

# The Herald Of Christ's Kingdom

*May/June 1996*

Israel in History

## Editors' Journal

*Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in  
Jerusalem.—Zechariah 12:6*

Jerusalem is celebrating its 3000th birthday this year. While chronologists disagree as to the exact year of the city of Jebus being taken by David's small band (1 Chron. 11:1-6), the figure 3000 is certainly not far off from being correct. In any case, Jerusalem can likely hold claim to being the oldest capital city in the world.

Few cities have known more masters. The city, like its kingdom, has well fulfilled the prophecy of Ezekiel 21:27, ". . . I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, until he come whose right it is." Following its fall to the armies of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the area has been ruled successively by Medo-Persia, the Ptolemys, the Hasmoneans, Rome, Byzantium, Muslims, Crusaders, Saladin, the Franks, the Mamelukes, the Tartars, the Ottomans, and Great Britain.

The Jewish people have been the main occupants of the city for less than one-half of that time. Yet the city remains not only the political capital of the state of Israel, but the emotional and spiritual capital of Judaism as well.

The return of the Israeli to his ancient homeland is a miracle of the past 120 years. The city is standing at a crossroads of history with a checkered past behind it and a glorious future ahead of it. We join in saying, "Happy Birthday, Jerusalem!"

## A People with a Past

This issue of **THE HERALD** is a salute to the people of Israel. They have become known as "the people of the Book." It is from this "Book," the Bible, that we will be drawing the lessons from the rich history of this nation. Our theme for this edition is "Israel in History."

The opening treatise, *A New Nation is Born*, as its title implies, explores the origin of the Jewish people, tracing their lineage from "father" Abraham through their exile in Egypt and the Exodus, which brought them back to the land of promise.

After conquering what was then called the Land of Canaan, the twelve tribes of Israel began subduing the land through agriculture and sheep-herding. Their governmental structure was a loose alliance of tribes, each semi-autonomous. *Another Generation* examines the period of the Judges when, as the Bible says, "there was no king in Israel, and every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Jud. 21:25).

*Lessons from the Kings of Israel* probes the next era of their history. Within the first three reigns—those of Saul, David, and Solomon—the nation arrived at the zenith of its glory. The territory of the country nearly fulfilled the biblical prediction that it would stretch "from the river of Egypt, unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. 15:18).

The Bible is largely silent on the history of Israel for the five hundred years between their return from Babylon and the first advent. Yet the developments of that time were vital to setting the stage for their most important moment, the arrival of their Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. These silent years form the subject matter for *Between the Testaments*. This narrative is continued through the time of Jesus in the succeeding treatise, All Men in Expectation.

Although Jesus, as their Messiah, had come particularly to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24), he was rejected by his countrymen. In the closing week of his life as he wept over the city, he uttered a fearful sentence, "your house is left unto you desolate" (Matt. 23:38). The fulfillment of this prediction is chronicled in the treatise, *The Ninth of Ab*.

## A People with a Present

The Bible has little to say about the specifics of the next nearly two thousand years, other than to predict a bleak Diaspora for the Hebrew people, wandering homeless from country to country. Fortunately, this was not to be a permanent situation. Their hopeful cry, "Next year in Jerusalem," has finally given way to *This Year in Jerusalem*, the title of the next article in this issue.

Following in the same vein, the monthly verse by verse Bible study, entitled *Of Bones and Sticks*, looks at two specific prophecies of their return.

# A New Nation is Born

*The Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse him that curses you; And all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you."—Genesis 12:1-3 Tenakh*

*Leonard Griehs*

The covenant with Abraham is the foundation for all of God's redemptive work. The remainder of the Bible, from Genesis 12 through Revelation, unfolds the story of how God carries out the promise that he made to his friend Abraham. This article will discuss the seeds planted that day and the way in which they eventually produced the nation of Israel. The seeds were planted with Abraham (Abram), sprouted in his son Isaac, bore fruit in Isaac's son Jacob, and grew into full bloom with the twelve sons of Jacob. Their progeny became the twelve tribes of Israel. These twelve tribes emerged from Egypt bound for Abraham's land of promise, Canaan.

Abram was called of God to venture to a land he did not know. God promised it to him, although Abram himself would never possess it. That a great nation would establish itself there was indicated by God himself in the theme text. In this rousing command to a man surrounded by pagans and yet to be proven, God spoke of his purpose. That purpose was to bless all the families of the earth. He promised to bring forth a nation that would produce a redeemer who would "bruise the serpent's head" (Gen. 3:15). This will rid mankind of the curse of death. Plainly, God works in mysterious ways!

God led Abram through many adventures, as recorded in chapters twelve to fourteen of Genesis. However, the culminating experience in his dealing with Abram is contained in seven words in the fifteenth chapter. There we are told that "The Lord made a covenant with Abram." (Gen. 15:18) In fact, this is the only time that exact phrase appears.

Recognizing this chapter as the inauguration of the covenant is essential to realizing how and why God gave so much care to the development of the nation and lends reliable credibility to God's promises to his children in Israel. Our story must begin here.

## **Eliezer Not the Heir**

At first, Abram thought that God would use Eliezer his servant to execute the promise and bestow the great blessings. God assured him, however, that his servant was not to be the one, and that despite his being childless at the time, Abram would have a son to receive the promise (Gen. 15:2-4). Although he and his wife Sarai were beyond the age of having children, Abram trusted in God's promise. "And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness." (Gen. 15:6)

If only we could demonstrate such faith when God's call becomes difficult and we cannot see our way out! Abram's simple faith was used as an example to believers in Christ by both Paul and James (Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6; James 2:23).

The writer of Hebrews attests to the importance of faith and cites both Abraham and Sarah as premier examples (Heb. 11:8-12). Is it any wonder that God places the burden of our salvation on faith rather than service? Abraham demonstrated his faith in so many ways and did many wonderful works in God's name; yet his simple belief in God's power to overcome any earthly restrictions, and thus fulfill his promise, was the basis for his reward as an "ancient worthy."

### **God Illustrates His Covenant With Abram**

Abram's faith pleased God. However, as is so often the case in the Old Testament, God demonstrated to Abram in a remarkable way the power of his commitment—a mysterious ceremony involving smoking pots and burning torches. "Then he said to him, 'I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to assign this land to you as a possession.' And he said, 'O LORD GOD, how shall I know that I am to possess it?' He answered, 'Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young bird.' He brought him all these and cut them in two, placing each half opposite the other; but he did not cut up the bird. Birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away." (Gen. 15:7-12, Tenakh)

God instructed Abram to cut in half three animals—the same type of animals later to be used in the Levitical sacrifices—a heifer, a goat and a ram (Gen. 15:9-10). As Abram prepared to cut these animals according to God's instruction, a throng of unclean birds swept down upon the carcasses.

This strange interlude (which scares Abram) is used by God to reassure him—he told Abram that the birds represented the time that the children of the promise would spend in Egypt. "And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance" (Gen. 15:13-14).

The word "afflict" in this passage is the same word Moses uses later to describe Egypt's oppression of Israel. "Therefore, they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens" (Ex. 1:11). Like the birds of prey attacking Abram's sacrifice, Egypt would interrupt the salvation plan for some four hundred years as it oppressed the inheritors of the promised land. Eventually, however, Egypt became the means by which the children of Israel gained the necessary wealth to survive forty years of wandering on the journey to Canaan.

After sunset, Abram saw a smoking fire pot and a burning torch pass between the pieces of the sacrifice. This description of God's glory was to be later reflected in the Levitical sacrifices as the "*shekinah*"—the consuming holiness of God. Then a crucial statement

follows: "In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram . . ." (15:18) The word for "made" here is Strong's 3772, *karath*. It literally means to "cut" and is used 26 times in the Old Testament. In fact it is this ceremony which forms the origin of the word—to "make an alliance or bargain by cutting flesh and passing between the pieces." God's own presence assures Abraham that he will fulfill his promise by his own power.

The covenant with Abraham was unilateral—it required nothing from Abraham, except faith. True, God later required the practice of circumcision upon Abraham's posterity but only as a sign of the covenant: "As for you and your offspring to come throughout the ages, you shall keep my covenant. Such shall be the covenant between me and you and your offspring to follow which you shall keep: every male among you shall be circumcised" (Gen. 17:10).

### **Tests Solidify Abraham's Faith**

Twenty-five years later Abraham was put to a severe test regarding the covenant and the promised seed. Following the birth of Isaac, and Isaac's subsequent growth to manhood, God directed Abraham to go to Mount Moriah and there sacrifice Isaac. Surely this was one of the most severe tests any prophet ever endured!

Abraham did not hesitate. His faith in God had solidified after the ceremony of the covenant and the birth of Isaac. He had total confidence that God would fulfill that promise and could do so even if Isaac were slain. Abraham journeyed to Moriah (eventually the site of the Temple in Jerusalem) and built an altar upon which to offer Isaac. As he raised the knife to slay his son, God intervened. "And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, 'In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.' And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, And said, 'By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice'" (Gen. 22:11-18).

In the burning pots and sacrifices, God had shown Abraham the beginning of his salvation plan. Through the covenant with Abraham, the law and its sacrifices would produce temporary blessings to the nation of Israel and keep it under the special protection of God. Now, in this second illustration, God indicates another step in the salvation plan. God himself would provide a substitutionary sacrifice—his own son—and on the very spot where Abraham offered Isaac!

Abraham's willingness to offer his long-awaited Isaac illustrated God's own willingness to give his greatest joy—his only son, Jesus. God's promise to Abraham continued to unfold and once more he attested to it by his own name.

### **The Promise Passes Through Isaac**

Abraham reached the age of 175 and died. God had promised him the land and had testified to the promise at least twice with his own oath. Yet Abraham himself never possessed a foot of the land! (Acts 7:5). Does this mean that God went back on his word? Indeed not! The conclusion must be that God would give at some future time all the land promised to Abraham's offspring. Every natural descendant of Abraham can be comforted by that promise yet to be fulfilled in its entirety. Even Abraham, the hero of faith, will plant his feet in that land someday. But for now, the promise passed through to the next generation.

Isaac, the child of the promise, married Rebekah; God's choice for him, indicated to Abraham's servant (Gen. 24). Like his father, Isaac had faith in God and knew the promised blessing would flow through him and his seed. Like his father's wife Sarah, Isaac's wife Rebekah failed to conceive. Only after Isaac pleaded with God did Rebekah conceive. Once again God intervened to grant a pregnancy and showed his diligent attention to fulfilling the promise. But the promise developed in a unique way when Rebekah gave birth to twin boys, Esau and Jacob.

### **Jacob Receives the Blessing**

Esau, as the firstborn, would normally have been heir to his father's promises; however he had given up his inheritance to satisfy his earthly appetite. There is a general misunderstanding about the transfer of the birthright and the promise from Esau to Jacob. Many biblical commentators portray Jacob's plot in a negative light. However, had it been the deceitful thing that many make it to be, God would have reproved him, just as he reproved David for the deceitful way by which he stole Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11, 12).

In the case of Jacob there is no record of God's disapproval. Scriptures point to Jacob as a faithful patriarch. Perhaps God looked favorably on this incident to illustrate the passing of the promises of God from natural Israel, the original inheritors of God's blessings, to the followers of Jesus, who became the main heirs of the Abrahamic promise. "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29). Thus Jacob pictures the sacrifice of every earthly interest to secure the higher spiritual promise of joint-heirship with Christ.

Jacob lamented his second-born status because it meant that he would not be the channel for the divine blessing. Isaac must have talked to his sons many times about their grandfather Abraham, and the experiences he and his father had together in recognizing God's deliverance and the reiteration of the promise! The promised blessing, not the possession of his father's goods, led Jacob to do all he could to secure it—indeed, to

become an outcast, a pilgrim, and a stranger. Each of us should diligently pursue the heavenly promise as Jacob pursued the earthly one!

God showed his pleasure with Jacob in a dream. He confirmed to Jacob that the promise made to Abraham, passed to Isaac, was now passing to him.

"And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed. . . . And behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (Gen. 28:13-15).

### **The Twelve Sons of Jacob**

Thus through divine oversight, Jacob received the birthright blessing which God had made to Abraham and passed it to his twelve sons, the forerunners of the nation of Israel.

The story of Jacob's sons is one of the most well-known of the Bible. Paramount is the story of Joseph—Jacob's first son by his favorite wife Rachel—who was sold into Egypt by his brothers and emerged as a great ruler. When famine forced Jacob and his family to reside in Egypt, the next significant unfolding of the promise took place. Jacob had already received personal reassurance that the promise would not fail. He had wrestled with the angel of God and had received a new name—Israel (He will rule as God). He had gotten both a blessing and a change of name. Once again we can see in Jacob's life an illustration of those who follow Christ and also receive a new name (Rev. 2:17).

