestinians', and they have the documents issued by the British mandatory government to prove it !

It was only after 1948 and even more so after 1967, that the Israeli Arabs began to use the term 'Palestinian', to signify not only a place of origin, but to develop the idea of a shared past and future. So we see that the Arabs of Palestine and then the residents of the West Bank and Gaza, began using the term 'Palestinian' to develop the idea of a Palestinian people and after 1967, the idea of a Palestinian state.

Now we can perhaps see some of the difficulties, when trying to understand the Palestinian problem. The Bible tells us clearly, that long ago, God gave the land to the Jewish people. However, the world at large now refuses to recognize this fact. The Palestinian Arabs also refuse, in the face of clear written and archaeological evidence, to acknowledge Israel's historical connections to the land. They understandably resent the loss of what they have regarded in more recent times as their land as they watch the Israelis building more and more settlements on it. This breeds further resentment and hostility.

WHAT IS THE KEY TO THE FUTURE?

Israel has tried to negotiate peace deals and more recently has resorted to strategic withdrawal of its settlers from vulnerable areas. The building of a barrier comprising fences and a concrete wall up to eight metres high, between Israel and the Palestinian areas of Gaza and the West Bank, has managed to reduce the number of deadly suicide attacks against Israel (see picture page 46). However, it has not stopped the frequent launching of rockets carrying explosives from the Palestinian territories into Israel.



The Separation Wall

At the end of 2007, the U.N. backed body known as the ‘Quartet on the Middle East’ called a conference in Annapolis in the USA, where representatives from more than 40 countries agreed to set in motion a revival of the so-called ‘Road-Map’ peace talks. These talks have the declared aim of setting up, within Israel, an area that will be an independent Palestinian state.

However, we must emphasise that, in addition to foretelling Israel’s national return to the land, the Bible also reveals that a time of peace will come for Israel. It could be that a peace deal will be reached by the negotiators in which the Israelis are lulled into a false sense of security, even to the extent of disarming and imagining themselves free from possible attack. We must watch developments to see how this will come about. The last article will consider these events in Israel’s future in more detail.



Israel in the Future

TO some people the name of Israel and the word future do not sit comfortably together. Many would pose the question - 'Is there any future for Israel?'

Indeed does Israel have a future? Today there appears to be a growing body of opinion that openly condemns the Israelis for the way they are dealing with the Palestinian problem. Israel is also condemned for what is generally seen as heavy-handed tactics in retaliating against the attacks from their hostile neighbours. The pictures portrayed in the news media show the damage caused and in many cases the total destruction of buildings including the homes of civilians, together with civilian deaths including children. Public opinion around the world is aroused by the way the news media report these events.

Statistics indicate that the instances of anti-Semitic violence around the world have doubled in the last decade. These things come together to paint a very gloomy picture of the future for Israel. Many who would have considered themselves supporters of Israel have felt compelled to question their allegiance. Since the establishment of their State in 1948, the nation of Israel has fought many wars for its survival and against all the odds has survived.

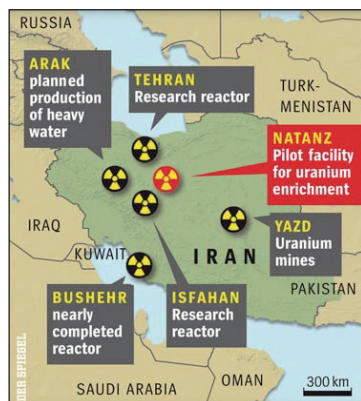
Heavily outnumbered in terms of manpower and weapons, they have proved victorious. In the past, the image of David fighting Goliath has perhaps been the reason for people showing sympathy towards Israel. Their successes have been seen as victories of the under-dog. In the present climate there seems to be a definite shift away from these feelings – Israel is no longer perceived as the under-dog.

A TIME OF TROUBLE AHEAD FOR ISRAEL

Israel feels particularly threatened at this present time by Iran which has made a public declaration of intent to 'wipe Israel off the map'. Iran is well on the way to the development of nuclear weapons in spite of the opposition of many nations.

