

The Herald Of Christ's Kingdom

July/August 1996

Israel in Prophecy



Editors' Journal

After many days thou shalt be visited: in the latter years thou shalt come into the land that is brought back from the sword, and is gathered out of many people, against the mountains of Israel, which have been always waste: but it is brought forth out of the nations, and they shall dwell safely all of them.—Ezekiel 38:8

Rather than being a country "brought back from the sword," Israel today is a land dwelling "under the sword." Showered by Hezbollah rockets from the north, Israel has retaliated with lightning strikes to secure a demilitarized zone in southern Lebanon. Deep in controversy over a land for peace process, Prime Minister Rabin has been assassinated. The terrorism of suicide bombers has replaced the riots of the Intifada. Longing for peace, peace seems to always elude them.

Students of Bible prophecy keep their eyes upon Israel, for they recognize that the developments there will carry the omen of God's kingdom on the earth. The end view is clear. Peace will come, not only to Israel but to an entire world weary of combat and conflict. The intermediate steps between today and that kingdom, however, are not clear.

Earnest Bible scholars collect portions of scriptural prophecy and seek to match them with the unraveling tide of current events. Not all place the pieces together in the same order. The giant jigsaw puzzle of Israel continues to take on more definite shape, yet many pieces need still to be connected before the vision is seen in all its clarity.

The previous issue of **THE HERALD** examined the rich history of this nation God is pleased to call his "chosen people." This edition takes on the more daunting task of looking into the murky future. Without claiming to hold all the answers, the articles of this issue will examine various features of the prophetic future for Israel and its impact on the entire world.

Israel in Prophecy

The Near Future of Israel seeks to penetrate, through the searchlight of the prophetic word, the mists to what lies immediately ahead. The author deals with details of the final crises, which must be met before Israel can assume a more certain kingdom position.

From the Christian perspective, perhaps the largest hurdle is in comprehending that the Bible clearly points out a future role for Israel as Israel, and not as a new Christian denomination. Yet the New Testament also clearly states that "there is none other name under heaven" by which to obtain salvation than that of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). Israel, to this date, is not yet willing to admit that name. The article *The Conversion of Israel* treats this issue, suggesting the timing and possible manner of such a change of belief from a biblical perspective.

The major conflicts in the Middle East today are over the question of territory—who is to receive what land and upon what basis. This question is considered in *This Land is Mine*, an article which seeks clues indicating the boundaries of the "promised land."

The short range vision is cloudy, but the long range picture is clearer. The Bible foresees God's kingdom established in Jerusalem with all nations "flowing unto it" (Isa. 2:2). This is the vision that is treated in the article *God's Witnesses and Servant*.

Many of the minor prophets discuss the restoration of Israel. One of these is Zechariah. The verse by verse Bible study in this issue, entitled *Jehovah Returns to Zion*, examines the eighth chapter of this book.

The following two items deal with the relationship between the Israel of God's kingdom and their resurrected patriarchs of old. *Real Heroes* describes the faith of these ancient men while *Two Roles in a Future Drama* show the cooperative work of both of these groups in the blessing of all mankind.

Finally, the *Question Box* feature considers a related question based on Isaiah 66:21, which discusses the offices of "priest" and "Levite" in the operation of God's kingdom.

The Near Future of Israel

I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon.—Zechariah 10:10

David Rice

Israel and Lebanon are daily in the news. In response to the recent shelling of towns in northern Israel, Israel has begun a systematic bombardment of Hezbollah positions in southern Lebanon to remove the threat. The Hezbollah, a militant force influenced by Iran, but located in Lebanon, shares the goal of the radical Palestinian sect Hamas: disrupt the Israel-Arab peace process at any cost. To this end, also, have been a series of Hamas terrorist acts against Israelis, which claimed the lives of more than 50 persons a short time ago.

These circumstances raise an old question afresh: will peace come soon? The assassination of Prime Minister Rabin immediately swelled Israeli public opinion in favor of Rabin's peace process. But the subsequent violence by Hamas and Hezbollah have modified the mood. Peace is still important to the Israelis, but security is the greater concern. Probably the recent reminders of Israel's vulnerability will make public sentiment less prepared to cede the Golan Heights to Syria in the quest for a peace settlement. Probably a settlement with Syria will be delayed.

However, many students of Bible prophecy hold that Ezekiel 38:11 shows peace will become more pervasive before the last assault of Gog from the north. If so, this implies that some formal accords are yet to come, or at least a growing economic interchange which makes peace in the common interest of all major parties. Even in this case, the trail of events leading to that peace is uncertain. Will another war intervene? Will Israel cede more land? Or will Israel acquire more land as in 1967 and 1973? We consider here some possibilities.

More Land to Come?

Zechariah 10:10, cited above, speaks of Israel dwelling in "Gilead and Lebanon" after their return. The setting for Zechariah's prophecies is the return of Israel from Babylonian captivity (Zech. 2:6, 7). And in the years following that return, Israel did come to inhabit these areas. In fact during the ministry of his first advent, Jesus visited "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" in these areas (Matt. 15:21, 24; John 1:28, Mark 7:31; also compare Zech. 11:12, which refers to the first advent).

Might these prophecies have an additional application now, in Israel's recovery from the greater Roman dispersion? Very likely yes. For example Zechariah 1:18 refers to four "horns" which scattered Israel, and at some level probably refers to the four world empires seen in Daniel's visions—Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome—and only in modern times is Israel recovering from the dispersion caused by that last power.

Certainly Zechariah 12:10 applies to the present recovery. It says God will pour "upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplication; and they shall look unto me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him" (ASV). This is an experience which Revelation 1:7 links with the second advent period..Therefore, Zechariah 10:10 may also have an application to the present return of Israel. Thus it is of interest to inquire, what lands are intended in the expression "Gilead and Lebanon," and when may Israel acquire them?

Gilead

Gilead is a land east of the Jordan River. In Numbers 32:40 it is described as the area settled by the half tribe of Manasseh before Israel crossed the Jordan into Canaan. As maps of the 12 tribes show, that would be northward, yet south of the Sea of Galilee. Other texts seem to use the word for a broader area extending farther southward as well.

"The Jabbok River divides Gilead into two parts: northern Gilead, the land between the Jabbok and the Yarmuk, and southern Gilead, the land between the Jabbok and the Arnon (Josh. 12:2). The term 'Gilead,' however, came to be applied to the entire region of Israelite Transjordan (Deut. 34:1)" ("Gilead," *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1986,).

Today that region is part of the country of Jordan. It is hard to imagine a peaceful transfer of that land to Israeli control under anything like present conditions. Therefore a settlement of Gilead by Israelis such as Zechariah 10:10 describes would suggest either another major Arab war, terminating the present accord with Jordan, or the result of the establishment of the kingdom.

Lebanon

Lebanon derives its name from two mountain ranges, running about 100 miles long, north and south, with the fertile Bekaa valley between, perhaps 15 to 20 miles wide. To distinguish the two parallel ranges, the eastern range is sometimes termed "Anti-Lebanon," and this range contains lofty Mt. Hermon at its southern end ("Lebanon," *Nelson's*).

Joshua 11:17 says Joshua took as far north as "unto Baalgad in the valley of Lebanon under mount Hermon: and all their kings he took, and smote them, and slew them." Joshua 13:5 says the remaining land left unconquered when Joshua was old included "all Lebanon, toward the sunrising, from Baalgad under mount Hermon unto the entering into Hamath." Evidently the western portion of Lebanon, including the cities of Tyre, Sidon, and the present day locations of Beirut and Tripoli, were not intended as parts of the promised land.

Therefore, the term "Lebanon" in Zechariah 10:10 probably means the area around Mt. Hermon, but how far in each direction is uncertain. Today the massive Mt. Hermon is a dividing point between the countries of Lebanon on the west, Syria on the east, and Israel

on the south. For Zechariah 10:10 to be fulfilled in modern times seems to require a deeper thrust by Israel into south central Lebanon. This would be intolerable for the Arab powers under present conditions. As with "Gilead," it would seem to require another major Arab war, or the result of the establishment of the kingdom.

Another Arab War?

Peace accords have been reached with Egypt, Jordan, and the Palestinians, and the momentum of events seems to be building in this direction, although stalled intermittently by tragic episodes. From a natural point of view, it seems unlikely the neighboring Arab states would find much present advantage in a fresh round of war in the near future. From a natural point of view, it seems unlikely the fomenting radical elements will have sufficient strength to force their wish.

These observations suggest that if Zechariah 10:10 applies to our day, it's full scope will be after the ancient worthies reappear and after Gog from the north has been defeated, when the influence of Israel expands by divine favor in the Kingdom. Then, probably, "they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord out of all nations" (Isa. 66:20), and it would not be surprising for the surrounding nations to also yield to Israel the remainder of their God-given inheritance of land.