Thus began the final chapter of the beginning of the nation of Israel. Under the direction of the Lord, Jacob called his sons to him and revealed their futures relating to the promise of blessing. The most significant part of the promise now narrowed to but one of Jacob's twelve sons. Jacob revealed that the original blessing to Abraham would flow through the loins of the great grandson Judah. "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10).

The Jewish Talmud lists Shiloh as one of the names of Messiah (Sanhedrin 98b). The most ancient Jewish commentary on the book of Genesis also adopts this interpretation (Bereshit Rabba 99). In the scriptures, the name Shiloh most likely relates to the word Shalom, the Hebrew word for peace. This is confirmed in the prophecies of the Messiah's coming in Isaiah 9:6 as the "Prince of Peace" and in Micah 5:5 as "this man shall be peace." These prophecies were the final stroke in the developing portrait of redemption given through the promise of Abraham and leading up to the development of the nation that would first be offered redemption. From this time on, the children of Israel looked for the promised deliverer to come from the tribe of Judah.

This narrowing of the promise is a key theme of the Old Testament. First, in Genesis 3:15, he says simply that the deliverer will be of mankind; in 9:26, it is intimated he will be a descendant of Shem; in 12:3, we are told that Abraham would be the progenitor of him in whom all families of the earth would be blessed; in 21:12, it was narrowed to the

line of Isaac; in 25:23 it was narrowed to Jacob, one of the two sons of Isaac; now, it is limited to the lineage of Judah. Later king David would come through the line of Judah and, in 2 Samuel 7:12-16, the genealogy of the Messiah is described as coming through David. God truly kept his word!

### **Captivity in Egypt**

Jacob's descendants dwelt safely in Egypt while their patriarch Joseph was alive, but eventually they passed through the fiery trials God had made manifest in his covenant ceremony with Abraham.

A new Pharaoh dealt harshly with the multiplying descendants of Jacob (Exod. 1:8). He feared that the Israelites would outnumber the Egyptians and ordered that all newborn Hebrew males be slain. Moses, however, escaped the death sentence. God miraculously preserved him and caused him to be nourished and brought up in Pharaoh's own house. Yet Moses treasured his Hebrew inheritance and chose to suffer affliction on behalf of his own people rather than enjoy the luxuries of Egypt. His sacrifice is a grand lesson to all those who are drawn to the world's luxuries and pleasures!

Harsh treatment of the Israelites continued under the Pharaoh, and God responded to the cries of Abraham's seed. He instructed Moses to return and prepare the people for deliverance. In the final plague cast upon hard-hearted Pharaoh, God gave another illustration of his great plan of redemption. The Passover—the sparing of the death of the firstborn of Israel—pictured the far greater deliverance from death of all those who would follow his Son. God used his earthly inheritors to provide a lesson for his spiritual family (I Cor. 10:11). The death of the first-born of Pharaoh's own house brought down the final barrier to the journey to the promised land. The following day, over 600,000 men, and probably as many women and children, left Egypt to follow Moses into the wilderness. That was the beginning of a new era in the development of the promise.

The miraculous deliverance from their enemies should have been sufficient to establish Israel's faith in God. However, much more was to be endured before they would finally become the nation in the new land that Abraham had stood and surveyed some five hundred years before.



## The Period of the Judges

# Another Generation

*And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. —Judges 2:10*

*Carl Hagensick*

Judgeship in Israel was a unique office. It differed both from the strong centralized leadership of Moses and Joshua, which preceded the period of the judges, and from the kingships which followed.

During the exodus and the period of conquest there was strong cohesion between the twelve tribes of Israel. Their religious life centered around the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant; they received political leadership from Moses and Joshua, recognizing them as God's appointees.

One of the first developments after the conquest of Canaan was dividing the promised land into tribal areas (Josh. 13:7). The tribes then became semi-autonomous. Along with the religious laxity mentioned in our text the tribes gave less and less heed to God's command to come together three times a year to celebrate the religious feasts. Each tribe began to develop its own government with the nation being a loose amalgam of the tribes. The situation was roughly analogous to the "state's rights" period in American history that preceded the Civil War.

While each tribe may have appointed its own "elders," probably by election, God raised up special leaders in answer to Israel's prayers for deliverance. This office may have combined the functions of tribal "heads" (Num. 1:4-16) and of the seventy elders appointed to assist Moses (Num. 11:16). This office, unlike that of the kings, was not dynastic or hereditary but appointed or elected; though in the cases of Jair (Jud. 10:3, 4) and Abdon (Jud. 12:13, 14) there does appear to be some succession along family lines.

Thus there may have been many judges sitting simultaneously, perhaps one in each tribe. From time to time, in cases of national crises when Israel "prayed unto the Lord," Jehovah raised up a "judge" to bring deliverance to the people. These special "judges" form the outline for the biblical book of Judges.

In this book of the Bible (plus the first four chapters of 1 Sam.) we read of the exploits of fourteen of these judges. They came from a variety of the tribes. Three of them came from Ephraim, two each from Judah and Gad, and one each from Dan, Naphtali, Zebulon, Issachar, Manasseh, Benjamin, and Levi. Only the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, and Asher did not contribute to these delivering judges.

While these judges represented more of a centralized leadership for the nation, not all tribes always participated in each specific deliverance. For instance, when Deborah and Barak marshaled their troops against king Jabin of Canaan and his general Sisera, they were joined by soldiers from Ephraim, Benjamin, Zebulun, Issachar, Manasseh, and Naphtali. The men of Reuben, Dan, Asher, and Gad gave no support. (Jud. 5:14-18).

### Conditions in Israel

A frequent phrase in the book, appearing seven times, is "the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord" (Jud. 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). Their constant idolatry caused the Lord to permit them to become subjugate to surrounding nations on numerous occasions. They were oppressed successively by the Mesopotamians, Moabites, Ammonites, Canaanites, Philistines, and Midianites.

The repetitive lapses into idolatry do not appear to have been deliberate rebellion but rather from weakness and being subject to temptation. The entire experience of this period is summed up in the last verse of Judges (21:25): "In those days there was no king in Israel, and every man did that which was right in his own eyes." They apparently were able to rationalize their behavior, making it seem "right" in their own eyes.

Temporally, they were in a period of prosperity. The land was fertile. Their flocks and herds were growing. They had accumulated sufficient wealth to be a constant target of surrounding nations seeking tribute. This was in marked contrast to the nomadic life they had in their forty years of wilderness wanderings.

Israel was demonstrating an oft-proved principle, temporal prosperity tends toward spiritual poverty. Seeking to maintain peace with their neighbors rather than expelling them, as God had commanded, they began to imitate them. In the history of the church, the same has been true, especially during the final stage, the period of Laodicea, of whom was written: "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see" (Rev. 3:17, 18).

One of the strong temptations to the Christian is the twin pull of prosperity and the desire to peacefully co-exist with a community that "knows not God." It is one thing to "live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18) and quite another to emulate their life style. As the Apostle Paul writes, ". . . be not conformed to this world . . ." (Rom. 12:2). Again, as we read in 1 John 2:15, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

### God's Choices

Three of the heroes in the book of Judges stand in great prominence—Deborah, Gideon, and Jephthah. The choices in these cases are uniquely God's; they are not the ones which

men would normally select. Deborah was a woman; Gideon, the least-esteemed son of the family esteemed the least in his tribe (6:15); and Jephthah, an illegitimate child (11:1).

As always, God chooses not as man chooses. As the Lord said to Samuel in the selection of David to be king, ". . . the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). This is also an important lesson for the Christian. Where man's priorities lie in selecting men who are aggressive and charismatic leaders, the Lord seeks those of a quiet spirit and a humble disposition, ones whom God can mold into the pattern fit for the task that lies ahead.

Another illustration from this period demonstrating a distinction between man's judgments and God's is found in the account of Samson. In the fourteenth chapter of Judges, Samson desires to take a Philistine wife from Timnath. The reaction of his parents was in line with God's commands against intermarriage (Ezra 10:2; Neh. 13:27). They said to Samson, "Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, get her for me; for she pleaseth me well" (Jud. 14:3).

We are prone naturally to concur with Samson's parents. However, the next verse shows the plan of the Lord behind the entire matter: "But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel" (v. 4).

Samson's exploits, which appear so sensual and earthy to us, do not seem to reflect God's judgments on the matter, nor those of the Apostle Paul, for he is given a specific place in the list of heroes of faith in Hebrews 11:32. We, too, should be slow to judge actions of others which may appear to us as being out of accord with the Lord's directions. As each stone in the temple was carved for its particular niche, and as each bone in the human body is shaped to suit its functions, so God's dealings with each Christian are unique in preparing them for a specific place in his future plans. Truly, their final character will be "a name which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it" (Rev. 2:17).

## Idolatry

Idolatry was not limited in this period to the service of pagan gods. We find two related accounts of idolatry—one personal and one tribal—in Judges 17 and 18. The first deals with Micah, a young man whose mother made for him a graven and a molten image. With these he established a "house of gods" (17:5). The Chaldaic Targum here reads "an house of error," and error it truly was. He then seeks to legitimize his idolatry by hiring a Levite as his priest (vs. 10-13).

Even today establishing houses of error and seeking to legitimize them by establishing a priesthood around them is easy. Both the hireling shepherd and his employers are equally guilty in hypocrisy and breaking the first commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:3). In the following chapter we find a group of renegade Danites,

seeking additional territory around Laish to the north of Ephraim. They stop at the house of Micah and seek to emulate his ways by establishing their own priesthood in the northern city of Dan (18:18-31). By this they would dilute the worship at Jerusalem and separate their area from the rest of the nation. Later, Jeroboam, the first king of the breakaway kingdom of Israel, follows a similar tactic (1 Kings 12:27-33).

The priest hired by the tribe of Dan is identified as "Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh" in Judges 18:30. However the NIV, RSV, and ASV, among others, indicate that he is the grandson of Moses, not Manasseh. If this is true, it leaves yet another lesson from this period of Israel's history: the descendants of a righteous man do not necessarily follow in their ancestor's footsteps. This was a recurring problem in the next period of history, of the kings, when the father was succeeded by his son. As a result we find frequent relapses during that period because of the unfaithfulness of the man selected for kingship.

### The Third Generation

In any event, the new "generation" of our theme text was the third generation from the Exodus. In this there is a recurring pattern throughout the scriptural record—a pattern that non-biblical history repeats as well. When great reformers rise on the scene they show the mighty purifying power of their personal vision. After their death, however, there is frequently a power struggle to see who will carry on to fill their shoes. The bitterness of this struggle, along with the time lapse from the heroics of the first generation, leave a disillusioned third generation. Well has the wise man said, "where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18).

This lesson seems especially appropriate to many today who are in the third (and even fourth) generation from the visions which inspired the Bible Student movement in the latter part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries. We are a generation who have witnessed the divisiveness of power struggles. We are a generation who, by and large, "knew not [by personal experience] the works which [the Lord] hath done for (spiritual) Israel." It is as essential now as ever before that we do not merely do "that which is right in our own eyes," but recognize that "there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12). Keep searching the Scriptures to see what is right in the eyes of our God and follow therein.

# Lessons from the Kings of Israel

*"Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. But the thing displeased Samuel . . . and the Lord said . . . they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them"—1 Samuel 8:5-7*

*David Rice*

This was a dark day in Israel's history. The people would have their way, and the Lord refused not to condescend to their desire. They placed their wish above divine counsel, and God, all wise, permitted the nation to learn by experience the sad consequences.

Naturally there were warnings. Samuel foretold the oppressive effects which would result, conscription and taxation (1 Sam. 8:10-21). These grew so heavy on the people during the reign of Solomon that at his death the people demanded of his son and successor Rehoboam relief from the burdens; and when he foolishly threatened even more, the kingdom was rent in two, the greater part forming the ten-tribe kingdom ruled from Tirzah, later Samaria—all this after only three kings had ruled (see also 1 Sam. 12). In the first armed conflict between the two brother kingdoms, 500,000 men lost their lives (2 Chron. 13:16), about twice as many as died during the four years of the American Civil War.

## **Respect for God's Arrangements**

The first and most striking lesson, therefore, is the wisdom of obedience to God's arrangements. Retrospectively, the lesson is even more striking, when we compare the Judges of Israel with the Kings of Israel. From time to time, a king rose in Jerusalem whose devotion to God was commended—David, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Josiah—to a lesser extent Amaziah, Uzziah and Jotham. All these were of the line of Judah, seven "good" kings. In the northern ten-tribe kingdom, which endured for more than two centuries, not even one king received this commendation—all together, only seven good kings out of 43, a total of 16%.

By contrast, there was not one bad judge—14 of 14 were faithful. In fact the only wicked leader of Israel during that time was Abimelech, who reigned as king by usurpation about three years (Jud. 9, 10).