The Israeli Prime Minister has gathered around him a formidable committee made up of prominent members drawn from past governments of Israel and also experts in satellite surveillance. They are planning to establish the facts regarding Iran's progress in the production of and ability to deploy nuclear weapons.

The advice of the committee is that a pre-emptive strike against Iran to destroy their nuclear facilities is not only required but is essential to the continued existence of Israel. The Israeli government has declared that it is prepared to go ahead with such an attack, with or without the backing of anyone – even her closest ally, America.



Iran's nuclear facilities

The question is – should we expect such an escalation in the tensions of this extremely volatile region, due to the threats and counter threats from opposing forces with such a divergence of

political and religious ideals? Further, if these threats turn into action, what should we expect the outcome to be?

As Bible students we do not need to speculate on such matters. However in considering the future of Israel, we need to be able to discern certain signs or indicators that are given in the Bible. It is the only book which can provide reliable information about God's people the Jews, in the past, the present and the future.

Today, Israel's population is made up of many different people. There are those who were born in Israel (Hebrew '*Sabras*' from a word meaning a type of desert pear which is prickly on the outside but soft inside). Generally these are known as Israelis. Then there is the large contingent made up of immigrant Jews from practically every country in the world (see picture on page 26). There are those who follow ancient Jewish traditions, known as orthodox Jews. These are easily recognised by their mode of dress and are often seen at the Western or Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. Generally though, Israel is a secular state. Few seem to have any faith in God and most reckon that their revival and indeed their survival in recent times, is entirely down to their own efforts in protecting themselves against their enemies.

As the previous articles have shown, the Bible gives us the real reason for Israel's continuance, their revival and their survival. God is in overall control of the affairs of His chosen people and He has a purpose with them in particular. What should interest us is the fact that His purpose, although centred on Israel, does include the whole world.

THE PAST – A PATTERN FOR THE FUTURE

Now there is a powerful clue to God's involvement in the affairs of Israel, which can help us understand what is happening to Israel today and what will happen in the future. This clue comes from considering the pattern of Israel's past history as recorded in the Bible.

Briefly, when Israel came out of Egypt, rescued from slavery by God through the leadership of Moses, they entered the Promised Land. From Joshua, the successor to Moses, up to the time of Saul the first king of Israel, justice was administered by a succession of Judges. The book of Judges records the events which took place during that period. The pattern of God's dealings with His people Israel was established at that time. God had made it plain to His people what He required of them and He clearly explained that they would benefit in every way if they heeded His conditions. However we find that Israel strayed from God's way, which in turn brought about the consequences that God had predicted. Punishment and correction came in the form of attacks from Israel's neighbours.

When Israel was subdued and defeated by its enemies, it was then that the people sought help from God. Only then did they come to realise that their departure from God's ways had brought about such disastrous results. Turning back to God, repenting of their faults reversed the fortunes of Israel. God raised up certain men and women who led them out of their troubles and to victory over their enemies as we read in Judges chapter two:

'Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD...and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods...And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel. So he delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and he sold them into the hands of their enemies...And when the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge...And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers...' [*Judges 2. 11-19*].

During the period of the Judges this pattern repeated itself over and over again. We sometimes say that ‘history repeats itself’ – what then will happen to Israel in the future?

AN INVASION OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

You can judge for yourself whether you think that Israel today is a God fearing nation. Israel is a westernised and secular nation and in the main shows little regard for God. Therefore the question has to be asked as to whether we are to see Israel on the receiving end of an assault by her enemies that will bring about her defeat. There are a number of prophecies in the Bible that indicate that this will indeed happen as the result of Israel’s departure from God. The pattern of future events is suggested then by those events of long ago.



Since the establishment of Israel as a state in 1948, she has proved to be successful in her military campaigns against her enemies. We should not, for that reason, allow ourselves to think that such successes will come in the future. Surrounded as Israel is, by hostile nations vowing to destroy her and to wipe her off the map, we would do well to watch the developments in that area very closely indeed!