On the other hand, what crises the next decade or two may hold, and their possible consequences, is impossible to know. We cannot preclude another major conflict, before Gog's invasion, which could augment Israel's territory.

Psalm 83

Psalm 83 speaks of a malicious Arab conspiracy against the state of Israel, and many students of prophecy suppose this passage has some relevance to the Arab-Israeli conflicts at this end of this Gospel age. We share this view.

The defeat of this alliance is likened in verses 9-12 both to the defeat of the Midianites under Gideon and the defeat of Sisera and Jabin under Deborah and Barak (Judges 4, 7, 8). Both of these episodes were pictures of the Armageddon climax, and for this reason it is feasible that the Arab hostilities described in Psalm 83 at least include the final middle-east conflict, which is part of Armageddon. Possibly they point to more than one conflict and embrace the whole series of wars during which the Arab wish has been "Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance" (Psa. 83:4).

The enemies listed in this Psalm are Edom, the Ishmaelites, Moab, the Hagarenes, Gebal, Ammon, Amalek, the Philistines, the inhabitants of Tyre, and Assur. The lands inhabited by these peoples answer to today's Jordan, Lebanon, Gaza, and Iraq. This is not a comprehensive list of the enemies of Israel. For example Syria, Egypt, Iran, and Gog [Russia] are not mentioned. But other scriptures supplement this list, and provide a more complete picture (e.g., Ezek. 38:2-6; Zech. 14:18).

Joel's Account of the Last Crisis

When considering the last crisis impending on Israel before the Kingdom, it is common to turn to Ezekiel 38-39, and Zechariah 14. Less common, though still frequently compared, is Joel's description of these closing events. We will close with a look now at the account in the second chapter of Joel. The invading host from the north is described as a formidable, unstoppable force in close array, whose forward march leaves but flame and destruction in its wake (vs. 3-11). The Lord says the purpose for this crisis is to turn the hearts of Israel to himself.

"Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him" (vs. 13, 14)?

And so it happens. A solemn fast and assembly is called, the people are gathered, and "the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar," saying "Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach . . . wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God" (v. 17)? Then the Lord will graciously respond to this humble prayer of faith.

"Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people . . . I will remove far off from you the northern army, and will drive him into a land barren and desolate . . . Fear not, O land . . . Be not afraid . . . Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God" (vs.18-23).

Israel holds a unique position in the eyes of the world, attached irrevocably to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Whatever religious stripe, or lack of religion, may characterize various nations of the globe, they know that Israel's claims to the land are based on its ancient roots in the land, and those roots are inseparably intertwined with the worship of Jehovah. Even in Israel's stunning victory during the six-day war of 1967, news commentators frequently referred to the word of the prophets who spoke of God's protecting care for his people. The connection will not be lost when the much greater deliverance still ahead arrests the attention of the world.

"And the nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity.... Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name ... and ... sanctified in them in the sight of many nations.... Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord God" (Ezek. 39:23-29).

The Conversion of Israel

For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.-Matthew 23:39

Carl Hagensick

Christians of many denominations note with interest the return of the Jews to their ancient homeland. For some it becomes a challenge to convert them to their form of Christianity. For others it is an opportunity to encourage them to realize their potential in God's plan **as Jews**. For a few it is merely a fluke of history. For a large number it indicates where we are on the stream of time. But all must admit that it is a miracle unprecedented on the pages of history.

The world marvels at the ability of this small nation to absorb such a vast quantity of immigrants in such a short period of time. They have come from all directions. Some have been enticed by a fervor of Zionist nationalism. Others have sought refuge from persecutions in the lands of their birth.

They span a vast spectrum of beliefs, from orthodox to reformed to conservative. Some profess Christianity. Many claim to be nonreligious. A few are atheistic. They are presently united as a people by the sharing of a mutual parentage and not by the bonds of any one religion.

The Bible prophesies this return of Israel. It predicts that when they become again settled in their land it shall be permanent; they shall not be plucked up. However, its portrait of the future is of a race that is joined on religious grounds-as Jews. More than that, it sees them as Jews united under a new "David" as their king, the Messiah. Marvelous as it has been to witness the return of Israel as a nation and the manifestations that God is certainly with them, it will be even more marvelous to watch the future development of their acceptance of the Messiah. The turn of belief will be an even greater event to behold, for it will become the foundation for Israel accepting their unique role of leadership in the Kingdom of God.

A Two Step Process

This process will be in two progressive stages. First, there must come a firm belief in the God of their fathers, Jehovah. Only after this is accomplished will they come to a belief in their Messiah.

A large number of those living in Israel today already profess a firm belief in God. They recognize him as different from the God that is portrayed by the Christians. The God of the Jews is described in Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, is one

LORD." The Jewish concept of God, correctly enough, is not the trinitarian concept of Christendom. To them that is the blasphemy of polytheism. Yet, while many Israelis believe in this "one LORD," many others do not.

Even those who do believe hold various ideas of how he is to be worshiped. The validity of the ancient Mosaic law in modern society is seriously questioned. Yet that very law is the foundation for Jewish unity. The God of the Old Testament is the God of today. As it was tempting in the past, when the going became difficult and enemies pressed hard against them to seek alliances with more powerful gentile neighbors, so the temptation is the same today.

It is difficult for anyone, Christian or Jew, to lean solely on the arm of God. In times of distress and national peril God seems so remote and intangible. In contrast, political alliances appear so convenient and real. Speaking of a message of comfort to Israel, Isaiah 40:6-8 phrases it thus: "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: . . . The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." How pertinent are the words of Hezekiah to Sennacherib, "With him is the arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles" (2 Chron. 32:8).

On some forty occasions in the book of Ezekiel alone God speaks through the prophet of the times and circumstances when Israel shall "know that I am the Lord." Many of these refer back to the Babylonian captivity when his judgments show Israel God was indeed their Lord, and one who would exact punishment for disobedience. Other references in Ezekiel carry this same lesson forward in time to the present, when not only Israel but other nations who incur God's displeasure will see by the execution of judgment that Jehovah is able to carry out his threats of punishment.

Several of the references, however, are more upbeat. A good example of this is found in Ezekiel 28:25, 26: "Thus saith the Lord GOD; When I shall have gathered the house of Israel from the people among whom they are scattered, and shall be sanctified in them in the sight of the heathen, then shall they dwell in their land that I have given to my servant Jacob. And they shall dwell safely therein, and shall build houses, and plant vineyards; yea, they shall dwell with confidence, when I have executed judgments upon all those that despise them round about them; and they shall know that I am the LORD their God."

God Fights for Israel

The turning point in Israel's future experiences will come when they are surrounded by enemies and have their back to the wall. Zechariah 14 predicts that at this time "the city shall be taken." It will evidently be, though, for only a short while. For "then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle" (v. 3). The resultant victory Ezekiel speaks of in our previous verse is when he will be "sanctified in them [Israel] in the sight of the heathen."

The interim between the present and that glorious event is described in Ezekiel 20:33-42. Here he pictures regathered Israel, though physically in the land of promise, as being "in the wilderness of the people." The allusion appears to be to the wilderness of Kadesh-Barnea, from whence the spies were sent out and the people of Israel made the fateful decision not to enter the land. This is the challenge of the present. Will there be faith, not in their own might but in the power of God to save

In verses 38 and 42 we read these words: "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 And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to your fathers." While they are literally in the geographic land promised to them, only after the rebels are purged out will the remainder realize this as the **covenanted** land of Israel. Then they "shall know that I am the LORD."

This same process is described in Zephaniah 3:11, 12: "In that day shall thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain. I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD."

One of the contributing factors to this sudden realization and appreciation of the Lord as their God will be the failure of earthly alliances to bring them deliverance. All her "lovers," gentile nations to whom she has been allied, shall forget her and forsake her (Jer. 30:14). In ancient times, a frequent alliance was sought with the government of Egypt. The prophet predicts of that symbolic ally, "It shall be the basest of the kingdoms; neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations: for I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations. And it shall be no more the confidence of the house of Israel, which bringeth their iniquity to remembrance, when they shall look after them: but they shall know that I am the Lord GOD" (Ezek. 29:15, 16).

Covenant Teachers

Another contributing factor in the future reform of Israel is a new covenant. Under the old covenant, made at Sinai, they were given a law to show them what God required of them. Now the same will be true of a new law covenant. This is referred to in Ezekiel 16:60-62, "Nevertheless I will remember my [old] covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting [new] covenant. Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed, when thou shalt receive thy sisters, throe elder and thy younger: and I will give them unto thee for daughters, but not by thy [old] covenant. And I will establish my [new] covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD."