It is not as though Israel had no legitimate criticisms. Though Samuel was in every way trustworthy and honorable, his sons were not, and Samuel was growing old. "When Samuel was old he made his sons judges over Israel . . . and his sons . . . turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment. Then all the elders of Israel . . . said . . . make us a king" (1 Sam. 8:1-5).

Also, Israel had recently come through forty years of oppression by the Philistines (Jud. 13:1; 1 Sam. 7). Naturally they felt the need of a strong military leader and an organized

resistance, such as a king would provide. Their wish was not an arbitrary one. The pressure of these issues compelled them to risk even the evils Samuel had warned them a king would bring.

Were we in their place, how many of us would have bowed to these factors, reasonable as they seemed, rather than take our stand on principle and faith? As a corporate whole, the Christian world opted for the bad example of the Israelites; and thus there was the formation and rule for centuries of the hierarchy of the Roman church. It not only aggregated blatant sins, abuses, and blasphemous arrogance, but silenced by the stake and flame the cries of protest raised from noble hearts. The people of God had come through many afflictions from the Roman empire, and most recently through the brutal ten-year oppression begun under emperor Diocletian in 303. Then Constantine came to power, and the Christian world so recently released from dire oppression too gladly accepted a league with the powers that existed. There was reason and cause. Not many kept the wiser course of principle and faith, trusting God.

None of the oppressors of Israel during the judges harmed the interests of that nation so much as the wicked acts of ones like Ahaz and Manasseh, who "shed innocent blood very much" (2 Kings 21:16) and caused children "to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen" (2 Kings 16:3). And none of the oppressions of pagan Rome, bloody as they were, matched the atrocities of the corrupt rule of the church of Rome.

Much better for us always to trace the counsel of the Lord, and adhere to it with thanks, even if pressed by contrary circumstance and apparent advantage. "My ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:9).

### **A Contrast of Two Kings**

One of the most egregious of sins was committed by one of the godliest of kings—good King David. He was able somehow to shield his sensibilities from the awfulness of his deeds. After all, were not kings customarily allowed many wives, and did not many fall in battle? "The sword devoureth one as well as another" (2 Sam. 11:25). So did David conceal adultery and murder.

One lesson is right on the surface: even very good men can (at times) fall into very bad sins. Let us not assume this always to be so, however. It may occur, but it should not occur. For example, there is no hint that the noble Apostle Paul, who "lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1), ever fell into egregious sin; and that should be the normal course for the godly. But it may not be the experience of all the godly, and for this cause no doubt the Lord made an example of him who was "a man after his own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14) for our comfort and reassurance in such a case.

Guilt is the inner sensibility of sin and shame which we feel when sin is disclosed in the presence of others. These words cannot be confined to these meanings, but there is a good point in this distinction. When the knowledge of David's sin was spoken publicly

by the prophet Nathan, the guilt which lurked in a dark corner of David's heart bloomed to full shame. He was worthy of death, and prepared for the righteous punishment. When he came face to face with his sin he did not deny it; he did not excuse it. His sin had found him out. His pride was broken. His heart yearned to be free of its burden, and nothing now except frank confession and utter repentance filled his mind. He pleaded with fervor: "Have mercy upon me, O God . . . Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee . . . have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight. . . . purge me with hyssop . . . wash me . . . Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me . . . Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God . . . thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it . . . The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart, . . ." (Psalm 51).

Seven days he fasted, and when the child of his sin died he complained not. Is our repentance as deep and our remorse as thorough when our sins are evident? Have we not cause for humility before the Lord as we examine the frailty of our way? Have we the forgiving spirit of the Lord who read the earnest heart and forgave? All these lessons merit deep reflection.

The reminders and chastisements of the Lord from this experience continued through the years of David's long life. "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; . . . I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun" (2 Samuel 12:11). What a heart rending experience to later find the agent of this evil would be his own dearly loved son. David would accept the discipline of the Lord. This too is an example for us.

Another king—even a good one—much later fell into the sin of pride and arrogated to himself the privileges of the priesthood: when Uzziah determined to offer incense in the temple. The priests withstood him forcibly. Unlike David, when his sin was rebuked, he would not soften. He was smitten on the spot, and became "a leper unto the day of his death . . . and Jotham his son was over the king's house . . ." (2 Chron. 26:16-21). Let our pride never be so deep that it fails to flex before the rebuke of the Lord.

### **A Quick Look at Some Other Lessons**

Saul's humility was his greatest asset and its loss was his greatest fault.

Solomon properly asked the Lord for wisdom to rule the people of God, valuing it over riches or fame or greatness—for this he was rewarded with wisdom above any other and riches and fame in addition. Let us value what Solomon did: heavenly wisdom, which is pure, peaceable, gentle, easily intreated, merciful, without bitterness or hypocrisy (James 3:17). Unlike Solomon, let us be on guard against "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16).

Rehoboam spurned the wisdom of the elders for the passions of the young and split the kingdom. Let us remember that "a soft answer turneth away wrath" (Prov. 15:1), and let the young be sensitive to the counsel of their elders.

King Asa wrought a great victory through faith against the million-man army of Zerah, the Ethiopian (2 Chron. 14:9-15); and in the glow of this victory he proceeded to purge Judah of idolatry, even removing his mother from queenly authority for her false worship (2 Chron. 15:7-16). His zeal lacked full compliance (verse 17), and his pride hindered him from receiving the correction of Hanani the seer (2 Chron. 16:7-10). No matter what our victories by faith, we must not let being self-satisfied or self-confident replace devoted thanks.

Good King Jehoshaphat became unequally yoked with evil king Ahab. When this alliance took the field of battle, but for the Lord's special care Jehoshaphat would have perished (2 Chron. 18:1, 31). Let us be wary of allying ourselves with those of ungodly aims and values, lest it imperil our lives in a spiritual crisis. What seems innocent at the start can entrap us in unwanted circumstances down the road.

The indiscretion of this alliance had an even more perverse influence in later times. Jehoshaphat had allowed his son Jehoram to marry Jezebel's daughter Athaliah. After the passing of Jehoshaphat and Jehoram (and the death of his successor Ahaziah during the first year of his reign,) Athaliah slew all the king's seed and usurped the throne for herself. Only the infant Joash was rescued from this plot. He was raised secretly, and in the seventh year the priest Jehoiada commanded a revolt, slew Athaliah, and installed Joash as king, the only royal child able to carry on the line of David (2 Chron. 22, 23). Jehoiada had remarkable faith and was blessed with a life of 130 years. God's promises are sure, for he had pledged to David that his line would retain the kingship. Despite any appearances in the interim outworking of God's plan, nothing he designs will fail.

The sin of ingratitude was never more manifest than under Joash. The young king who was preserved and trained by faithful Jehoiada later conspired to falsely condemn his son Zechariah, who rebuked Judah's waywardness after the passing of Jehoiada. This is the crime that Jesus evidently referred to in Matthew 23:35 (where "son of Barachias" is omitted in the Sinaitic manuscript) [2 Chron. 24:20-24].

Joash's son Amaziah was given victory over "the children of Seir," but on his return foolishly sought after the gods of Edom rather than give glory to God. In his folly he indiscreetly challenged Jehoash of Israel to battle. He lost and was taken prisoner to Samaria, and in his absence "all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king in the room of his father Amaziah" (2 Chron. 25, 26:1). Amaziah was subsequently released, in fact he outlived his captor by fifteen years (2 Chron. 25:25). But he probably never forgot this rebuke from the Lord for his idolatry (2 Chron. 25:14, 15). Have we had some remarkable victories of faith, run well for a season, and then turned to pursue the things of this life? "Little children, keep yourselves from idols," we are advised (1 John 5:21).



Hezekiah was surrounded by adversity. The entire middle east fell under Assyrian sway, and Jerusalem was sieged for an imminent fall. King Sennacherib of Assyria sent a letter of ultimatum. In one of the most touching episodes of Judah's long history, "Hezekiah went up unto the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord," and left his case completely with the Lord. This prayer of complete faith the Lord heard, and the invincible might of Assyria was laid waste in one night by the angel of the Lord (Isa. 37). Does he care any less for spiritual Israel? Is he weaker on our part than for those of old?

After Manasseh's reign led to gross sin in Judah, the Lord would no longer spare. The nation would fall. For the prudence and devotion of good King Josiah who followed, the punishment would not come until after his time. After a long reign of 31 years, the Lord allowed the good king to fall in battle against Egypt. He never lived to see the evil his people would soon suffer under the might of Babylon. Like Josiah, let us be pledged to the Lord's cause whatever the adversity. Like him, let us fall in a noble warfare, but with us a spiritual one (2 Chron. 34, 35; 2 Cor. 10:4).

# Between the Testaments

*Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.—Daniel 9:24, 25*

## *Contributed*

As the era of the Old Testament came to an end, there was silence in the writings of the prophets. Many pointed forward to the coming of Messiah, but the period of waiting was left to the patient ones. The prophecy of Daniel provides the clue that the wait from the building of Jerusalem until Messiah would be 70 weeks. The period of 490 days (70 weeks) prophetically meant 490 years (see Ezekiel 4:6, where a year was applied for each day). A correct application of this prophecy was sought by those with inquiring minds in Jesus' day (Luke 3:15; 7:19, 20). At the end of 490 years the people expected Messiah to come on the scene. John the Baptist was asked if he were Messiah. Jesus was asked if he were Messiah. It was time for the long wait to show some fruitage. Preparation for the Messiah

On the political scene the Persian Empire gave way to the Greek Empire. The Greek Empire gave way to the Roman Empire, just as prophesied in Daniel 11. History laces the events of Palestine with names like Alexander the Great, Ptolemy (there were 15 Ptolemies and seven Cleopatras), Seleucid, Antiochus (there were seven with this name), and the Maccabees. There were high priests named Simon son of Onias, Onias II son of Simon, Onias III, Jonathan, Simon, John, Judas and Hyrcanus II. There were key battles which sparked limited hope and others which dashed what hope there was. The battle of Raphia, the battle of Panias, the Maccabean revolt, civil war, the siege of Pompey and the Parthian Invasion are all but lost to the footnotes in history. To the Jew it meant a continuation of servitude to gentile rule with a blend of freedoms, concessions and turmoil.

Many of the factions found in Jesus' day established their roots during this 490 year period.

## **The Maccabees**

Scholars, philosophers and writers also came from Greece as immigrants to the world of the Fertile Crescent. Many also settled in the new city of Alexandria, founded by Alexander the Great, the capital of the Ptolemaic Egypt, which they helped transform into a great center of culture. There were no other such centers in the Hellenistic world. The first public library in history was built in Alexandria. The Hebrew Bible was translated

into Greek for the large Greek-speaking Jewish community of Alexandria. The result, the Septuagint was the first major translation project in history.

Half way between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean Sea lies the small village of Modein. A Jewish priest named Mattathias Hasmoneas created an incident that triggered a revolt. Since many of the fighting factions of the world had converged upon the land of Israel, it was difficult to keep these influences from invading the strict religious rules of the Jewish community. Greek rulers who had fought for control of Alexander's empire following his death brought with them the Greek culture, known as Hellenism. Some Jews were swayed by the Hellenizing influences, others rebelled or ran away to avoid persecution. Every settlement in the land was ordered to worship Zeus and other foreign deities.

One day an agent of the king was sent to Modein to confirm that the village was paying the proper homage to the deities. Mattathias not only killed a Jew attempting a pagan sacrifice at the altar but slew the royal officer as well. With his five sons (John, Simon, Judas, Eleazar, and Jonathan) Mattathias fled into the Gophna Hills, an area of heavily forested ridges and valleys.

Jews throughout the land rallied to Mattathias, especially the Hasidim, the "pious ones" who dedicated themselves to the Law. They had been steadily losing power to the Hellenizers, but now village after village rose against the Greeks. Mattathias designated Simon, "wise counsel," to lead the rebellion. He selected his third son, Judas, to be military commander, for he "has been a mighty warrior from his youth." Already Judas was called Maccabeus ("the hammer"), a name that would be applied to the mounting rebellion. When Mattathias died, the revolt had not yet produced major fighting, but virtually the whole of Judea except the large towns and walled cities was under rebel control.

Judas skillfully prepared his followers for guerrilla warfare. They knew the land, its hills and valleys, its forests and rocky enclaves, and they drew their support from the local populace. By day they blended with the villagers or hid in the hills and forests. By night they struck the pro-Hellenistic settlements and ambushed enemy patrols. More and more people rallied to Judas' banner.

The key day arrived when Judas led the fight into Jerusalem and took the Temple Mount. When the area was secured and the enemy routed, the sanctuary was cleansed. In December of 164 B.C. the Holy House was rededicated and the lamps of the eternal light were lit once more to the glory of the God of Israel. This moment has ever since been celebrated by the Jews as the festival of Hanukkah.