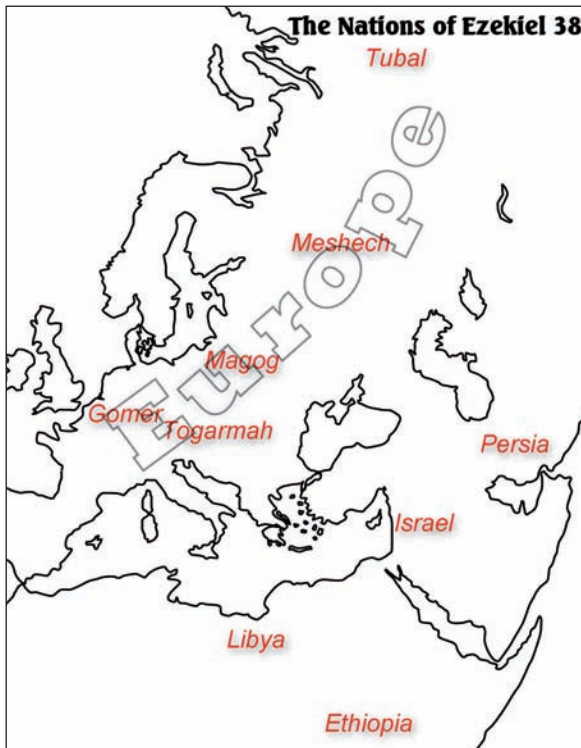
The possible acquisition of nuclear warheads by her enemies, adds a further dimension to the present tense situation which is being closely monitored by many nations. Will a future attack on Israel have an entirely different outcome to what we have witnessed in recent years? The Israeli Air Force destroyed nuclear facilities near Bagdad in Iraq in 1981 and more recently in September 2007 attacked and destroyed a nuclear reactor under construction in Syria – but what of the future? When Israel is threatened with annihilation, will she then turn back to God for deliverance?

The Bible tells us of a time when a confederacy of nations will be brought into the land of Israel for a conflict that will surpass any conflict that has ever been experienced before. The Divine power to be revealed at that time will draw many people to the land of Israel. The prophet Ezekiel had this to say about this confederacy of nations who will eventually attack **a peaceful Israel**:

‘.. In future years you will invade a land that has recovered from war, **whose people were gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel**, which had long been desolate. They had been brought out from the nations, and now **all of them live in safety**...On that day thoughts will come into your mind...You will say...I will attack a peaceful and unsuspecting people...and turn my hand against...the people gathered from the nations...’ [Ezekiel 38. 8, 10-12 NIV].

This prophecy suggests that the expected period of peace, will prove to be but a lull before the final storm of an invasion of Israel. The prophet Ezekiel shows in chapters 37 and 38 that the return of the Jews to Israel and this final attempt to destroy them, will result in the annihilation of the enemies of Israel. Careful reading of Ezekiel chapter 38 leaves us in no doubt that this group of nations - including Persia (Iran) Ethiopia and Libya - are to be compelled by God to attack the land of Israel.

This federation of nations is led by a power situated to the the North of Israel and named by Ezekiel ‘Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal’ [Ezekiel 38.2]. It is interesting to note that both in the past and even at the present time, Israel has needed to look carefully to the security of her **northern** borders. The Syrians of course are a threat from that direction, just as the Assyrians were some 2,800 years ago. God, speaking through the prophet Ezekiel concerning this **northern** aggressor said: ‘Then you will come from your place out of the far **north**, you and many peoples with you...You will come up against my people Israel like a cloud, to cover the land. It will be **in the latter days**...’ [Ezekiel 38.15,16].



The identity of this federation, to be gathered against Israel in the very near future is not difficult to determine. Magog, Meshech and Tubal are acknowledged by students of ancient history to be the descendants of one of the sons of Noah, namely Japheth (see map above). Persia (now Iran), Ethiopia and Libya are nations antagonistic to Israel. These are well known to us today, and the prophet Ezekiel, speaking with Divine authority, tells us they will be joined by the

descendants of Japheth, the '*latter day*' occupiers of the '*far north*'.