In this context the elder and younger sisters are described as Sodom and Samaria, two cities

known for their wickedness. When these are raised from the dead, Israel will also be restored. These must be received or accepted by Israel just as Israel must be accepted by these. This is the lesson of Job 42:8-10, where it was mutually dependent upon job and his comforters to recognize each other before complete restoration could be made.

This new covenant will have a further aspect in bringing Israel to recognize their Messiah. Under this covenant the ancient Hebrew prophets will be restored from the dead. In Isaiah 1:26 these are described as "judges" and as "counselors." The work of these ancient prophets amongst Israel is further described in Jeremiah 3:15, "And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding."

The Spirit of Prayer

What will it be that triggers the resurrection of these ancients? Several scriptures indicate that resurrection will be an answer to prayer. Seemingly men would be raised from the tomb through the medium of prayer. But whose prayer? And when?

We are given two clues to these questions. Micah 5:5 says of Israel: "we shall raise against him seven shepherds [the completed church], and eight principal men [the ancient worthies]." How can Israel accomplish this? Only through prayer. At this same time the LORD "shall defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem," and God will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, "the spirit of grace and of supplications" (Zech. 12:8, 10). And what will that prayer be? We know not, but perhaps, in light of the dire circumstances described in Zechariah 14, it may be nothing more than the one word, "Helps"

Two Previous Influences

Even before this climactic battle, however, two other influences work upon Israel to prepare them for their Messiah. The church of Christ is commissioned in Isaiah 40 to comfort Israel. Their message is likened to that of John the Baptist in the third verse, "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

As John prepared the way for Messiah at the first advent of Christ, so the church is to prepare his way at the second advent. The burden of John's message was twofold. First, he proclaimed "repent and be converted;" and secondly, "Behold the Lamb of God." So it will be the responsibility of the church of Christ to seek to draw Israel's attention to their law and the need to be converted to it and, secondly, to point out to them that their Messiah is working on their behalf.

But while the church points Israel to the fact that Messiah is working on her behalf, it is not the church's role to convince Israel of the identity of this Messiah. The Apostle Paul points out that this cannot be accomplished until after the church is complete. "For I

would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in" (Rom. 11:25).

However, God will still have his witness on the earth after the church is complete. There will still be those with spiritual minds, the "great company" of Revelation 7. The early expectation of the Bible Student movement was that the "great company" would play a prominent role in this conversion of Israel. In the year-end report of the harvest work for 1910, the statement was made "It is not our expectation that the Jews will become Christians now The Scriptures seem to imply that the `great company' will have the honor and privilege of leading them to recognize Jesus as Messiah, during the time of trouble" (R4728).

Two specific texts may refer to this activity. In the Song of Solomon, from the second verse of the fifth chapter through the third verse of the sixth chapter, there is a small vignette of a maiden who is too tired to answer the door when her lover appears. To her dismay, when she does arise, he has withdrawn himself and she seeks him throughout the city. The keepers of the wall beat her and take her veil from her. In desperation she turns to "the daughters of Jerusalem" and inquires of them, "If ye find my beloved, tell him that I am sick of love." They respond by asking how her beloved differs from other young men. She describes him in beautiful poetic words and the daughters of Jerusalem respond with their own query, "Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women Whither is thy beloved gone that we may seek him with thee?"

The maiden exemplifies the qualities of the "great company." Both are in love with their Lord. Both feel the tugs of the flesh so strong that they miss meeting him when he calls. As the maiden is beaten, so the "great company" comes through great tribulation.

The term "daughters of Jerusalem" is an apt description of natural Israel. Their first question, "What is thy beloved more than another beloved" indicates they have heard about such a beloved before and want to know how this "beloved" is different from the others. Israel has been besieged with Christian missionaries presenting to them the name of Jesus. However, they have not been attracted to these presentations. The "great company" will present a different "beloved"-a Messiah, free from the superstitions of centuries. Knowing that God's plan is to work with Israel after the church is complete, they ask the question, "If ye find my beloved, tell him that I am sick of love." If these facts be so, then the responsive question of the "daughters of Jerusalem" indicates a willingness to now earnestly seek their Messiah-"we will seek him with thee."

A second text which may fit in with the above is from the picture of the last day of the life of the prophet Elijah. After crossing the Jordan in company with Elisha, an apt picture of the great company in fellowship with the church, Elijah is taken up in a whirlwind. His mantle falls to the ground and is taken by Elisha, who uses it to smite the Jordan a second time and return to the west bank (2 Kings 2). That the mantle represented the office of a prophet can be seen from the fact that Elijah commissioned Elisha to become a prophet by placing his mantle on him (1 Kings 19:19).

This thus indicates that whatever is represented by the crossing of Jordan, it is accomplished through the exercise of prophetic authority. This implies the giving of a message and, at that point in time, the most likely recipients of such a message would be the next class with whom God will work in accomplishing his plan-the faithful remnant of Israel.

Then they will realize their kingdom potential. They then will say, in the words of our text, "Blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord." Then they will see Jesus in a way they have never seen him before (Rev. 1:7). Then they will be ready to fully assume the glorious position God has designed for them in his kingdom: not as Christians, but as Jews who have found and accepted their Messiah.

This Land is Mine

The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me.—Leviticus 25:23

Abridged from the booklet of the same name by the Chicago Bible Students

To both Jew and Arab, to both Christian and Moslem, the land of Israel, hardly larger than the state of Illinois, is viewed with something akin to reverence as The Promised Land. In truth, it is not so much the land itself, although with irrigation and hard work it can be made extremely fruitful, but it is religious associations that have made this a hallowed land.

The heartbeat of this religious fervor is the golden city of Jerusalem itself. The Mosque of Omar and the silver-domed Mosque of El Aqsah, place Jerusalem as one of the most holy cities for the sons of Islam. The tomb of David and the citadel which bears his name recall a bygone glory for the Israelis. The faithful orthodox of Jewry, rocking in earnest prayer at the Western Wall, rejoice that their prayer has finally been answered—that at last it is "This year in Jerusalem." For the Christians it is no less so. The sacred associations with the life of Jesus of Nazareth, especially in Jerusalem, make this holy ground also for the followers of the Galilean. It was here that Jesus died and it was here that Jesus was buried. And it was here, according to the New Testament scriptures, that Jesus rose again on the third day.

Thus it is little wonder that this ancient land is the most hotly-contested piece of real estate on the globe today.

Claims and Counter Claims

Current mid-East tensions can be readily traced to the formation of the State of Israel on May 15, 1948 and the subsequent hostility of its Arab and Palestinian neighbors, many of them uprooted from their ancestral homes. It is this hostility which erupted in the repetitive border wars of 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973 and the almost continuous skirmishes ever since.

The past century has seen two very different sets of claims and counter-claims upon the land. First, there has been the conflict between the Israelis and the Arabs in a search for borders that both sides consider mutually secure and defensible. Second, there is the related debate between the Jews and the Palestinians as to who has a right to live on the land in the first place.

The first question is one of politics and security, while the second is one of history. Let us examine the second question more closely.

The discussion goes something like this. The Palestinian charges, "We have been uprooted from a land that our ancestors have lived on for over a thousand years." The Israeli counters, "Yes, but before that, our ancestors occupied this land for over two thousand years."

"But," the Palestinian is quick with his counter-claim, "before that, our ancestors dwelt in this land as its original inhabitants." The Palestinian goes on to explain that his heritage is different from that of his Arab neighbor. While the Arabs are blood relatives of the Israelis, being both a Semitic people who trace their roots back to Abraham, the Palestinian claim is to Hamitic stock, descendants from the original Canaanites from which the land received its name, "the land of Canaan."

Biblical Borders

For many Israelis there is yet another significant factor in the conflicting claims for the land of the Middle East. Their position is that the proper borders of Israel should be nothing less—and nothing more—than those borders spelled out in the Old Testament as the inheritance of the Jewish people.

To us, as Christians, this position seems eminently correct. This is the position we wish to examine in our investigation of the Bible and its promises considering the division of the land.

This Land is Mine!

What right has anyone—and if anyone, Who?—to arbitrarily partition the land at all. Leviticus 25:23 deals with the jubilee law of ancient Israel, whereby purchasers of property were to return the land to the original possessors every fifty years. The text reads: "The land shall not be sold forever; for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me." The basis of the entire matter, then, lies in the fact that not only the ancient land of Canaan but the land of the whole world as well belongs to the God who created it, and he has a right to divide it as he chooses.

Deuteronomy 32:8, 9 reads: "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob is the lot of his inheritance."

The Old Testament does have a bias toward Israel. We read in Amos 3:2 that God says of Israel, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." The reason for this bias, this favoritism of God toward one nation over another, is the unique relationship the nation of Israel possessed with God—a covenant relationship.