### **The Essenes**

One group of Jews regarded Simon's priesthood as profaning both the holy office and the Temple. They withdrew to Qumran at the northern edge of the Dead Sea. There they built a monastery and lived a sectarian existence emphasizing scriptural study and ritual

purity as they looked toward the coming of Messiah. From these people came the famous Dead Sea Scrolls. They were known as the Essenes. The Hasmonean Dynasty

Traces of the Hasmonean Dynasty reached the time of Herod the Great. He had married Mariamne, a Hasmonean descendant, but had her executed. Herod's family troubles dominated his declining years. He grew paranoid and had two of Mariamne's sons executed for allegedly plotting against him. As he neared death he had a third son executed for treason. "It is better to be Herod's pig, than his son," Augustus is reputed to have said.

Herod had old Hyrcanus put to death earlier to insure that the Roman Emperor would not be tempted to restore the Hasmonean dynasty. He slew forty-five members of the Sanhedrin who had supported the Hasmoneans, and the Sanhedrin was left with only religious judicial power. Herod feared being replaced by another king. When word of a new king of the Jews came to him from the wise men, his reaction was to slay all the children up to two years of age, hoping to put an end to this threat.

### **The Development of Priestly Sects**

**SADDUCEES:** Factions of Jews sought to confront the cultural specter that had invaded their mountain world from across the sea. The upper classes however, embraced it; many of them were priests, deeply involved in the ruthless maneuvering of geopolitics. The priestly class claimed descent from Zadok, the high priest in the time of King David. They had become rich, powerful, urban, aristocratic. From this background they came to be called Zedukim or Sadducees.

Not all the priests were Sadducees, but all the Sadducees were priests. They were eager to adopt the Hellenistic world, absorb its beauty, share its power, bend to it if need be. They believed fully in the Torah, the written law, and regarded with contempt the interpretations and oral accretions heaped upon the text by generations of scribes. They believed God could be described in human terms and worshipped as one does a human king or ruler. They believed in the sacrificial features but opposed the scribal and Pietist or Hasidim services consisting only of prayer and study. The writings of the Sadducees have not been preserved.

**PHARISEES:** From the ranks of the scribes and priests around the start of the Hasmonean revolution came the first of a new breed of religious teachers. They drew their support from the lower classes of the city and countryside. Because they were forced out—separated from—the Sanhedrin, because they held themselves aloof from pagans and tended to be exceptionally careful in matters of ritual purity, this faction became known as Perushim or Pharisees, from a word meaning "to be separated."

These Separatists held as their fundamental doctrine the belief that an oral law had been revealed to Moses at Sinai together with a written law. They claimed to be the rightful teachers and interpreters of that oral law. They believed that all the stipulations of the covenant should be performed, even those that seemed of only minor importance. They

believed that God guided human events providentially and would mete out reward and punishment in a world to come. They believed in the resurrection of the dead, in angels. Those doctrines had evolved during the critical centuries after the return of exiles from Babylonia and were now regarded by the Pharisees as rooted firmly in the sacred written text. In none of these doctrines did the Sadducees agree.

**ESSENES:** As mentioned earlier, numerous Pietists had looked with despair upon the Hellenism that had come to pervade the Hasmonean court. They departed to the wilderness to live their own lives with God, away from the raised voices, civil strife, and the elaborate temple cult. They longed for the Day of God, an end of strife. Known as Essenes, the word probably means "the healers," after an Aramaic verb, *asa*, to heal. They sought to heal what they thought was an illness caused by the sinful passions of man. Another possibility is that the word may come from *hasin*, the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew word Hasidim, the "pious ones." We know of their world and their lives through the writings hastily concealed in the nearby hillside caves as the Romans came down the road after destroying Jerusalem. Those writings are known today as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

### **The Influence of Hellenistic Teaching Customs**

The master-disciple relationship that became characteristic of Jewish learning appears to have had its roots in the academies of Athens. That was the way organized thought was transmitted then—from master to disciple. Masters would meet together with their disciples and talk of matters pertaining to the personal and communal life of the Jew. They would meet in the temple precinct or in special houses of study. The words bet midrash, house of learning, and yeshiva, seat, the location of the master, are found for the first time in the writings of Ben Sira, a scribe who lived about 180 B.C. The personality of the individual teacher had now become discernible, a clear result of the influence of Greek custom. The scribe, the master, the disciples were separated from court and cult. This was the new kind of leadership. Its beginnings were in the centuries when Hellenism came to Jerusalem.

When Jesus arrived upon the scene Jewish society was in turmoil. Foreign powers had left their influence everywhere. Religious leaders were skeptical of any new rise in popularity. Bloodshed and brutality were commonplace in the halls of justice. The people longed for a Messiah, a Prince of Peace who would reestablish the Kingdom of Israel and free them from the pagan invasion they were forced to endure. The Law, which was to be a schoolmaster to help them appreciate and recognize Messiah, did not fail. It was the hardness of heart and the confusion of 490 years that kept them from appreciating the lesson.

References: Nelson Beecher Keyes, Reader's Digest *Atlas of the Bible World*, pages 152-169; *Wanderings*, Chaim Potok's *History of the Jews*, pages 181-208

# All Men in Expectation

*And as the people were in expectation, . . . all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not.—Luke 3:15*

*Homer Montague*

The Jewish historian Josephus stated there was a general anticipation that the Messiah's appearance was nigh when Jesus was born. Presumably this was based upon the popular interpretation of Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks (Dan. 9:24-27). Although Jesus was not anointed as Messiah until thirty years later, the desire of the wise men from the east to worship the King of the Jews and the order given by Herod to slay innocent children in an attempt to kill this potential rival attested to the stir caused by the holy infant's arrival upon the scene (Matt. 2:1-18).

Nearly three decades passed before John the Baptist began his work as a reformer by calling upon the people to repent from their sinful ways. The effect of his preaching led many to wonder whether or not he was the Christ, but John acknowledged being merely a forerunner; the one who would follow would be greater than he.

The first advent covers the three and one half year period from the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan river to his death on the cross of Calvary, although a case might be made for extending this period until his ascension, since, as the risen Christ, he intermittently had contact with the disciples.

When Jesus commenced his ministry, Palestine had been under foreign subjugation for nearly one hundred years. The temple priesthood cooperated with the occupying Roman powers to maintain a measure of autonomy. They were thus permitted to conduct their religious services as the authorized spiritual leaders of the Jewish people.

## The Scribes

The scribes were transcribers of the scriptures and considered as authorities on the law. The decisions rendered by the leading members of this class became part of the "oral tradition," which in effect often superseded God's word. In the New Testament we frequently find the scribes and Pharisees mentioned together, and in certain cases, some scribes were Pharisees (Acts 23:9).

Jesus was forceful in his condemnation of the scribes. He said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love to be greeted with respect in the market places, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation" (Luke 20:46, 47 RSV). The various theories and speculations rendered by the scribes were perceived by the people to be shallow when compared to the magnificent eloquence and truths expressed by the Master. The

scriptures, speaking of our Lord, so indicate: "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrines: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:28, 29). Clearly, the scribes bore much hatred and resentment towards the Son of Man because his righteousness exposed them for what they truly were.

### The Pharisees

According to Smith's Bible Dictionary, the following items are partially descriptive of the religious sect in Jesus' day known as the Pharisees:

1. The oral law of Jewish traditions became to them a compendium of the entire ritual law and, in time, was considered to be of greater importance than the sacred writings of Moses.
2. Not only did the Pharisees pretend to keep God's law perfectly but they required the people to follow a series of regulations dealing with minute details, such as ritualistic washings, fastings, and tithings, which proved burdensome.
3. They sought the admiration of men and, instead of acknowledging their own sinful nature, they manifested pride and self-righteousness, which were contrary to the spirit of godliness.
4. They were avaricious and sensual. Additionally, they made proselytes who ultimately became even more narrow in thought and opposed the truth to a greater degree than themselves.

Jesus was the epitome of truth, righteousness, and humility. He rebuked the hypocrisy of the Pharisees: "In the meantime, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1).

In addition, Matthew 23:13-33 contains a litany of specifics to support this charge of hypocrisy which both the scribes and Pharisees practiced. It is, therefore, understandable that our Lord would be hated and his enemies would seek his life. We read, "And the Pharisees went forth and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him" (Mark 3:6).

### Sadducees

Another faction which existed during the first advent of Jesus was the Sadducees. Unlike the Pharisees, they taught it was mandatory for the nation to follow the written law because it was of divine origin. Apparently they had great prominence and authority. We read of them, "Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him (which is the

sect of the Sadducees), and were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison" (Acts 5:17, 18).

Other distinguishing features of the Sadducees were a disbelief in angels or spirit beings (Acts 23:8) and a denial of the resurrection. Seeking to entrap the Master concerning this last point (Matt. 22:23-33), they provide further evidence of Christ's ability to show up the sophistry of such opposing claims. Jesus warned his disciples about the impure motives of both these groups: "How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matt. 16:11, 12).

### Jesus' Disciples

The disciples generally were "unlearned and ignorant men" (Acts 4:13), and yet it is this group of individuals who were to have their names inscribed in the foundations of the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14). Surely, God's ways are higher than ours. Each of these special followers of the Lamb had different natural attributes. Although they needed various experiences and the guidance of the holy spirit to transform them into suitable vessels for the Master's service, with the exception of Judas Iscariot, they all manifested loyalty, honesty of heart, and faithfulness in sacrificing earthly interests.

Their human frailties, however, were exhibited frequently in the presence of the Master. Instances of such shortcomings included disputes among themselves as to who should be the greatest (Mark 9:33, 34), Peter's denial of the Lord (Matt. 26:73-75), an inability to remain awake and be a source of comfort during Christ's Gethsemane hour (Matt. 26:36-38), and a sense of doubt on the road to Emmaus by the two disciples concerning Jesus' death and his failure to restore Israel as they had supposed (Luke 24:13-21). The knowledge that the disciples overcame all these fleshly weaknesses should give encouragement to all who are truly God's children at this time.

### The Common People

Though rejected by the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, Jesus was well received by the ordinary people of his day. His teachings and miracles were powerful and stood in sharp contrast to the formality and lack of vitality found among the religious leaders. The Bible says, "and the common people heard him gladly" (Mark 12:37).

"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan" (Matt. 4:23-25).



After Christ miraculously fed the five thousand, he had to depart into a mountain because he discerned the multitude desired to force him into becoming their king (John 6:14, 15).

### Mixed Reviews

Jesus' ministry evoked mixed reviews because on the one hand "there went out a fame of him through all the region round about" (Luke 4:14), on the other, he read in the synagogue of Nazareth on the Sabbath and declared scripture was being fulfilled in their midst. In amazement they inquired, "Is not this Joseph's son?" (Luke 4:21, 22). Those who heard his response concerning a prophet being without honor in his own country were so incensed they unsuccessfully sought to kill him (Luke 4:28-30).

On another occasion, as recorded in John 7:3-9, the kinfolk of Jesus (probably his cousins) urged him to go up to Judea to attend the annual feast of Tabernacles and perform some mighty works to prove himself in front of the learned individuals who would be there. This suggestion was made because his relatives doubted his Messiahship. Our Lord, while confident of divine protection, did not immediately depart for Jerusalem. He knew the chief priests, through envy, sought to kill him. Instead, he told his relatives that they should attend the feast, but he would not "go up yet" because his hour was not fully come.

After his brethren left, however, Jesus did depart for Jerusalem "not openly, but as it were in secret." Although he initially kept a low profile, he later became more visible. There was much discussion about the Master at this great feast. People inquired who he was, and some responded that he was a good man, while others indicated he led the people astray. No one, however, would speak openly in his favor, because everyone feared the priests, scribes, and Pharisees who hated Jesus. When the feast of Tabernacles was at its height, Jesus went into the temple and taught as did the other teachers. The rulers were filled with great wonder because his teaching was remarkable and many of the people believed in him and said, in effect, that if he was not Christ, then when Christ would come, how could he possibly perform greater miracles than those of Jesus (v. 31). The Pharisees and chief priests sent officers to take Jesus, but the record is that no man dared lay hands upon him.

### The Turning Point

The turning point in our Lord's first advent was when he offered himself to the nation of Israel as their king. This was prophesied in Zechariah 9:9. The New Testament record of the fulfillment of this prophecy is: "And they brought him to Jesus: and they cast their garments upon the colt, and they set Jesus thereon. And as he went, they spread their clothes in the way. And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen; Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones

would immediately cry out. And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation" (Luke 19:35-44).