Directly to the north of Israel as mentioned above, is Syria, one of Israel's many Arab enemies. Further north through Armenia we come to the troubled, now largely independent states of the former USSR. We note with interest the high Islamic following that there is among this group of nations. Further North still is Russia one of the world's super powers that, after a period of decline is now growing rapidly both in economic and military strength.

As in the past, following a change of heart and an acceptance of their failures, God will provide a deliverer for Israel. It has already been confirmed by a consideration of Bible prophecy that Jesus Christ will be that deliverer (see page 17 onwards). In the main the Jews today do not accept that Christ is their Messiah. This rejection of Christ is also the subject of Bible prophecy as is his subsequent acceptance, which was foretold by the prophet Zechariah:

'And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for him as one grieves for a first-born' [*Zechariah 12.10*].

ISRAEL'S FINAL DELIVERANCE

Now this acceptance of Christ will coincide with the time of the final deliverance of Israel from all her enemies. The subject of the future deliverance of Israel is a very interesting one. There are many references in the Bible to this aspect of Israel's future and details are given about events that will unfold when the promised return of Jesus to the earth becomes a reality. While this task is being completed by Jesus and his saints, it will become apparent to the rest of the world that an entirely new and unexpected force will have appeared in this region.

We have become used to the attempted predictions of military strategists, as they have tried to assess the offensive capabilities of countries around the world; considering as they do the degree of threats posed by factions and driven by extreme political and religious idealism. These experts can only base their predictions on what they have learnt from history. The appearance of a force as predicted by the Bible falls into an entirely different category. This begs the question – will the nations of the world accept this kind of intervention?

The Bible's answer to this question is No! Instead it will lead to a final great conflict as predicted by the ancient prophets of Israel. This conflict described in the Bible as the battle of '**Armageddon**' will bring about the solution to Israel's problems and indeed the problems that affect the whole world. It will not be the final destruction of Israel, as envisaged and plotted by her enemies – **but the setting up of the Kingdom of God upon earth, with none other than the Lord Jesus Christ as its king!**

Now it must be noted that the name '**Armageddon**' occurs only once in the Bible in the book of Revelation, which predicts the final conflict that will take place [*Revelation 16.16*]. For this reason we must consider other Biblical prophecies that tell us about this conflict. The prophets Joel and Zechariah predicted that such a battle would take place in the land of Israel:

'In those days and at that time, when **I restore** the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, **I will gather** all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There **I will enter** into judgement against them concerning my inheritance, **my people** Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up **my land.**'

[*Joel 3.1,2 NIV*]

'I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured...Then the LORD will go out

and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle' [Zechariah 14.2,3 NIV].

THE FUTURE OF JERUSALEM – UNDIVIDED CAPITAL CITY

Few we suggest, would disagree that this world is in desperate need of a complete change in practically all aspects of life. Now these radical changes will come about following Armageddon, as described in the Bible, starting with Israel. God's chosen people will be brought to understand and accept His Almighty power. Following the dramatic deliverance of Israel, the whole world will then become subject to this Divinely revealed all wise and righteous ruler, Jesus Christ. Jerusalem will become the capital city, not only of Israel but also of the whole world. This place will be the centre from which laws and justice will be perfectly administered. Jerusalem will no longer be a divided city with so many claims upon its ownership, for as the Old Testament prophets foretold:

'...in the latter days...Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us his ways, and we shall walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem"'

[Isaiah 2.3].

'And you, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, even the former dominion shall come; the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem' [Micah 4.8].

Today we find the three major religions of the world making claims with regards to who should have the right of control over and access to Jerusalem. As the words of the prophets foretold, God himself, through the work of His son Jesus Christ, will determine the future of this city. A reading of Isaiah chapter 62 underlines the prophetic statements above. This confirms that God himself will make Jerusalem '*a praise in the earth*' [Isaiah 62.7].