A Covenant with Abraham

In order to trace this covenant we need to turn to the twelfth chapter of the book of Genesis. There we find God approaching a man named Abram in the far-off city of Ur, in the land of the Chaldees. Abram is told to leave his land and journey to another, one which God would show him. There God would make a covenant, or pact, with him. In obedience, Abram and his entourage journeyed into the land of Canaan.

Close to Shechem, the modern Nablus on the West Bank, Abram first settled in the promised land. Further wanderings took him as far as Egypt and then back to Canaan: first to Bethel, north of Jerusalem, and then finally to Mamre, in the vicinity of modern Hebron. There God fulfilled his promise and made a covenant with him. This covenant is recorded for us in Genesis 15:7: "I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it."

After sealing this covenant, in verse 17, God outlined the scope of the promised land in verses 18 through 21: "In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the River of Egypt unto the Great River, the River Euphrates: the Kenites, the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.'"

The boundaries of the area promised to the descendants of Abram are defined in two distinctly different manners—first, by a geographical description; and second, by naming the inhabitants of the land at that time.

Two specific borders are mentioned—the River of Egypt and the River Euphrates. Bible scholars are divided in their opinion as to the identity of the River of Egypt. Some say that it is the main trunk of the Nile. Others claim it to be the easternmost branch of the Nile near Suez. Still others argue for the Wadi el Arish, now a dry river bed in the eastern Sinai.

We cite six reasons, which include every use of the term "River of Egypt," for the belief that the description is of the Wadi el Arish.

The River of Egypt

(1) In 1 Chronicles 13:5; 2 Chronicles 7:8; and 1 Kings 8:65, the River of Egypt is used to describe a boundary of Israel during the reigns of David and Solomon. No scholar holds that, historically, the kingdom of either David or Solomon included the entirety of the Sinai peninsula.

(2) The River of Egypt is used as a southern boundary of Israel in Numbers 34:3-5 and Joshua 15:4, 47, where it is closely allied with the geographic sites of Gaza, Kadesh, and the southern end of the Dead Sea. All of these points are far removed from either the Suez or the Nile, but lie in proximity or on a line with the Wadi el Arish. It is interesting

to note, in this connection, that the Joshua 15:4 reference mentions it in connection with "Azmon," a site that has been tentatively identified by archaeologists with a recent dig in the area of el Arish.

(3) The river is mentioned in Isaiah 27:12. The Septuagint version of this text, translated in the days before our common era, utilizes the word "Rhinocoroua," a name archaeologically identified with the site of el Arish itself.

(4) In 2 Kings 24:7, a passage referring to Jehoiakim, a king of Judah defeated by Nebuchadnezzar in the sixth century before the common era. we read: "And the king of Egypt came not up anymore out of his land: for the King of Babylon had taken from the River of Egypt unto the River Euphrates all that pertained to the king of Egypt." The fact that the Babylonian empire, at this time, did not control the Sinai peninsula is well documented. (5) The scriptures say that the immediate descendants of Abram, before inheriting the land, would go through a period of affliction in "a land that was not theirs" (Gen. 15:13). This is descriptive of the period of bondage which Israel spent in the land of Goshen, on the east bank of the Nile river in Egypt. Therefore, if the River of Egypt referred to the Nile, they would not have been in "a land that was not theirs." Rather, in that case, they would have been afflicted in a land that would eventually become their rightful inheritance.

(6) In the Genesis 15 text referred to earlier, the "River of Egypt" is contrasted with "the great river, the Euphrates." Great as is the mighty Euphrates, it cannot be compared with the mighty Nile for greatness. The Nile is second only to the Amazon as the longest river in the world. Therefore, since the River of Egypt lacks the appellation "great," it must be not as great as the Euphrates, and therefore not the Nile. In fact the Nile is over twice as long as the Euphrates.

The Euphrates on the North

The river Euphrates can be shown from the scriptures to be a northern, and not an eastern, border of Israel.

(1) The River of Egypt mentioned in Numbers 34:3-5 and Joshua 15:47 is given as the southern border. The contrast to be anticipated, therefore, is that in the second phrase in Genesis 15:18-21, the river Euphrates would be the northern boundary.

(2) Another description of the promised land is found in Exodus 23:31. Here it is described as extending (east to west) from the red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines (the Mediterranean); and (south to north) from "the desert" (the Negev) to "the River," the Euphrates.

(3) In yet another description of the promised land (Deut. 11:24) the river Euphrates is listed in conjunction with Lebanon, to Israel's north, and not to one of the countries that lie to the east of Israel.

(4) In Genesis 12, Abram was to leave Ur of the Chaldees and journey to the promised land. Ur is located just west of the Euphrates, near the Persian Gulf, in the modern country of Iraq. If the Euphrates was meant to describe an eastern border of Israel, Ur would already be within the "promised land" and there would have been no necessity to "journey" to it.

A Complete Description

The most complete description of the land which Abram's seed was to inherit is found in Deuteronomy 1:7, 8: "Turn you, and take your journey, and go to the mount of the Amorites [the Nebo ridge on the east bank of the Jordan]; and go to all the places high thereunto [the Jordan valley, east of the river itself]; in the plain [in Hebrew, Arabah, the Great Rift of the Jordan valley south of the Dead Sea]; and in the hills [the Judean hills]; and in the vale [in Hebrew, Shephelah, lying between the coastal plain and the Judean hills] and in the south [the Negev]; and by the seaside [the Mediterranean coastal plain]; to the land of the Canaanites [particularly the Plain of Sharon and the Jezreel Valley]; and unto Lebanon [in the north—How far north?], unto the Great River, the River Euphrates. Behold I have set the land before thee: go and possess the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them."

Ten Nations Dispossessed

Next, note the boundaries of the land as described by the list of inhabitants then living there. These nations, which Israel was to conquer, are listed many times. We will just cite two of them.

Ten enemy nations are listed in Genesis 15:19-21, while Joshua catalogs only seven of them. The harmony between these two accounts is simple. The Genesis record covers all the tribes whose land Israel was to inherit while the record in Joshua, written years later, omits the names of those nations which had already been conquered.

Let us locate these early peoples in the land of Palestine. We will deal first only with those who are listed in the Genesis account and note that they are either located in the Negev or east of the Jordan river, territory which Israel had already made secure before the text given in the book of Joshua.

The **Kenites** are mentioned first. They were iron workers, living in the northern Sinai, near present day Eilat. The Kenites first mined copper at the spot known today as "King Solomon's mines."

The **Kenizzites** were hunters who reputedly lived on the western slopes of Mount Seir, in the Wadi Arabah. This is due south of the Dead Sea, close to the famous red rock city of Petra. The location of the Kadmonites is not definitely known. However, since their name means "easterners," it can be presumed that they lived east of the Jordan river. Tradition locates them at the foot of Mount Hermon in the Golan Heights.

The **Rephaim** were large men, giants as it were. According to Deuteronomy 3:11 they lived in Bashan, which lies east of the Jordan, south of the Sea of Galilee.

The next grouping we want to examine are those names found in both the lists of Genesis and the book of Joshua. There are six tribes in this list, all located west of the Jordan river, from the Negev on the south through Lebanon on the north.

First, in this grouping, are the **Hittites**. There are two ancient people, both known as Hittites. One of these lived in the far north, in the present day country of Turkey. These are the ancestors of the current Armenians. However, the Hittites referred to in the Genesis record are more probably the people known as the "Hurrians" by archaeologists. They dwelt in Lebanon, from the Mediterranean to the slopes of Mount Hermon.

The **Perizzites** are believed to have lived in the Shephelah, east of the Philistines of the Gaza strip, but to the west of modern Hebron.

While the Genesis account locates the **Amorites** in the area of Hebron and Mamre, they are also found just north of the Arnon river in the Trans-Jordan. The Israelite troops, under the command of Moses, made the first approach to the promised land and engaged in battle with Sihon, king of Heshbon. Heshbon has been recently excavated by archaeologists and lies between Amman and Madaba in today's country of Jordan.

The **Canaanites** lived in the fertile farming area of the Plain of Sharon and the Valley of Jezreel. Their famous fortress city was Megiddo, whose location is undisputed today by archaeologists.

We are informed in Joshua 24:11 that the **Girgashites** dwelt west of Jordan, presumably in the Jordan valley itself, northward from Jericho to the city of Adam.

Finally, the **Jebusites** were the early occupants of the city of Jerusalem. So strongly had they fortified this city, in fact, that it held out against the Israelites for nearly 500 years before being captured for David by his nephews, Joab and Abishai.

There is one more tribe to consider—the **Hivites**, who, while not listed in the Genesis account, are named in the book of Joshua. They were probably omitted in Genesis because they were not recognized as a people in Abram's time but sprung up shortly thereafter.