Events during the final week of the Lord's ministry ranged from a multitude hailing him as king to his being utterly rejected by the nation he loved so dearly. When Pilate gave the crowd the choice of freeing him or a convicted murderer, under the prodding of the chief priests the decision was made abundantly clear—release Barabbas, but crucify Christ Jesus, the King of the Jews.

The execution of the Just One brought the first advent to a close. As Christians, how glad we should be that the story does not end there; but in God's plan, one of the important promises concerning our Lord's second advent indicates that the blindness that came upon Israel will ultimately be removed after the church is completed and the New Covenant arrangement is established (Rom. 11:25-32).

## The Fall of Jerusalem

# The Ninth of Ab

***And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.—Luke 21:20-22***

*Carl Hagensick*

Today the ninth day of the Jewish month Ab (July-August on our calendar) is commemorated as a national day of misfortune for Israel. It is a day of fasting.

On the ninth of Ab on the first year of the exodus, according to Jewish tradition, the Israelites refused to enter the promised land after the spies brought back their evil report at Kadesh Barnea (Num. 14:20-23).

On the ninth of Ab Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon burned the city of Jerusalem. This event is ascribed to the tenth of the month in Jeremiah 52:12 and to the seventh of the month in 2 Kings 25:8. In both cases the Syriac and Arabic versions read "ninth." Probably the breach was made on the ninth, with the burning completed on the tenth.

On the ninth of Ab in A.D. 70 the temple in Jerusalem was burned by the Roman forces under the command of Titus. "It was on the ninth of Ab that the defenders made their final stand. They made two last-ditch sorties, but both times they were driven back. Then a Roman soldier hurled a fire-brand through the Golden Window of the temple and the great wooden beams inside began to burn" (*Pictorial History of the Jewish People*, page 88).

On the ninth of Ab in A.D. 135 the forces of Bar Kokhba were finally put down by the Roman general Hadrian and Jerusalem was replaced with a Roman city, Aelia Capitolina. "Even before the fighting was over, Jerusalem began to be rebuilt as a pagan city. By a strange chance, the foundations of the new city were laid on the usual day of misfortune for the Jews, the ninth of Ab. Jews were prohibited from coming near the city" (*A History of the Jews*, page 177).

On the ninth of Ab in A.D. 1492 the last group of Jews expelled from Spain departed by ship. "August 1 was the date set for the final departure of the Jews from Castile and Aragon; actually the last groups left on August 2. By another of those strange coincidences, of which Jewish history is full, that day was the ninth of Ab, the fast day which recalls the destruction of the first, as well as of the second, temple" (*A History of the Jews*, page 363.)

The same writer notes that these departing ships are noted in the log of Christopher Columbus as he began his historic journey, resulting in the discovery of North America. Interestingly, he writes, "Columbus' voyage was more closely connected with the expulsion of the Jews, and with the events leading up to it, than he was ready to admit. . . . Columbus' plans were aided by a number of prominent ex-Jews; his ships were fitted out with money confiscated from the Jews; and his sailors were, to some extent, former Jews, now turned Maranos, fleeing from a land made inhospitable by the Inquisition" (*ibid*, page 365).

On the ninth of Ab in A.D. 1676 Sabbatai Zevi, the most widely accepted of modern Jewish claimants to messianic status, was born. "His birthday (9th Ab) was the day specified in Jewish tradition for Messiah's birth" (*Grolier's Encyclopedia*; "Zevi, Sabbatai").

### **"Your House Left Desolate"**

Shortly before his crucifixion Jesus uttered a stunning sentence against Jerusalem. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matt. 23:37, 38).

The events of the past two thousand years have certainly shown the accuracy of that prophecy. In tracing its execution we want to focus on two of the "ninth of Ab" dates referred to above—the years A.D. 70 and A.D. 135.

The Jewish people in the time of Jesus had long been chafing under Roman rule. Various would-be liberators rose up, such as Theudas and Judas of Galilee (Acts 5:37, 38). The most concerted effort occurred in A.D. 66 when three rival groups of Jews threw the Romans out of Jerusalem. They mustered a force of over 23,000, including 5,000 Idumean mercenaries. There were 2,400 Zealots, plus Simon bar Giroa's troops of 10,000, and another 6,000 under the leadership of John of Gisela. The Romans quickly moved to put down the insurrection. General Vespasian laid siege to the city. The siege was briefly interrupted the next year when the emperor Nero committed suicide and Vespasian was elevated to the throne, starting the Flavian dynasty. His son Titus, however, carried on the siege and on the ninth of Ab in A.D. 70 quelled the rebellion when his men burned the holy temple.

Much was lost. Over 500,000 Jewish civilians were slaughtered. The temple was destroyed, never to be rebuilt, even to the present time. Animal sacrifices were never reinstated on a large scale. Since the genealogical records were burned with the temple, the priesthood could no longer function. The annual temple tax was diverted to Rome. "The Romans now ordered the Jews to send the same annual sum, not to Jerusalem, but to the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill of Rome. The insult was deliberate. The sum involved was petty. The real point was, that despite the pride of the Jews in the God

of heaven, they had to pay tribute to the Olympian god who presumably had conquered him and was entitled to be his heir" (*A History of the Jews*, page 171).

Political rights were also forfeited. The same historian writes, "Even before the war the Jews had enjoyed but little political independence. But at least they occasionally had a native king, and they always had the Sanhedrin, which represented the shell of self-government. Now there could be no more Sanhedrin, because from the point of view of Rome there was no longer a Jewish nation. Palestine was to be governed by a military representative of the emperor" (*ibid*, page 170).

### **The School at Jabneh**

All was not lost, however. Over one million Jews survived the Roman slaughter. They soon reorganized their government in exile. One man, perhaps, was more responsible than any other for this quick regrouping—Johanan ben Zakkai, one of the Jewish leaders trapped in Jerusalem during the siege by Titus. According to tradition, when he saw all hope was lost, he came up with a plan for survival. He feigned death and his aides convinced the invading Romans to give permission to bury him outside the city. Thus, smuggled out in a casket, he escaped the siege. He then boldly went to the Roman camp and requested permission to speak to Titus. He gave the Roman general two predictions—that the siege would be successful and that Titus would be the next emperor of Rome. In return, he asked that he be permitted to form a school at Jabneh to continue the teaching of tradition. He was given that permission. What follows is best told from the annals of history.

"The Pharisaic leaders, shortly thereafter given the title of Rabbi (Hebrew, 'my teacher'), rallied the people for a new undertaking—the reconstruction of religious and social life. Using the institution of the Synagogue as a center of worship and education, they adapted religious practice to new conditions. Their assembly, the Sanhedrin, was reconvened at Jabneh, and its head was recognized by the Romans and given the title of patriarch; the Diaspora Jews accepted his authority and that of the Sanhedrin in matters of Jewish law. The leaders of the Jabneh period included Johanan ben Zakkai, Gamaliel of Jabneh, and Akiba ben Joseph" (*Grolier's Encyclopedia*; "Jews").

"The Sanhedrin, for example, which used to meet in Jerusalem and which always everywhere had been looked upon as the central legislative and judicial body, could meet no more. Rome had forbidden its revival as it forbade everything else that pertained to Jewish life. Quietly Johanan ben Zakkai gathered seventy-one scholars, the number that used to sit on the original Sanhedrin, organized them under similar offices, and set for them the same functions" (*A History of the Jews*, page 185).

Similarly, the synagogue became the substitute for the temple and the newly named "Rabbis" undertook much of the function of the priesthood.

## The Next 67 Years

The last remnants of the Jewish rebellion were quenched with the fall of Masada in A.D. 73. The survivors of the campaign formed themselves into some 125 small agricultural villages. Their hopes revived when the emperor Trajan (A.D. 98-117) promised to rebuild the temple. When he reneged on his promise, uprisings occurred among the Jews in Egypt and Cyprus. His successor, Hadrian (117-138), made a promise to do the same, but it was again broken.

The Jews became more and more restive. Their villages had increased from 125 to 987. A brilliant new military leader had arisen in their ranks, Simeon ben Koseva. Although most of his contemporaries considered rebellion useless, the head of the Jabneh school, Rabbi Akiba, promoted his cause, proclaiming him as "the son of the star," Bar Kokhba in Hebrew, a veiled reference to Numbers 24:17. A large fighting force of 400,000 men was raised and in a series of lightning raids the Romans were temporarily put to flight.

"The war of Bar Kokhba, or the so-called Second Revolt, was a cruel war, perhaps more cruel than the First Revolt of 66-70. It lasted over three years with initial success for the Jews who, led by Bar Kokhba, conquered Jerusalem and reestablished the Jewish state, thus endangering the Roman empire under Hadrian, who was forced to dispatch the best of his legions to Palestine to fight the rebels" (Yadin, Yigael; *Bar Kokhba*, page 18).

"Bar Kokhba drove the Roman legions out of the country. Some historians believe that had he continued pursuing them instead of stopping at the borders of Syria, he might possibly have roused the entire colonial empire to rebel against Rome. . . .

"Bar Kokhba declared the independence of Judea almost as soon as he had taken command of the rebel forces. In emulation of the Maccabees, each year he struck special coins, commemorative shekels and half-shekels, with the Hebrew superscriptions, 'First year after the liberation of Jerusalem' and 'Redemption of Zion'" (*Pictorial History of the Jewish People*, page 90).

"Yet of the three Jewish wars, the third one had been the costliest to the Romans. When Hadrian reported its conclusion to the Senate, he omitted the customary ending, 'I and my army are well,' for neither was well. Hadrian had suffered a tremendous loss of face and his armies had been decimated" (Dimont, Max; *Jews, God, and History*, page 109).

## Gains and Losses

The accomplishments of Bar Kokhba, though short-lived, were many: (1) Independent Jewish government was re-established. (2) Jerusalem was retaken. (3) An altar for animal sacrifice was erected on the temple mount. (4) Gold coins were struck to celebrate the "Restoration of Israel." (5) Land was leased and sub-leased. (6) Sabbath and feast laws were reintroduced. (7) Orders for capital punishment were issued and executed. (8) Governmental sub-districts, such as En-Gedi and Herodion, were established.

On the other hand, the fall of the rebellion brought even greater losses: (1) Over 580,000 people were killed and 985 villages were razed to the ground. (2) Jews were denied access to Jerusalem. (3) They were almost totally expelled from Israel. (4) The rite of circumcision became a legal offense. (5) The school at Jabneh with its shadow government was closed down. (6) The final rift was drawn between the Jews and the Christians.

In support of this last statement, we quote the following from *Those Incredible Christians*, by Hugh Schonfeld:

"Jews were forbidden entrance [to Jerusalem] except once a year. But a Christian church found a lodging in the city under a gentile bishop, Marcus. . . . These events in Jewish history undoubtedly influenced current Christian thinking in two respects. They reinforced anti-Judaic thinking among Christians, who now found themselves further confirmed in the conviction that the Jews had been repudiated by God for their rejection of Christ, and they encouraged those who favored a heavenly rather than an earthly kingdom as the reward for believers. Well before the end of the second century the Christian church had passed beyond its recall to the aims and faith of Jesus and his original Jewish followers. Henceforth the Jesus of Christianity would be alien to his brethren" (page 213).

Thus it was that the desolation pronounced on the Mount of Olives was executed on God's "Chosen People." But, as the Apostle Paul was to affirm prophetically, "Hath God cast away his people? God forbid" (Rom. 11:1). Now, nearly two millennia later, we see the reversal of those tragic days. Now we see the Jews once again returning to their ancient homeland. One of the instrumental steps in this direction was the work of Theodor Herzl and the World Zionist Organization. When the invitation went forth to that original Zionist Congress in 1897, Herzl hearkened back to Bar Kokhba.

"The world at large took little note of this Zionist Congress in Basel. To the world press it was only a crackpot Jewish organization holding another meeting. Nor did the world note the replica of the Jewish coin used in the days of the Bar Kokhba rebellion against Rome, which each member in the Zionist organization received" (Dimont, Max; *Jews, God, and History*, page 398).

Today when Israel is attacked, they hearken back to Masada and their famous rallying cry, "Never again will Masada fall!"

### **The Days of Vengeance**

In a synagogue in Nazareth Jesus took up the scroll one Sabbath, quoted the famous prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-3 and said, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). Many have correctly noted that in his quotation he omitted the phrase "the day of vengeance of our God." They have assumed, and we believe again correctly, that this was because the true "day of vengeance" of Old Testament prophecy lies at the time of Jesus' second advent and not at his first advent.

However, in our theme text, referring primarily to the events of A.D. 69 when Jerusalem was compassed with armies and the Christians, heeding this prophecy, did flee to the trans-Jordan mountain retreat of Pella, Jesus added the words, "these be the days of vengeance."