The city of Jerusalem

THE BLESSING OF ABRAHAM TO COME ON ALL NATIONS

There can be no doubt that the world needs a single all powerful ruler and a unified government. However it has to be accepted that this kind of authority must be superior to anything within human experience so far. You can rest assured that the form of government to be administered with Divine authority by Jesus Christ will be just that and will be based on Divine principles. The prophet describes the man who is destined to be the future king of Israel in these words:

‘The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. His delight is in the fear of the LORD, and he shall not judge by the sight of his eyes, nor decide by the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth...’[Isaiah 11.2-4].

Now such a time of change and blessing for Israel and the world, yet in the future, is at the very centre of all of God's promises throughout the Bible. Way back, as recorded in Genesis when God chose Abraham, the father of the Jewish race, He made him a promise. That promise as we have seen, is centred in a particular descendant of Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ. From the time of Abraham God has developed His purpose through the nation of Israel and is still working through that same nation today.

Israel's existence today, its revival and survival, confirm the existence of God. He declared through the prophet Isaiah:

'You are my witnesses...that I am God. Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No-one can deliver out of my hand. When I act who can reverse it? ...I am the LORD, your Holy One, Israel's Creator, your King.'

[Isaiah 43.12,13,15 NIV]

Now whatever our personal feelings or prejudices regarding the Jewish race, the fact remains that God has chosen them and the Jews are central to His plan for the world. What we need to focus on is the outcome and the culmination of this Divine plan which, as we showed in the first article, was revealed to Abraham and his descendants – a three-fold promise.

- **God said to Abraham:**

'I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and **all peoples on earth** will be blessed through you'
[Genesis 12.2,3 NIV].

- **God said To Abraham's son Isaac:**

'...For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I

will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring **all nations** on earth will be blessed'

[Genesis 26.3,4 NIV].

- **God said To Abraham's grandson Jacob (Israel):**

'I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. 'Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. **All peoples on earth** will be blessed through you and your offspring'

[Genesis 28.13,14 NIV].

The whole world will benefit from the blessings that God will bring about following the return of Jesus Christ to this earth and the establishment of His Kingdom. It will only be then that the conflicts between Jew and Arab will be resolved. As we consider the state of the world today we find that the ongoing problems of the Middle East and in particular the Palestinian conflict are at the very centre of the political arena.

THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL AND YOU

It is recognised by politicians and statesmen that the resolution of this conflict is absolutely essential to the stability and future welfare of the whole world. We recommend that you forget what the politicians say and concentrate on the only authority that really matters. As we have seen from the Bible, Israel's future is assured – but what about your future?

Although it may not be apparent to you that God is active in our present world, you may rest assured that very soon the events which we have referred to, will affect us all. For this we should be very grateful. However this message comes with a warning in the form of a question: **Are you watching out for it and more importantly will you be prepared and ready for it when it happens?**

Throughout this special issue of 'Light Magazine' we have stressed the need to think seriously about how God has overseen the affairs of the nation of Israel. We have underlined the importance of the promises He made concerning the future blessing of Israel and all nations, given to Abraham the father of the Jewish race. You too, can become personally involved with and benefit from the great changes that will then take place. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians:

'You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.'

[Galatians 3.26-28 NIV]

If you become related to Jesus Christ in this way, you also become related to the promises to Abraham – and the future promised to God's people, the descendants of Abraham. But more than that, having taken on the commitment to be obedient to God's requirements and putting your faith and trust in Him, you will be able to look forward to receiving that greatest of all gifts - life unending and a place in His Kingdom at the return of Jesus. What a truly amazing offer is held out to all of us. Will you, reader, rise to the challenge and focus your attention on God's plan for the future in an uncertain world?

The ultimate future of Israel is assured – you can have that assurance too!

Contributors to this Special Issue of 'Light on a New World' include Ken Dennis, Mark Hamilton and Alan Rich.

The Christadelphians (Dawn Fellowship) believe the Bible (Old and New Testaments) to be the wholly inspired and infallible Word of God. Its principal theme is the salvation of mankind through the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the setting up of the kingdom of God under his rulership when he returns to the earth.

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