Two generations later, however, they evidently had come into existence and were located in the West Bank area, at ancient Shechem, modern Nablus. It was a Hivite, a resident of this town, who defiled Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, in one of the uglier incidents in biblical history (Gen. 34).

The combined area of these eleven nations is the very same area encompassed in the geographic description of the promised land—a second witness to the title deed of the land which Israel was to inherit.

Up to now we have looked at the promise of land in the Bible for the Jewish people. What about the claims of the Arabs and the Palestinians? Are they left to be without a homeland of their own?

God's Promises to the Arabs

The claims of the Palestinians and those of the Arabs are very different, and thus we will treat them separately. We will first look at the promises of God recorded in the Bible for the Arabs. Most of the Arab nations have sprung from one of four biblical ancestors—Ishmael, Esau, Moab, and Ammon.

In Genesis 16:12 we read about Ishmael, the older brother of Isaac, and the son of Abraham by Sarah's bond-maid Hagar. There is a positive promise made concerning his descendants: "He shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren."

This implies a shared inheritance with the children of Abraham through Isaac—the people of Israel. Since the main descendants of Ishmael today are represented by the Bedouin tribes, who are already living peaceably in Israel, this promise seems peculiarly fitting.

There are further promises for Ishmael in the Bible. "As for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation" (Gen. 17:20). Again: "And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed" (Gen. 21:13). And yet again, "I will make him a great nation" (Gen. 21:18).

Similarly of the descendants of Esau it is written that God has given them a distinct territorial grant of their own. We read of this in Deuteronomy 2:5, "Meddle not with them [the Edomites, sons of Esau, ancestors of many of today's Arabs]; for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as a foot breadth; because I have given Mount Seir unto Esau for a possession."

The territory of Mount Seir is in present-day Jordan, between the Moabite territory at the southern end of the Dead Sea, southward to Aqaba, on the Red Sea.

The other two noted ancestors of the Arab tribes were Moab and Ammon, the children of Abraham's nephew, Lot.

Of the former of these we read in Deuteronomy 2:9, "Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battle; for I will not give thee of their land for a possession; because I have given Ar unto the children of Lot for a possession."

"Ar," meaning "mountain," or "mountain range," is well identified with the mountain range to the east of the Dead Sea, just south of the Arnon river. This is to be a possession for ever for the children of Lot.

Likewise, of Ammon, we read in Deuteronomy 2:19, "When thou comest nigh over against the children of Ammon, distress them not, nor meddle with them: for I shall not give thee of the children of Ammon any possession; because I have given it unto the children of Lot for a possession."

This "land of Ammon" is the western portion of present day Jordan. Indeed, Jordan's capital city, Amman, takes its name from this ancient heritage of the children of Ammon.

Thus, with the Ishmaelites (the Bedouins) living amongst the Israelis; and with provision for the other Arabs—whether they descended from Moab, Ammon, or Esau—to the east of the Dead Sea, the Bible lays the groundwork for a peaceful solution with equality toward all—both for Jews and for Arabs.

God's Witnesses and Servant

Ye [Israel] are my witnesses, saith Jehovah, and my servant whom I have chosen that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he.—Isaiah 43:10

R. E. Evans

The destiny of Israel is certain and will be glorious. A dominant theme of the Bible, it was often addressed by God's spokesmen. Their confidence in Israel's future and its appointed role in the divine arrangements was absolute.

Israel's Destiny

The prophet Jeremiah proclaimed: "For I [God] will set mine eyes upon them [Israel] for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up" (Jer. 24:6).

Jeremiah was not content to address only the return. He also prophesied Israel will be never again pulled down, never again plucked up. Following this permanent return, he asserted the hearts of the people would be changed: "And I will give them a heart to know me, that I am Jehovah: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God; for they shall return unto me with their whole heart" (Jer. 24:7).

Though Israel has been planted in the land, this unconditional avowal of the return of their hearts to the Lord has yet to be fulfilled!

The prophet Ezekiel also wrote of Israel's deliverance, a national life after death: "Then he [God] said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off. Therefore prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, O my people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel....I will put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live, . . ." (Ezek. 37:11-14). Again, this is an unconditional promise. A promise only partially fulfilled. The nation has yet to have God's spirit put within it. God has not as yet given it a heart to know him.

In another prophecy through Jeremiah, God explained: "Therefore fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith Jehovah; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be quiet and at ease, and none shall make him afraid. For I am with thee, saith Jehovah, to save thee: for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have scattered thee, but I will not make a full end of thee; but I will correct thee in measure, and will in no wise leave thee unpunished" (Jer. 30:10, 11). [Also see Jer. 46:27, 28.]

In that bygone age, the heavenly Father saw Jacob, his chosen servant, as a rebellious and disobedient nation. It was, therefore, necessary that it suffer divine correction; but, there was to be a subsequent deliverance.

"And I will bring back the captivity of my people Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be plucked up out of their land which I have given them, saith Jehovah thy God."—Amos 9:14, 15

Though Israel has returned to the land, it has not as yet experienced the promised permanence. It is not yet quiet and at ease. It lives in fear it will again be plucked up! There will, however, be a time when that fear will be put away. God has promised none shall make him afraid (Jer. 30:10).

God's Predestined Peoples

This destiny for Israel was evident from the very beginning of its relationship with God. "For thou art a holy people unto Jehovah thy God: Jehovah thy God hath chosen thee to be a people for his own possession, above all peoples that are upon the face of the earth. Jehovah did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all peoples" (Deut. 7:6, 7).

Following this preamble, Moses attested: "And it shall come to pass, because [if—KJV] ye hearken to these ordinances, and keep and do them, that Jehovah thy God will keep with thee the covenant and the lovingkindness which he sware unto thy fathers" (Deut. 7:12) [Translators change the thought of this text by rendering 'eqeb' (#6118) as if, instead of because, making the promise conditional instead of unconditional.]

God declared there will be a time when Israel will keep his ordinances. The Lord decreed his chosen people will be obedient! Israel, as a nation, is predestined to be a holy people!

This predestination does not apply to individuals. It concerns the aggregate, the sum. Israel, as a nation, will be God's servant and a holy people. The individual Jew, however, is not predestined to share in this divine purpose. God will not violate the free-will of his creatures, and will not have any serve him who are unwilling. The choice is the individual's. "And if it seem evil unto you to serve Jehovah, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah" (Josh. 24:15).

In his marvelous plan God predestined two peoples, peoples chosen to accomplish his purposes: Israel and the church. Just as with the Christian, the individual Jew is not predestinated. Free-will takes precedence. As human beings created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26), each Christian and each son of Jacob must exercise his or her free-will. As collective entities, however, both have been foreordained by God.

" . . . James answered, saying, Brethren, hearken unto me: Symeon [apostle Peter] hath rehearsed how first God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After these things I will return, And I will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen; And I will build again the ruins thereof, And I will set it up: That the residue of men may seek after the Lord, . . ."—Acts 15:13-17

Note how James separated the human creation into three distinct and different entities:

A people for his name (the church);

The tabernacle of David (Israel);

The residue of men (remainder of humanity).

One of the great errors of Christendom has been its failure to realize God has two elect peoples. The church did not replace Israel in the divine arrangements, but was an added dimension. During the period of Israel's correction, the heavenly Father introduced something new, something additional to his work with Israel.

Up to the time of Jesus of Nazareth, God had been dealing with the Jew only: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2).

With the advent of Jesus, however, the Lord began working with another people—a people for his name (Acts 15:14), a people that were not a people (Deut. 32:21; Rom. 10:19). "I say then, Did they [the Jews] stumble that they might fall? God forbid: but by their fall salvation [a different salvation than that offered to Israel] is come unto the Gentiles [the church], to provoke them [the Jews] to jealousy [zealousness]" (Rom. 11:11).

The 'Fulness' of God's Peoples

Did this second election mean God abandoned Israel? By no means! "Did God cast off his people? God forbid" (Rom. 11:1) This affirmation by the apostle was firmly founded on God's long-standing promise.

"And Jehovah thy God will make thee plenteous in all the work of thy hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, for good: for [ki] Jehovah will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers; if [ki, for] thou shalt obey the voice of Jehovah thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law; if [ki, for] thou [shalt] turn unto Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul."—Deut. 30:9, 10 [See Young's Literal Translation and the marginal reading in the NASB.]

This text has been greatly abused by translators. To support Christendom's ill-considered attempt to usurp the promises given Israel by God, it is often rendered as if it was

conditional. Such abuse, however, cannot stand before the clear message of Scripture. That the Lord set aside an age for Israel's correction makes evident it has a future, a time when his favor will return. ". . . and so all Israel shall be saved: even as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer; He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: And this is my covenant unto them, When I shall take away their sins. As touching the gospel, they [Israel] are enemies for your [the church's] sake: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sake. For the gifts and the calling of God are not repented of" (Rom. 11:26-29).