The interpretations of this phrase to both the first and second advents are not incompatible. One does not cancel out the other for the simple reason that the second advent of Jesus mirrors the experiences of the first advent. This is for two reasons: first, what happens to the Head of the church at the first advent is prototypical of what happens to his body at the second advent. Second, whereas the ending stages of the Jewish age saw the diminishing of the house of Israel, so the Bible predicts that the closing stages of the Gospel dispensation would see the returning of favor to natural Israel. "For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" (Rom. 11:15). Both of these events are accompanied by a period of retributive trouble—"days of vengeance." At the first advent this vengeance affects the nominal natural house of Israel; at the second, it affects the nominal spiritual house of Israel.

Israel went through a dual "baptism with fire" (Matt. 3:11) in the invasions of Titus and Hadrian, now the time has come to rebuild "the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down" (Acts 15:16). Now, more than ever, we are to follow the admonition to "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee" (Psa. 122:6).



## Development in Palestine in Modern Times

# This Year in Jerusalem

*If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee.—Deuteronomy 30:4*

Contributed

Next year in Jerusalem," the plaintive lament heard around the world during the Passover Seder, echoes the long centuries of trial and struggle experienced by a wandering and exiled people. Dispersed throughout the nations of the earth to a land they and their fathers knew not (Jer. 16:13), they have received severe punishment for their disobedience and their failure to comprehend lessons taught in the Law that would have led them to hail their Messiah (Exod. 19:5; Deut. 11:27; 1 Sam. 12:14, 15).

For over eighteen hundred years God showed exclusive favor to Israel (Amos 3:2; Psa. 147:20), making them one of the greatest nations on earth during the reign of King Solomon. Through their prophets he warned them of the consequences of continually forgetting their covenant with him and turning to serve other gods.

Their disobedience resulted in an equal time (1845 years) of no favor and the destruction of their nation (Zech. 9:12; Jer. 16:18). This period of disfavor ended in 1878. The character of this return of favor to the Jew would be so extraordinary as to make it doubtful as to whether their favor had returned.

Favor returned during a period of unprecedented trouble on the entire world (Joel 3:1, 2; 9-12). The return to the land incurred great hardships on the Jews, both inside and out of Israel. The role of the Christian who sees Israel's part in God's plan was to encourage the Jew by telling them that it is indeed the time (Psa. 102:13) to go up and possess the land (Deut. 1:8). Since 1878, every step made to return to the land has been met with almost insurmountable obstacles created by the various nations of the earth, so that it can without a doubt be said that the birth of the State of Israel in 1948 was a miracle of God.

Historians state that the modern state of Israel took nearly 100 years (mid 1870's to 1970) to grow into the entity that it is today. Both ancient and modern, internal and external forces facilitated the return and growth of the Jewish state. One of these ancient forces was racial homogeneity. In the Diaspora, throughout the centuries, no host country wanted the Jew. Constant attempts were made to assimilate them and to convert them to Christianity or Mohammedanism. Where this was impossible, they were driven from nation to nation, with no hope of finding a resting place.

Jews were accused of performing heinous crimes against Christians, and were burned, tortured, massacred, and exiled so that they literally had no place to lay their heads. This period of national disfavor began in A.D. 33 when Jesus proclaimed that henceforth their

house would be left desolate (Matt. 23:38), and this was fully accomplished in A.D. 70 with the loss of Jerusalem and national polity.

During the long period of their suffering and homelessness there was no relief. But viewed in a different light, even this was a mark of favor on God's part. Had they assimilated, their identity as a race would have been lost. God, long ago, proposed to use them to bless all the families of the earth (Gen. 22:18).

Lloyd George, former Prime Minister of Great Britain rightly observed, "You [Jews] may say you have been oppressed and persecuted. That has been your power. You have been hammered into very fine steel, and that is why you have never been broken." Theodor Herzl also observed, "We are one people; our enemies have made us one."

Another force that encouraged the return at the appointed time was the inability of nineteenth century enlightenment to solve the Jewish question. The Jews of Central and Western Europe had hopes of being formally emancipated and absorbed as equals in the various countries where they lived. These hopes were crushed by continual waves of social and intellectual anti-Semitism.

In Russia and Romania freedom was impossible, and Jews were scapegoats of various reigning powers and victims of repeated deadly pogroms. By the middle of that century the devastating experiences of Jewish intellectuals in both the East and West produced a mainly secular movement based on the reaffirmation of the Jewish identity and the belief that the Jew would never be free without his own Jewish state.

These nationalist ideas soon merged with traditional religious beliefs. These two trends gave birth to Zionism as an organized political effort. Along with the early pioneer movement, they laid the foundations for the economic and social rebirth of the Jewish nation. Therefore, at the set time conditions were ripe to go up and possess the land promised to Abraham.

Prior to 1878 there had been some minor immigration to Palestine. Interest had been renewed by British writers and statesmen in the forties who began discussing the possibility of restoring the Jewish people to Palestine. By 1851 Jews comprised the majority in the cities of Safed and Tiberias, and before the turn of the century Jews comprised half of Jerusalem's population. The Jewish immigrants that came during those years settled mainly in the four sacred cities of Jerusalem, Safed, Hebron, and Tiberias, but they were mostly supported by charity from Jews in other countries. There was, as yet, no real desire to develop the country as a homeland. These early immigrants were constantly hampered by severe government restrictions on the purchase of land. They were also in constant danger from Muslim neighbors, who continually raided their land and cities. Thus, during those years little was done to develop the land; and it was reported that Palestine was empty, silent, in waste and ruin, and empty of inhabitant. Forces were taking place in other parts of the globe to stimulate interest in returning the Jew to Palestine and in developing it as a Jewish homeland.

## **The Berlin Congress of Nations**

In 1878 leaders of the great European powers met in the Berlin Congress of nations to settle problems regarding the Balkans and Near East after the Turko-Russian war. Greater religious and human rights were granted to subjects in the Ottoman Empire, of which Palestine was a part. This opened the way for Jews to buy land and settle in Palestine, a right long denied.

Petach Tikvah, the first modern Jewish agricultural colony in Palestine, opened in 1878. It began the physical regeneration of the land by strengthening the ties between Jews and the soil of their ancient country. Similar communities followed that soon revitalized the long dormant land.

Almost immediately following this renewed hope, numerous and repeated checks to immigration were applied by the Turkish government and later by the British. These were done on behalf of the increasing Arab population who were now being encouraged to immigrate to Palestine to arrest the increasing number of Jews coming to the country. Other laws blocked the use and sale of lands by Jews already living in the country.

## **Hunters of the First Aliyah**

"Behold, I will send for many fishers saith the Lord, and they shall fish them; and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks" (Jer. 16:16).

By 1880 there were 20,000 to 25,000 Jews living in Palestine, but a stronger impetus was needed to lure more exiles home. In the years 1881 and 1882 terrible pogroms broke out in Russia and Romania. In Russia alone 100,000 Jews were left without means of livelihood and 20,000 without homes. In May 1882 new restrictive laws were introduced in Russia forcing many to give up lands and move to the crowded ghetto towns of the Pale.

Such harsh conditions forced the first major Aliyah (major wave of immigration to Palestine) during the years 1882-1905. More than 25,000 Jews, mostly from Eastern Europe, arrived. This first wave of immigration settled in agricultural settlements, beginning the agricultural development of Palestine.

The Turkish government viewed this as a threat, and in June, 1882 laws were enacted preventing East European Jews from settling in Palestine. These laws allowed Jews to settle anywhere in the Ottoman Empire, except Palestine. Immigration did not completely halt, but only a trickle of the 3 million European Jews settled in Palestine during those years. Many went to the United States. These laws were not lifted until 1906.

## **The Fishers**

During this period, another means of persuasion to lure the Jews home was born. Theodor Herzl, the founder of the Zionist movement, was greatly moved by the plight of Jews suffering from anti-Semitism around the world. His booklet, *The Jewish State*, (1896) advocated a homeland for persecuted Jews. Along with this goal, Zionism's main objective was to strengthen the Jewish consciousness and national feeling through organizing groups in various countries to encourage systematic settlement in Palestine. They sought to organize political efforts to gain support of Zionists' aims by world governments. "Zionism" became a rallying cry for worldwide Jewry and many from Europe and Russia answered the call, spurred on by the proud beliefs of the movement. It proved to be a strong political force in rebuilding the country. The Second Aliyah

Despite restrictions imposed on immigration, the second Aliyah commenced in 1904 and continued through the outbreak of World War I. Approximately 40,000 immigrated during that period spurred on by the continued Russian pogroms. This wave of immigration brought the much needed agricultural and scientific expertise, plus labor, to the country; a much needed commodity in rebuilding the land.

## **The Balfour Declaration**

One problem intervening between Israel receiving world political status was the right of the gentile powers to rule until 1914. This lease began in 606 B.C. when Israel's last king, Zedekiah, was dethroned and the entire nation carried captive into Babylon. The gentiles had domination for 2520 years (Luke 21:24). It came to an end in 1914, as evidenced by the results of the first World War. By the end of that war all the powerful thrones of Europe had collapsed, making way for the eventual incoming Kingdom of God.

The events of and following World War I saw the ascendancy of Israel to political autonomy and eventual life as a nation, one of the major steps in the setting up of God's kingdom.

The year 1917 saw the ousting of the Turks from Jerusalem by General Allenby, and Britain's commitment, through the Balfour Declaration, to establish a homeland for the Jewish people. The Land of Israel reappeared on the world political map.

## **Further Aliyahs**

The years 1919-1923 produced a third Aliyah. Thirty-five thousand Jews arrived, mainly young people and speculators who established cities, industry, and schools. This was a further step in the development of the homeland. This Aliyah was impelled by the sufferings of Jews during the war and later pogroms.

The next wave came between 1924 and 1928 when some 67,000 immigrated. Half of these were from Poland, which had suffered terrible economic crises.

Another Aliyah, occurring during the years 1929 to 1939, saw over 250,000 Jews go home. These last two groups brought an influx of many intellectuals and professionals who laid the groundwork for democracy in Israel.

### **More Hunters**

World War II brought a new and different type of persecution, both in character and duration—the Holocaust. God used these persecutions to drive the Jew home; Satan used the situation to try to completely eradicate worldwide Jewry in an attempt to thwart the ultimate plan of God. As a result of the horrors of the Holocaust, the shocked nations of the world granted official sanction of a Jewish state and on May 14, 1948 Israel was born.

During the years 1934-1948 Jewish immigration was continually halted by British restrictions brought about by Arab pressures. But despite this, 115,000 Jews arrived in Palestine during those years.

Israel's independence immediately removed all restrictions on Aliyah and during the years 1948 to 1987 approximately 1.8 million Jews returned and the numbers keep increasing.

### **Still Returning**

At the end of 1988, due to relaxed government controls in Russia, Jews were free to apply for exit visas. A new, larger scale immigration began. In 1990 over 150,000 immigrants entered the country. The population of Israel by the year 2000 could reach six million, 4.8 million being Jews, as compared to a 1990 population of 4.7 million (3.8 million Jews).

The return of the exiles in recent times and the subsequent birth of the State of Israel can be well termed a miracle. Against all odds, and against what seemed insurmountable roadblocks, the Jews are still being gathered home to build the waste cities and inhabit them. The Lord promises that he shall plant them upon their land and they shall no more be pulled up (Amos 9:14; Jer. 31:8; Ezek. 37:21).

## Two Prophecies of Israel's Regathering

# Of Bones and Sticks

*For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?—Romans 11:15*

*A verse by verse study in Ezekiel 37*

Vivid imagery characterizes the book of Ezekiel. In many respects it is the Old Testament counterpart to the book of Revelation. Not only does the prophet see a number of graphic visions, he becomes an interactive participator in them. This is especially true in the two visions which comprise the thirty-seventh chapter of his writings.

### **The Sections of Ezekiel**

The prophecy is directed primarily toward the Jewish people living in Babylonian captivity, though the book actually begins some six years before the fall of the last king, Zedekiah. Set at such a dramatic turning point in Jewish history, it is easy to see that the prophecy as a whole is concerned with the future of that nation.

The book itself divides naturally into four sections: (1) The first three chapters begin with his vision of the glory of God and show how this became the introduction of his personal ministry. (2) The second division (chaps. 4-24) delineate God's judgments on Judah and Israel. (3) The next section (chaps. 25-32) details God's judgments on the surrounding gentile nations. (4) The final part of the book includes a happy ending, a series of prophecies concerning Israel's regathering and restoration as the People of God.

The chapter to be considered here lies in the last section and gives important details concerning the regathering of Israel.

### **The Setting**

"The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest" (vs. 1-3).

The valley may have been the same plain where the Lord was wont to talk with Ezekiel (3:22, 23). In vision he sees the valley strewn with bones: not piled in heaps but scattered, as though the people had died in battle. The fact that they were unburied in the vision lends hope for resuscitation; buried bones, like those of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 39:12, 15 are put out of sight, not awaiting a resurrection.

The dryness of the bones stands in sharp contrast to the bones of a healthy man who has died as described in Job 21:23, 24: "One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet. His breasts are full of milk, and his bones are moistened with marrow."

Ezekiel's answer to the query, "Can these bones live?," is wise. The obvious response is, "No, of course not!" Ezekiel, however, does not challenge the power of the Almighty. His reaction is simply, "O Lord God, thou knowest."

### **A Command to Prophecy**

"Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord" (vs. 4-6)

This vision, like so many in the book of Ezekiel, is interactive. Rather than giving the prophet the answer to his question, he invites the prophet to participate in furnishing the answer. The prophecy God gives Ezekiel to pronounce identifies three stages in the process of life returning to these dry bones.

"Hear the word of the Lord!" This is fundamental. No action can take place without there being first a hearkening to the word of God. Jesus' words that there will be a resurrection of all follows the same order: "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28, 29 NAS).

Second, as described in the following verses, the mechanical action of bringing the bones back to life occurs in orderly stages. First, the bones come together; then sinews, muscles, and flesh. Now they are ready for the grand climax —the breath of life entering the still bodies so that they can live.

Finally, ". . . and ye shall know that I am the Lord." This is contrary to what many expect. There is a general concept that man must first know the Lord in order to obtain life. Here the order is reversed; they are resuscitated and then brought to know the Lord. This same order is given by the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 2:3, 4: "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

### **Bodies Reassembled**

"So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them" (vs. 7, 8).

As the prophet delivers his message two forces react to bring the randomly strewn bones back together—a noise and a shaking. The former is caused by the latter. The word here translated shaking is oftentimes translated "earthquake" in the Bible. The noise is the sound of the quake. Earthquakes are symbols of social revolution. A notable example is in the "wind, earthquake, and fire" of Elijah's prophetic vision at Mt. Horeb (1 Kings 19).

The bones of this prophecy are identified as "the whole house of Israel" in verse eleven. In a miracle of our time, the house of Israel, scattered throughout the world and driven from country to country, has come back together in its ancestral homeland. No natural contributing factor has been more important in this regathering than the spirit of social revolution and demand for independence that has been encircling the globe since the American and French revolutions of the late eighteenth century.

It was not until 1878, however, that the Hebrew people had a place to go and reassemble themselves as a nation. In that year the Turko-Russian war came to an end at the Berlin Congress of Nations. Presided over by a British Jew, Lord Beaconsfield, the peace treaty there agreed upon recognized the rights of all—Jew or gentile—to own property in the area then called Palestine. No one responded more immediately than the Jewish community. Pressured by a series of pogroms in Russia, a contingent of Israelis departed for the new territory and established a beachhead in the colony of Petach Tikvah—"the door of hope." Further immigration was spurred when Theodor Herzl organized the World Zionist Congress in 1897.

From 1878 to 1948 the regathered exiles began forming the infrastructure of a government. In 1912 the Hadassah, under Elizabeth Szold, began to provide medical services for the returning exiles. In 1912 Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, followed in 1918 by the Hebrew University, made top quality higher education available. Labor organized the Histadrut in 1920 and the defense forces began to be formed by the Haganah the same year. The political and economic underpinnings of statehood developed under the Jewish Agency, formed in 1929, with the first political party, Mapai, appearing the following year, in 1930.

From the bones of nothingness events were heading for the inevitable: statehood. The official announcement of statehood on May, 14, 1948 was greeted by diplomatic recognition from a number of countries, starting with the United States. Membership in the United Nations gave Israel a definite seat in the world family of nations. Yet one thing was lacking, "but there was no breath in them."

### **The Second Prophecy**

"Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold,



they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts" (vs. 9-11).

Ezekiel is now instructed to turn from the bones and prophesy to a new audience—"the wind." The specific wind is here identified with "the four winds." These "four winds" are identified in Revelation 7:1 with a force that threatens to "hurt" the whole earth and are held in check until the church of Christ is first "sealed in their foreheads." The term "four winds" is suggestive of conflicting blasts, as in a whirlwind or hurricane. Most expositors conclude that it is a picture of extremely severe trouble, trouble without specific direction, as in anarchy. This would seem to agree with the picture of "fire" in Elijah's prophecy of 1 Kings 19.

Out of the midst of this whirlwind of anarchy another wind is to arise and become a "breath of life" to the bones now assembled in Ezekiel's valley. This might well represent a final onslaught of trouble for the newly assembled nation such as described in the two following chapters of Ezekiel (chaps. 38 and 39). It also fits well with an event described in Jeremiah 30:7, "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it." The response to this prophecy is immediate. The bones now assume life, with the final act calling to remembrance the giving of life to Adam in the Garden of Eden, "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7).

God proceeds to explain the vision to Ezekiel by identifying the bones, not as individual Israelites, but as the hopes and prospects of that nation. These hopes, once burning so brightly within the Hebrew consciousness, had dimmed and seemed impossible of realization. In a similar vein, at the first advent, Jesus is described as "a root out of dry ground" (Isa. 53:2). As their fortunes turn, their hopes reawaken and grow multitudinously—"an exceeding great army." So total had been their scattering that they felt "completely cut off," as the idiom "cut off for our parts" signifies.

### **The Third Prophecy**

"Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD" (vs. 12-14).

Now the prophet turns to his real audience, the people of Israel. They are at one of the darkest points in their history, just having been taken as a captive people to the city of Babylon, hundreds of miles from their beloved homeland. Their defeat by King Nebuchadnezzar had been so complete that their hopes of return were almost forsaken. Only a few kept the hopes burning brightly, like faithful Daniel, who prayed three times a day with his face toward Jerusalem (Dan. 6:10).

Like Jeremiah, much of what Ezekiel had to say was in prophecies of doom. Now he could say that this experience, like any chastening of God, was to have its end. How often they must have asked, "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and Will he be favorable no more?" (Psa. 77:7). Now the answer would come, as it had to the Psalmist, "For the Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance" (Psa. 94:14).

Ezekiel appears to broaden the scope of the prophecy in these verses. Formerly he spoke of their national hopes being as dry bones which would come back to life. Now he speaks of a personal resurrection. The two thoughts are not contradictory. They complement each other. What good would it be to revive the hopes without reviving those who hope?

One enigma remains. Here he speaks of putting his spirit within them before placing them in their own land. Elsewhere he speaks of them already being in Jerusalem before he pours his spirit upon them (Zech. 12:9, 10). The harmony is in grasping the thought of what God means by "placing" them in their land. Strong's Concordance defines the Hebrew *yanach*, here translated "place," as being to "allow to stay." Dwelling in the land is one thing, it is another to have the land by covenant ownership. Abraham dwelt most of his life in this land, but as a "sojourner," "as in a strange country" (Heb. 11:9).

This thought seems well expressed in Ezekiel 20:38, "And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the LORD."

When this personal resuscitation is accomplished he "puts his spirit in them," and as a result they recognize him as their delivering Lord. The words of the following chapters agree (see 38:23 and 39:7).

### **A Vision of Two Sticks**

"The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand" (vs. 15-17).

Now the vision changes. The previous vision had been to "the whole house of Israel" (v. 11), but Israel, at the time, was divided into two kingdoms. The ten-tribe kingdom of Israel abided in the north and the two-tribe kingdom of Judah in the south. In this second vision he foresees the reuniting of the divided house. They would reunite as one nation.

### **Curiosity Satisfied**

"And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not shew us what thou meanest by these? Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his

fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes. And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwelling places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God" (vs. 18-23).

Watching Ezekiel playing with these two sticks must have seemed like a child at play to his viewing audience. Their curiosity prompted further inquiry. This produced the proper frame of mind for delivering the message behind the sticks. First, both nations would be scattered. Most of the ten tribe kingdom did not return to Israel from the Babylonian captivity, though a smattering of all tribes did. Judah, of whom more returned, would be again scattered by the Romans in both A.D. 70 and again in A. D. 135.

The scattering became more and more worldwide as they were chased out of one country after another. He speaks of this Diaspora as already beginning in the days of Ezekiel's prophecy, early in the Babylonian captivity. After the dispersion has accomplished its work (and the gospel call comes to a close), he regathers them back to their native land.

This had not been their first captivity. They had been a tribute people to the Philistines, the Midianites, and other nations. From those periods of subjection they repented, but soon turned back to their idolatrous ways. This time, Ezekiel informs them, they will never return to idolatry.

This transformation will not come automatically but, as he prophesies, "I will cleanse them." This work is not yet accomplished, though Israel has returned to her land. Before that can happen they must become "one nation" with "one king."

### **One King, One Land, One Covenant**

"And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (vs. 24-27).

Israel became divided by a dispute between two kings—Jeroboam and Rehoboam. Now they would be united under one king: David, not the David of old but that great descendant of his, Jesus of Nazareth, "the son of David."

They had been citizens of two lands: Judea and Israel. Now they return to the land of a more distant past—to the time when God had originally promised the whole of the land of Canaan to Abraham, Isaac, and to Jacob. They had had one covenant in the past, but it had not proved to be "a covenant of peace." Because of their inability to keep that covenant it had become a covenant of death instead of a covenant of life. Now they would be reunited under a "new covenant," as another prophet predicted:

"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31:31-33).

Matthew Henry, in his *Commentary*, phrases this new condition of Israel in glowing terms: "They shall be one, one nation, . . . They shall have no separate interests, and, consequently, no divided affections. There shall be no mutual jealousies and animosities, no remembrance, no remains, of their former discord. But there shall be a perfect harmony between them, a good understanding one of another, a good disposition one to another, and a readiness to all good offices and services for one another's credit and comfort. They had been two sticks crossing and thwarting one another, nay, beating and bruising one another; but now they shall become one, supporting and strengthening one another."

### **The Gentiles**

"And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore" (v. 28).

The beauty of God's plan is that it is not only for one nation or one people. It is not just for the Jew, nor is it just for the church. It encompasses "all men." In his economy, Jehovah uses the same experience to sanctify his name both to his chosen people of the past, Israel, and to all other nations.

In the two succeeding chapters in Ezekiel we read that many of these nations shall join a coalition to attack Israel. It will seem to be successful. Zechariah, speaking of the same event, says, "the city shall be taken" (Zech. 14:2). But, in the end, God himself shall fight for and deliver Israel. Not all of the attacking forces will be killed, but we read in Isaiah 66:18, 19:

"For I know their works and their thoughts: it shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory. And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, to Tubal, and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles."

Not only will the gentiles return to their countries and tell the wondrous things they have seen, but Israelis shall become missionaries, spreading the same good news. We read of this in Micah 5:7, "And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the LORD, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men."

At the head of this restored Israel will be their ancient prophets (Isa. 1:26). These, too, will be intermediaries in spreading the news and the work of the incoming kingdom, the kingdom of the greater than David, to all the world. We read of them in Psalm 45:16, "Instead of thy fathers, shall be thy children, whom, thou mayest make princes in all the earth."

Then nation will not fight nation, but love will well up in every heart. Then sickness will be no more, the eyes of the blind will be opened and the lame man leap as an hart. Then death will give way to life. And, best of all, then men will not need to inquire of the Lord but all will know his name, "from the least to the greatest." What a time that will be!

# News & Views

## **PBI News**

### *Annual Meeting Notice*

This year the Institute Annual Membership Meeting will be at 10:00 a.m. (CST), Friday, July 12, 1996, on the campus of the Western Missouri University, St. Joseph, Missouri. Additional details are being mailed to Institute members. (The General Convention of Bible Students begins the next day at the same location.)

## **New Booklet**

### *Great World Changes Long Foretold*

For some time, although we have had many requests, we have not been able to fill them pending updating and reprinting of this booklet. Reprinting has now been completed in a new, more attractive format. We have adequate inventory to 611 requests. Please send your requests to the secretary. Two other booklets which currently appear on the back cover are out of stock and there are no plans to reprint them: *Our Lord's Return and What Is The Soul?*

## **READERS SPEAK OUT**

Your magazine is a wonderful help to me, as at my age I don't get very far from home anymore. I do meet with Alfred and Sara Mandel and their daughter Ruth whenever I can. I don't drive nights anymore nor when the roads are bad. May the Lord bless you in your work. With brotherly love.

*-Walter Bredlau, Loyal, Wisconsin*

Greetings in the precious name of Christ Jesus, Our Passover Lamb. We thank you for the Herald magazine, we enjoy every part of it. We like the News and Views. We appreciate Entered into Rest, Convention notices and other poems, etc. Please continue sending it. We pray for all of our brethren who so lovingly help us in the narrow way. Please pray for us that we may become copies of God's dear son and our loving heavenly Father. Lord bless you all. Enclosed is a check to help in sending out the Heralds.