Some have attempted to spiritualize the meaning of all Israel. The immediate context, however, does not permit such interpretation. It is national Israel, Jacob, that is the subject here.

From the beginning, then, God's promise to his servant Jacob has been irrevocable. As Jeremiah declared: "For thus saith Jehovah: Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them" (32:42). God has spoken. He will not repent of his calling! His favor will return to Israel!

A little earlier in his letter Paul wrote: "Now if their [Israel's] fall is the riches of the world, and their loss the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" (Rom. 11:12).

Israel did fall. It did lose its position of favor (Amos 3:2). But, as the apostle declared, the fall was not permanent. Israel is to have a fullness, a return of favor. "For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery, lest ye be wise in your own conceits, that a hardening in part hath befallen Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in . . ." (Rom. 11:25).

The partial hardening that led to Israel's fall will pass. When the fullness of the Gentiles be "come in" (when the church is complete), then Jewish eyes will be opened, their ears unstopped (Deut. 29:4; Isa. 6:9-13; 29:18; 35:5) God's favor will return to Israel!

Why Israel?

A question naturally follows an understanding of God's marvelous unconditional promise to Israel. Why? After all the Jews have done, after their failure to keep his Law, after their rejection of his Son, why will God again show his favor? If he is to make a full end of all the nations (Jer. 30:11), why not Israel? The Bible reveals three reasons:

Reason One. God's favor returns to Israel for the cause it was originally given. As Paul explained to the Romans: "As touching the gospel, they [the Jews] are enemies for your [the church's] sake: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sake" (Rom. 11:28).

The Jews are different from all other peoples. Not different because of any ethnic, moral, or political quality on their part; they are different because God chose them as themeans

to fulfill his promise to their fathers. This beloved condition has existed since Israel was delivered from Egypt.

"Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thy heart, dost thou go in to possess their land; but for the wickedness of these nations Jehovah thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may establish the word which Jehovah sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Know therefore, that Jehovah thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people."—Deuteronomy 9:5, 6

Reason Two. God's favor returns to Israel to remove the discredit brought upon his holy name by their exile.

"But I had regard for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations, whither they went. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: I do not this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for my holy name, which ye have profaned among the nations, whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which hath been profaned among the nations, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the nations shall know that I am Jehovah,..."—Ezekiel 36:21-23

In order to sanctify his great and holy name, the Lord will renew Israel's favored position. "As a sweet savor will I accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you in the sight of the nations" (Ezek. 20:41). [Also see Ezek. 28:25; 36:23; 37:28; 39:7.]

Reason Three. God's favor returns to Israel because he has a work for it to do. He has not resurrected the nation (Ezek. 37:11,12) in vain (Isa. 55:11). He will not cleanse it and put his spirit within it (Ezek. 36:25-27) and not have a purpose for it.

Through the prophet Isaiah the heavenly Father raised this very issue: "and he said unto me, Thou art my servant; Israel, in whom I will be glorified. . . . yea, he saith, It is too light a thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth" (49:3, 6).

God will not raise up the Jews alone. Israel's restoration is not the end of God's plan. The salvation of his human creation in its totality is the Lord's desire (1 Tim. 2:4). As Paul declared: ". . . but glory and honor and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 2:10).

Isaiah foretold of this sequence in the divine plan: "The Lord Jehovah, who gathereth the outcasts [the dispersed] of Israel, saith, Yet will I gather others to him, besides his own that are gathered" (56:8).

As we saw in Acts 15, James, quoting Amos, also indicated the gentile salvation was to be the sequel of Israel's restoration. "After these things [after taking out of the gentiles a

people, the church (v. 14)] I will return, And I will build again the tabernacle of David [Israel], which is fallen; And I will build again the ruins thereof, And I will set it up: That the residue of men [the rest of humanity] may seek after the Lord" (Acts 15:16, 17).

The tabernacle of David (Israel: Zech. 12:7-13:1; Isa. 16:5) is to be restored in order that the residue of men may seek after the Lord. Israel is to be an example that will bring all of humankind back to the Creator! Israel's return to favor is to demonstrate God's mercy and benevolence to all his earthly creation.

"And they [the nations] shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited. Then the nations that are left round about you shall know that I, Jehovah, have builded the ruined places, and planted that which was desolate: I, Jehovah, have spoken it, and I will do it."—Ezekiel 36:35, 36

God's Purpose

When the heavenly Father puts his spirit within Israel, when he removes the partial hardening from the sons of Jacob, they will return to their God. He will bless them and Israel shall become a "delightful" land. "For I, Jehovah, change not; therefore ye, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed. . . . And all nations shall call you happy; for ye shall be a delightful land, saith Jehovah of hosts" (Mal. 3:6, 12).

For many centuries Israel's fall has been an example of God's cursing, of his correction; but, soon, Israel will be the exemplar of his blessing. Its return to favor will be a sign to all peoples of the earth. "And it shall come to pass that, as ye were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing" (Zech. 8:13). The spectacle of a restored Israel, the wonder of a land that was desolate becoming like the garden of Eden (Ezek. 36:25), will have the intended consequence.

"Yea, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek Jehovah of hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favor of Jehovah. Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold, out of all the languages of the nations, they shall take hold of [the hem of] the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you"—Zechariah 8:22, 23

The world of the gentiles, experiencing a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation (Dan. 12:1), will be dejected and morose—full of evil, misery, suffering.

"For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples; but Jehovah will arise upon thee [Israel], and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."—Isaiah 60:2, 3

The peoples of the world will look to Israel and see all the good God has done (Jer. 32:42). Then they will come to the Jew and ask how they too may enter into a

relationship with their Creator and share in the blessings. Just as the heart of the Jew will change (Jer. 24:7), so too will the heart of the gentile.

"And the sons of them [gentiles] that afflicted thee [Israel] shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee The city of Jehovah, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel."—Isaiah 60:14

The world will be awestruck by the work the Lord will do in Israel. The transcendence of it will bring them to their knees, and they will turn to Israel to learn of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

"And I will cleanse them [the Jews] from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned against me, and whereby they have transgressed against me. And this city shall be to me for a name of joy, for a praise and for a glory, before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them, and shall fear and tremble for all the good and for all the peace that I procure unto it."—Jeremiah 33:8, 9

Is Israel's Favor Just?

Despite its grand purpose some may question the justness of this return of favor to the Jew. The apostle Paul anticipated just such a concern, and gave the answer. "Even as it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy" (Rom. 9:13-16).

The creation is not to judge the Creator, to question to whom he may or may not show mercy: ". . . hath not the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor" (Rom. 9:21)?

God's relationship with his creation is based on grace (Rom. 5:15). There is nothing the creature can do to merit the Creator's favor.

Any special blessing the Lord may give, whether it be to the church or whether it be to Israel, does not take away from the blessings he has in store for his earthly creation. The provisions of the general salvation for humankind are not reduced in any way from what God saw them to be from the beginning of the world. Israel's election does not imply the rejection of others, but rather their inclusion. Israel was chosen, not for its own restoration, but to be a model to the world, an example that will bring all peoples to their gracious Creator so they may share in his salvation and blessing.

God's Witnesses and Servant

The God of Jacob made a promise (Gen. 28:14); a promise repeated time and again by the prophets and apostles, a promise that was repented. Perhaps, it was put in the clearest terms by Isaiah: "Ye [Israel] are my witnesses, saith Jehovah, and my servant whom I have chosen; . . . (43:10). God has foreordained that the seed of Jacob will be his earthly witnesses and servant.

"And for this cause he [Jesus] is the mediator of a new covenant, that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first [Mosaic] covenant, they [the Jews] that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."—Hebrews 9:15 The restoration of all peoples is the eternal inheritance of God's first chosen people (Deut. 7:6). This is the role the Jews have in God's plan of salvation. After their correction (Jer. 30:10) they will be God's witnesses and servant, they will be a name of joy before all the nations (Jer. 33:9). As the prophets foretold:

"In days to come shall Jacob take root; Israel shall blossom and bud; and they shall fill the face of the world with fruit."—Isaiah 27:6

"Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast."—Jeremiah 31:27

"I [God] will increase them [Israel] with men like a flock. As the flock for sacrifice, as the flock of Jerusalem in her appointed feasts, so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men; and they [all humanity] shall know that I am Jehovah."—Ezekiel 36:37, 38

Israel was chosen as God's servant so the residue of men may seek after the Lord (Acts 15:17). Its witness will lead all peoples into a covenant relationship with him. This is the destiny of Israel!