*-Ed and Mollie Heidelberg, Milwaukee, WI*

## **Witness Activities**

Editor's note: Beginning with this issue, from time to time depending on the amount of material submitted, we will report on some of the various techniques brethren are using to spread the word of God. If you are engaged in such an activity, or know of someone who is, please submit a report, along with specific details to the News and Views editor. We reserve the right to select those activities which would be for the benefit of our readers.

"We have been running a one column by one inch ad in our local newspaper on the obituary page. It has some flowers on it and reads: `Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. Losing a loved one is heartbreaking, however the Bible gives hope and not just for Christians. Send for your free copy of Comfort and Consolation for answers to life's deepest questions.' Not much response yet, but we have just started.

"Also, I contacted the Christian radio station here. For \$6 for 30 seconds, we can have Bible verses read along with a tag (brought to you by Starkville Bible Students) What I want to do is use classic Bible student texts that show both salvations ransom, etc." -*Mark Tribble*

Some Bible students are now using the Internet to spread the gospel truth. We are aware of several Bible student home pages currently and would be interested to know of any others. Only one of these has given permission to list the address in THE HERALD. The Chicago Bible Students home page address is <http://www.chicagobible.org> Plans are to advertise literature and to put the class newsletter on the home page.

## **Around The World**

### *Israel*

Yasser Arafat convened the first Palestinian legislative council on March 7 and proclaimed the birth of a new democracy in the Middle East. "Don't be sad," said Arafat as he observed the Israeli troops on the West Bank, "We will overcome if we believe in God. We are witnessing the birth of a new democracy in the Middle East. We are witnessing a new Palestinian struggle for an independent state, with Jerusalem as its capital." "There is a thesis that Arafat is a Moses who can bring his people to the promised land but can never lead them," said one Western diplomat.

-*New York Times, 3/8/96*

The Jewish population is decreasing around the world except in Israel. The "State of the Jewish World" report issued in January said that only 13 million Jews are alive worldwide. Before the Holocaust there were 18 million Jews. The percentage of Jews has dropped drastically in the United States from a postwar high of 4% of the population to 2.3%, or 5.8 million. More than 50% of the Jews in the US who married in the 80s married a non-Jewish partner. "The numbers are quite worrying," said Avi Beker, a political scientist and director of the Israel Office of the World Jewish Congress which conducted the survey. He said that the study revealed a growing polarization between the religious and nonreligious Jews worldwide. "In some places we can say there is almost no contact." Israel, with 4.5 million Jews "is slowly replacing the United States as the largest Jewish community in the world, a process which will take place within a decade. It is the only place in the world where there is a natural growth rate in the Jewish community."

*-Los Angeles Times, 1/27/96*

Maher Alami, an editor at the East Jerusalem newspaper Al Quds, was detained for six days after he refused to publish a certain story about Yasar Arafat on the front page and instead placed it on page 8. It concerned a meeting at which a Greek patriarch of Jerusalem likened Arafat to the city's 7th century Muslim conqueror, Omar Ibn al-Khattab. Arafat reportedly had his spokesman call the newspaper and order front-page treatment for the story. Other newspapers complied, and when Al Quds did not, Alami was arrested by Arafat's security service.

*-Washington Post, 1/4/96*

The terrorist group Hamas, responsible for the bombings in Israel, is reportedly squabbling within itself to find a place in the "new" Middle East. The split within Hamas emerged after the January elections to the Palestinian ruling council. Hamas had no resulting power within the council and some members believed it was time for the group to become a legitimate political party. Hamas has continually disputed Israel's right to exist and backs up an Islamic state in all of Palestine. Support for Hamas has declined from 40 percent before the elections to 15 percent after. Arafat came close to achieving his goal of a Palestinian state when the violent faction within the group emerged again.

*-Wall Street Journal, 3/6/96*

Surprise talks have been underway in Israel by the three rightwing political parties to form a united front ahead of elections in May. The advantages of having a united front would be considerable in order to change the direction of the current peace process begun by Shimon Peres, shifting it instead to Benjamin Netanyahu. The coalition opposes the peace policies of the current Labor-led government. The group also opposes concessions with Syria.

*-Financial Times, 3/3/96*



In recent years, Israel's Arab community has been following two opposing trends, complicating the situation since the peace process began. There has been a marked increase in the "Israelization" of the Arab community as it seeks to integrate further with the mainstream. "You see more Arab cities flying the Israeli flag on Independence Day, more Arabs volunteering to join the Israeli army, more legitimacy toward voting for Jewish Zionist political parties in elections," says Mohammed Darawishe, a consultant in Nazareth, Israel's largest Arab city. At the same time the Islamic movement among Israeli Arabs is enjoying more clout. In the coming elections, Israeli Arabs could have tremendous clout. If they unite behind an Islamic party, experts estimate that Arab parties could increase their representation in the 120-member party by as many as 15 seats. For many Israeli Jews, recent arrests of both Arabs and Jews for disturbances have demonstrated how difficult it will be to separate the Jewish and Palestinian populations in the future.

*-Wall Street Journal, 3/7/96*

At the time of the Balfour Declaration in 1917, and at the time of the collapse of the last great empire that held this land, there was universal agreement that this land belongs to us, and that we must come back to it. How is it, that in the short span of 70 years the situation seems to have completely reversed? Now, the seats of government around the world, and the media which influence men's minds and hearts, say that we are the usurpers; the interlopers; that we came and stole this land from its ancient residents—the Palestinians, who were here from before the time of Jesus. And to those who do not know, this message becomes, by dint of constant repetition and elaboration, the self-evident truth. Unless we pierce this falsehood, unless we come up with a weapon of truth, no amount of guns or money, no amount of human material, can defend against this slander.

I heard the speech of Yassar Arafat at the UN, when he said that the great Zionist invasion began in 1881. At that time, he said, Palestine was a verdant land, teeming with a peaceful people quietly cultivating their fields.

You know that in the 19th century . . . a growing flood of visitors documented their visits to the holy land. They described . . . the craven state of the land, the barrenness, the silence of death. This is the truth. The land was barren. It was waiting precisely as the great Christian preachers taught; it was waiting for the one people who could bring it back to life. We came back, and we brought it back to life ....

I have a deep faith, and it resonates amongst most of the people of Israel, that the promise that God gave to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, this (covenant) is the most powerful force we have .... It has brought us back from the ashes of the dead. It has brought back this country to life, and I believe that, with your help, and with God's help, we will prevail.

*--Middle East Intelligence Digest, 11/95*

From a speech of Benjamin Netanyahu, Leader of the Likud Party in Israel to 4,500 Christians who gathered in Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles.

*The Nations*

The genocidal massacres of 1994 left an estimated half-million people dead in Rwanda. A recent survey by UNICEF says more than one-fourth of 3,000 Rwandan children surveyed saw their parents or relatives killed, many of them beaten or hacked to death with machetes. Eighty percent of the children, who ranged in age from 8 to 19, said they had hidden to survive, some of them burrowing under the bodies of the victims. Thousands of children died from disease. No aspect of the war left children untouched. Predominantly Hutu militia and death squads sacked Tutsi neighborhoods and villages from April to June 1994. Then a Tutsi-led guerilla army arrived and toppled the government two months later, prompting fearful Hutu to flee the country.

*-New York Times, 3/8/96*

Half a decade ago we interpreted the events in the Soviet Union as a triumph and a liberation. The very meaning of Russia itself, which had always had some overreaching mission has disappeared to be replaced with no agreed concept. Orthodox Christianity, suppressed and corrupted by communism, has revived, more in form than in content. Spiritual hunger is filled by charlatanism and obscurantism.

*-Financial Times, 1/24/96*

Despite a more seemingly peaceful world, there are a host of "hot spots" around the world which promise to ignite at any time.

Bosnia-the chance of more American casualties looms large. American moves there have spurred fierce criticism;

Russia-the rise of Communist and nationalist forces threatens the efforts of peace;

China-the sale of nuclear technology to Pakistan and other nations worries the rest of the world watching China as the next emerging superpower;

Taiwan-as the first presidential election nears, China has never recognized Taiwan's right to exist. The mainland country has been saber rattling in military exercises near Taiwan recently.

*-Investors Business Daily, 3/6/96*

## *Christendom*

Protestants in Mexico are posing a challenge to 500 years of Catholicism. In the last two decades, as many as 30,000 former Catholics who have converted to Protestantism have been expelled from their home towns. Many of the converts have been burned out of their homes. Others have been beaten, tortured, raped, and hundreds have been killed.

- *Washington Post*, 2/6/96

In San Salvador, about half of the money to finish a \$4 million dollar Roman Catholic cathedral church project preceding the visit of the pope was contributed by the conservative government of the Republican Nationalist Alliance. That has caused a deep split in the church. The decision to take money from the government signals to many a return to the traditional relationship between church and state. The Rev. Miguel Ventura, a priest who served for nine years, said the decision "shows we are returning to the days of the marriage between the church and the state."

-*Washington Post*, 1/21/96

### **Top-Selling Bible Translations:**

New International Version (1978)

King James Version (1611)

The New King James Version (1982)

New Century Version (1986)

*News & Views -19 - News & Views*

The Living Bible (1971)

The Message: New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs (1993)

### **New Translations:**

God's Word: Today's Bible Translation That Says What It Means (1995)

Contemporary English Version (1995)

The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version (1995)

The Five Books of Moses (1995)

-*Christian Booksellers Association*

## *Science*

In June, 1995, a meeting of international scientists concerned with race was held in the small Austrian town of Schlaining near the Hungarian border. Among the participants were experts in various disciplines including genetics, endocrinology, anthropology, psychology, animal behavior and political science. The meeting was to assess the scientific validity of the concept of race and its utility as a category in the discussion of public policy. The discussions determined that all contemporary notion of race as a real phenomenon is unacceptable. All contemporary population genetics and molecular biology underscores that the 19th century notion of races as discrete and different entities is false. There is only gradual genetic diversity between groups. All races merge smoothly into each other. Nearly all of the physically observable differences reflect very limited local adaptations to climate and other specific environmental conditions. The group concluded: "Categorization of humans by distribution of genetically determined factors is artificial and encourages the production of unending lists of arbitrary and misleading social perceptions and images."

*-Wall Street Journal, 2/23/96*

Ants have been found to be the most successful terrestrial creatures that have ever lived, amounting to as many as 30,000 species. Ants are stronger than an elephant, able to lift up to six times its own weight, so successful as a life form that an estimated 10 percent of the world's biomass is ants. There are ants that sting, ants that bite, ants that saw, ants that farm, ants that herd and milk a tiny form of cattle, ants that make war, ants that hold slaves, ants that cannibalize and ants that hang from the roof of their underground bunkers and act as living honeypots. There are even ants that act as bombs. They have two oversized glands that run from head to garter, each filled with poison. When these ants are cornered or attacked, they contract their abdominal muscles violently, their bodies burst open, and messy poisonous secretions are sprayed all over, killing or disabling their opponent and any other ants in close proximity. Like the human suicide car bombers, the ant bombers die instantly.

*-Erich Hoyt, excerpted from his book:  
The Earth Dwellers Adventures in the Land of Ants.*

## Book Review

*The Temple: Its Ministry and Services (Updated Edition)* by Alfred Edersheim. 340 pages. Hendrickson Publishers.

Jerusalem's temple represented not only the glory of Israel's past but the splendor of its future, when the Messiah would reign over God's people and blessings would flow to all the families of the earth. This book is a tour guide through the temple and captures the temple's significance both in the life of Israel and in the life and theology of the early Christians. Readers who want to experience the grandeur of Herod's temple—the one standing in Jesus' day—will find this book most informative and passionate reading. The new edition includes illustrations and references from newly discovered manuscripts, including those of Philo, Josephus, and the early recordings of the Jewish book of the rabbis, the Mishnah. Alfred Edersheim was born in 1825 and died in 1889. Although born to Jewish parents, he converted to Christianity as a young man. He studied theology at Edinburgh and Berlin and was one of the leading authorities of his time regarding the doctrines and practices of Judaism in the centuries preceding and during the early Christian era. There are many interesting comments on the Jewish celebrations for Bible Students. For example, in the chapter on The Paschal Feast and the Lord's Supper, Edersheim deals with the discussion of whether Jesus celebrated the Passover the day prior to the rest of Israel. In fact, Edersheim devotes an entire appendix to the issue of the 14th of Nisan as the proper date for celebration, and how that related to the Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed. While some Bible students may not agree with his conclusion (you will have to read the book!), all would agree on the scholarly treatment of the issue. The value of the book is in its ability to help modern day readers understand the significance the temple played in the worship of the first century Jews, and why Jesus used it as he did for the center of his teaching in Jerusalem.