"And the ransomed of Jehovah [all humanity] shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads: they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."—Isaiah 35:10

EDITOR'S NOTE: All Scriptures in the above article are cited from the American Standard Version (ASV).

Jehovah Returns to Zion

Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain.—Zechariah 8:3

A verse by verse study in Zechariah 8

Zechariah, like the other prophets who wrote after the Babylonian captivity, stands in marked contrast to Jeremiah and those who wrote just before the captivity. Whereas the former prophets were viewed by their peers as doomsayers, the post-exilic prophets were decidedly upbeat in tone. And they had a right to be. Now the captivity was over. The land lay before them. The work of rebuilding was a big challenge and the prophets needed to be as goads to urge the people forward.

Uppermost in their minds was the rebuilding of the temple of God. The emphasis the prophets placed on this project showed the importance of arranging their priorities—placing God first in their lives, both individually and nationally.

Nowhere is the positiveness of the conviction that God is with them more evident than in the eighth chapter of Zechariah. Ten times in just twenty-three verses we find the forceful assertion, "Thus saith the LORD."

The Jealousy of God—Verses 1 to 5

"Again the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous [zealous] for Zion with great jealousy [zeal], and I was jealous [zealous] for her with great fury [passion]. Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof."

The New King James version of the Bible correctly captures the thought of God's jealousy by substituting the word "zealous." The Hebrew word properly describes zeal and should only be translated jealous when used in a negative sense. Similarly, the word translated "fury" would be better translated "passion." It is with great passion that Jehovah turns the fortunes of Jerusalem. Although the prophet is speaking of the immediate cause of rejoicing—the return to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity—he is also prophetically looking down the stream of time to a far greater deliverance of God's chosen people.

The immediate aim of Zechariah is to encourage the temple building. This was to be God's house. Therefore, he says that God will soon be able again to "dwell in the midst

of Jerusalem." From that temple would issue forth the decrees of God, and Jerusalem would be called "the city of truth." These expressions, however, have their deeper meaning in the long-term fulfillment of this prophecy.

Note the testimony of the Apostle John: "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:3).

Israel will be established "in the top of the mountains." It will be then that "out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:2, 3). And it will be then that the streets of that city will bustle with life as old and young mingle together in the joys of life. "There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed" (Isa. 65:20).

The Returning Remnant—Verses 6 to 8

"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvelous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness."

How marvelous that time was to the Israelites! After seventy years of captivity for the people of Judah and even longer for those of the kingdom of Israel, they were suddenly to return to their native land. How much more marvelous is the return of Israel from their Diaspora! After nearly two thousand years they have returned to the ancestral land of their forefathers. Not only have they come from the east and from the west, but from all the nations wherein they have been scattered.

Now, as in those favorable days of the past, if they will but put God first and make room in their hearts to prepare for a home for their God, then indeed he "will be their God, in truth and in righteousness."

Building the Temple—Verses 9 and 10

"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, which were in the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built. For before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast; neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction: for I set all men every one against his neighbor."

Here lies the kernel of the prophet's message to Israel of that time. The foundation of the temple had been laid. Workers were needed to complete the job. But, as Nehemiah notes,

now they were too busy building their individual fortunes, often at the cost of the less fortunate among them (Neh. 5:5). As the contemporary prophet, Haggai, phrased it succinctly, "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?" (Hag. 1:4).

A similar proposition faces the Israel of today. They have been permitted reentry into their land. They have built a prosperous economy. The challenge now is to lay the spiritual foundation for their God.

Zechariah calls to mind the former days, days of famine, want, and unemployment. Haggai does the same: "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD" (Hag. 1:6-8).

In remembering the hardships of their Diaspora, Israel should find the incentive to build in each of their hearts a temple for their God, their God who has delivered them from these conditions of bondage to the prosperity of the present. Not only were they beset by economic hardships, but they faced social inequities as well. With "every one against his neighbor" they knew not who to trust and were frequently betrayed by seemingly the best of their friends.

The Return of Favor—Verses 11 to 15

"But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the LORD of hosts. For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong. For thus saith the LORD of hosts; As I thought to punish you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, saith the LORD of hosts, and I repented not: So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not."

The word here translated "remnant" could just as well be translated "survivors." Professor W. E. Vine, in his Expository Dictionary writes: "The 'remnant' concept is applied especially to the Israelites who survived such calamities as war, pestilence, and famine—people whom the Lord in his mercy spared to be his chosen people."

Here it describes not so much those who survived the Diaspora and the Holocaust experiences at its conclusion, but more particularly those who had the right heart condition to survive Israel's final climactic battle with the forces of Gog and Magog (Ezek. 38; 39).

To this remnant is promised prosperity. For them it will once again be true that they will be blessed (Deut. 28:5). But their prosperity will not be a selfish prosperity. They will share of their bounty with others. More importantly, they will share the secret of obtaining that bounty—the rules and regulations of a new law covenant. Thus, as they had been a byword and a curse in times past to other nations, now they shall be a blessing to them.

A specific example of this blessing is given in Isaiah 19:23, 24: "In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land." Here Israel is assigned an intermediary role, as it were, between the warring factions of Egypt and Assyria. This may well signify a peacemaking role in the emotional conflicts between the western and eastern worlds, represented by Egypt and Assyria respectively.

The Requirements—Verses 16 and 17

"These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbor; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: and let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbor; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD."

These blessings will not come to all who are of Jewish origin (Rom. 2:28). These favors are reserved for those with the right character requirements. These requirements serve a practical purpose in addition to the benefits to those possessing such characteristics. Since the previous verses describe the kingdom role as being an intermediary and a blessing to the nations around them, it is imperative that they learn from their past experiences how to put themselves in the favor of God.

Mankind in that age will progress to righteous living along what the prophet Isaiah calls "a highway of holiness" (Isa. 35:8-10). Israel will have a role in the construction of that highway. We read of their responsibilities in Isaiah 62:10, "Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people."

These stumbling stones consist not only of barriers to the acceptance of Christ, but include all impediments to the attainment of righteousness. Resurrected Israel will have been well trained for this educational work of helping mankind in God's kingdom.

Sorrow Turned to Joy—Verses 18 and 19

"And the word of the LORD of hosts came unto me, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace."

The four fasts which Israel was observing during the seventy years were to commemorate four different incidents in their captivity under Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The city was taken in the fourth month (Jer. 39:2). The temple was burned in the fifth month (Jer. 52:12, 13). Gedaliah, the appointed governor of Judea, was slain in the seventh month (Jer. 41:1-3). [It should be noted that some apply the fast of the seventh month to the annual fast on the Day of Atonement.] The siege of Jerusalem had been set in the tenth month of the preceding year (Jer. 52:4).

Now in a contrasting sequence of events, Israel's fortunes were to be reversed. This was true in the typical situation between the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1, 2) until the final rebuilding of the walls under Nehemiah many years later. Likewise in the larger fulfillment of this prophecy in our own days we have seen a number of events since 1878 and onward showing a reversal of the misfortunes of Israel. Their fast days will become feast days.

The Gentile Effect—Verses 20 to 22

"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD."

Once the new government becomes established in Israel with the ancient prophets at its head, there will come a movement among all the nations of the world to learn the secret of their success. The prophet says that all nations "shall flow unto it" (Isa. 2:2). Word of the remarkable victory which God accomplished will quickly reach the national capitals involved (Isa. 66:19). The prosperity of Israel will soon be reported world-wide (Zech. 14:14-19). It will not require a "hard sell" publicity campaign to convince the nations of the world that their prosperity, indeed their very life, will depend upon learning from the God of Israel.

A small picture of this is given in the book of Job. Israel, like Job, endured a vast number of hardships to show their fidelity to God. His comforters, like the nations of the world, had little to offer and were often his accusers—well did they deserve the title "miserable comforters" (Job. 16:2). When the story of Job comes to its climax two things happen before it can reach its happy ending. The comforters are told to bring a peace offering to Job (42:8) and Job, representing Israel, had to offer intercessory prayer for them before his own fortunes were restored (42:10).

The Skirt of a Jew—Verse 23

"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you."

Though many students of the Bible have tried to enumerate the particular ten men involved in this text, it is probably no more than a general reference to a number to indicate the totality of the nations involved. It is in a similar vein that Jacob complains that his father-in-law had changed his wages "ten times" (Gen. 31:7), using a definite number to express an indefinite concept.

Others have noted that the pronoun "him" is singular, designating an individual man and not the total number of a group. Strong's Concordance bears this out, saying it refers to "a man as an individual or a male person." Some draw the conclusion from this that "the man" referred to here is Jesus. We feel such a conclusion is unwarranted. The word is used broadly, both of individuals and of groups. An enlightening use of the word is in Exodus 34:24 where it is translated "any man." That appears to be the usage in our text. The man referred to can be any of the faithful remnant of Israel.

Worthy of note is that they do not grab onto this "man" but "take hold of the skirt of him." The word for "skirt" properly means, as the New International Version has it, "the hem of his robe."

In the New Testament we see an illustration of this. In Capernaum Jesus was on his way to raise the daughter of Jairus from the dead. A large crowd followed him and pressed against him. One in the crowd, a woman having an issue of blood, came close to him and "touched the border of his garment." Immediately Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" Peter, noting that the thronging crowd had undoubtedly touched him often along the way, was puzzled and asked Jesus for the meaning of his question. Jesus replied that one had specially touched him for he had felt virtue go out of him to heal her.

Here, too, "the border of his garment" was touched. The meaning becomes clear when we consider what was peculiar about the border of the Jewish garment. "Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring" (Num. 15:38-40).

This blue fringe was to indicate a commitment to the Jewish law. Jesus had been so faithful. In acknowledging obedience the sick woman demonstrated her faith. So will it be in the kingdom. As men recognize and acknowledge that the special blessings Israel is experiencing come from their adherence to God's laws, they will be prompted to do likewise. And likewise, they will also receive blessings.

Thus it is that they will say, "we will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you." Thus, the faithful of the nation of Israel will yet realize their potential to be a blessing amongst all the nations of the world.

Real Heroes

And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city.—Isaiah 1:26

Richard Kindig

Our society seems preoccupied with the search for "role models." We are constantly besieged with talk of heroes, champions, winners, success stories—models for the young to copy, for underachievers to emulate. Yet most of the names we are given are glaringly defective in their moral character.

For 6000 years the eyes of the LORD have been going to and fro among the human race, looking for men and women of "perfect hearts" to show himself strong on their behalf (2 Chron. 16:9). Like a farmer or a vintner, he has patiently pruned and nurtured this precious fruit of the earth (James 5:7).

During the Christian era, brave martyrs and unheralded saints have quietly been added to the church of the living God, whose names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3). In the world's estimation, brave hearts are proven on the battlefields of war and politics. But in God's eyes, the courage of convictions, the obedience to and labor on behalf of principle, the nurturing of the downtrodden, loyalty to spiritual family and love of enemies—these have been the humble, godly qualities he has sought.

The just and godly in all ages are in one sense viewed as one family—God's family. Yet, Jesus and the Apostles were careful to distinguish between the brave heroes of Christianity and those of the prior ages whose lives were spent serving the same God, but without the benefit of Jesus' shed blood and the "new and living way" that it consecrated for us (Heb.10:19-24).

The precious ancient heroes of the Patriarchal and Jewish ages are among the greatest treasures of human history. They often have been called "ancient worthies" or "heroes of faith." They are the foundational layer of the "cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1) referred to as our source of motivation and example. Among them are those who, as individuals, are called by the word of God "the father of the faithful," "the friend of God," "the meekest man in all the earth," "a man after God's own heart." Hebrews assures us that the world was unworthy of these noble men and women of faith and obedience.

In the same breath it is clearly stated that a better thing was reserved for "us"—the Christian church. Though they gained "a good report" (Heb. 11:2) through faith, and their faith was "counted as righteousness" (Rom. 4), Jesus is the "perfector" of faith (Heb. 12:2). Jesus' cross—his sacrifice as the great anti-typical bullock of sin offering—was necessary to atone for the sins of the faithful; and so those who died prior to that sin offering "received not the promise" God had made to Abraham (Heb. 11:39).

As Moses literally died within sight of the promised land, so all the "ancient worthies" passed away without having their faith perfected. And so as we turn to the prophetic word respecting them, we need to bear in mind that their role will require some additional seasoning and perfecting under the tutelage of Christ and his church of the firstborn (Heb. 11:40; 12:23). Before we consider the nature of that additional growth, let us look at prophecies and their role in the Messianic kingdom.

Ancient Worthies in the Kingdom

Jesus assured us that the ancient worthies will be prominent in his kingdom (Luke 13:28). But Jesus made a covenant with his apostles that they (the twelve) would in the Messianic Kingdom be sitting on thrones, judging Israel—a higher honor (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30).

In the prophetic picture of the new government of the earth Jesus gave us (Rev. 21) the "city" is the bride, which descends from heaven. Its wall has twelve foundations—the apostles (vs. 14). It has twelve gates named for the twelve tribes, possibly referring to twelve qualities of the church; and each of the gates, or ways of access for the world of mankind, is a pearl (v. 21)—a beautiful emblem of the type of jewel that God was developing in the church: a coating of divine character applied in layers upon a coarse pebble that had no value before God selected it for transformation.

When walking in the city, the nations of earth will be treading upon golden pathways — possibly referring to the golden way in which the church walked, through humility and obedience; or perhaps showing that the world's feet will be upheld and kept from stumbling by the golden acts of kindness and example that the church, then divine, will hold forth to them (v. 21).

Missing from this heavenly picture is the distinctive role of the ancient worthies, and of Israel—possibly because the Revelation 21 vision only shows those who have already submitted to the rulership of the heavenly kingdom. As such, it is a vision of things as they will be when the work of restoration is complete, at the end of the millennium.

The Counselors Restored

The prophet Isaiah gave us perhaps the most complete pictures we have of the operation of the earthly peaceable kingdom (Isa. 2:1-4). In one of these accounts, the heavenly city of Revelation is described after it arrives on earth as the "New Jerusalem" (Rev. 21:2).

In the verses leading up to chapter 2, Isaiah speaks of the house cleaning that God would accomplish among the corrupt leaders of Isaiah's own day and later (reminiscent of Jesus' statement to the Pharisees in Luke 13:28). One of the governing techniques God will use, according to the prophet, is to "restore [Israel's] counselors as at the first" (Isa. 1:26).

Who were Israel's counselors? When did they first appear, and how did they work? Surely any list of Israel's counselors must have included Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the other respected patriarchs of the tribe, such as Joseph. The counselors must have included Moses, who gave them their laws and was their first real governor; and such other notables as Job, David, and Daniel. But the counselors must also have included the faithful men whom Moses appointed as Israel's first judges.

For the Jews, the "beginning" was at Sinai, when God added the Law to the Abrahamic covenant he had already established. Shortly after Sinai God set the precedent of raising up judges from among the people to settle disputes and resolve controversies.

Read the remarkable account in Exodus 18:1. Moses in humility acquiesces to the advice he received from his father-in-law. To a practical tribal leader like Jethro, unschooled in the autocratic ways of Egypt as Moses had been, it was obvious that the best judicial system for both Moses and God's people was a bottom-up approach in which men who best knew the people and were their closest possible kin should hear each case first. Cases that remained unresolved at the lowest levels would be bumped up to a higher level, probably some sort of inter-tribal council of elders. And if they did not suffice, Moses with his direct connection to heaven became the supreme court of the land.

Let us consider the benefits of the system as Jethro outlined them: First, the people would learn the laws themselves (vs. 20).

Second, the able men, who fear God, men of truth and hating covetousness, would form successive levels of wisdom and authority. This authority would be derived from the people's voluntary submission to them on the basis of their age, wisdom, and proven honesty. These duties would have developed an increasing storehouse of practical wisdom among the counselors and the people whom they served.

Third, this system left Moses free to deal with the toughest cases as well as the other important duties of his office—picturing how the dignity of the heavenly rulers will not be interrupted for every little question and dispute of the peaceable kingdom. Fourth, the people benefit by getting immediate attention to their concerns and by having their cases heard by men of experience, who were known to them and in whom they trusted.

Another clear point of comparison between Moses' "first counselors and judges" who will be restored is that they do not make the laws but apply them and help enforce them. The laws themselves, according to the prophet, will come "from Zion"—the heavenly courts (Isa. 2:3).

Another Line of Evidence

Psalm 45 contains another apparent reference to these restored counselors, in language that is also mentioned by Isaiah.

Verse 13 describes the church as the "king's daughter"—which the bride becomes when she marries the king's son. The golden clothing identifies her as in the heavenly condition.

Verse 14 describes the other virgins, her companions who follow her. These may refer to the other spiritual class mentioned in Revelation 7—the "great multitude," who are referred to as virgins of a lesser stature in the pictures of Song of Solomon 8:8, 9 and our Lord's parable of Matthew 25:1-13.

Verse 15 then describes a group who had been the fathers of the church, but who now become her children. Who could these be, if not the "fathers," the heroes of faith from the Jewish age and before? The church is told in this verse that she will make these fathers "princes in all the earth." Again, we note that these honored elders of the past are distinctly presented as inferior, in both the fact that they are on earth instead of heaven and in that they are given their new position by the younger, more honored class.

Micah 5:5 also describes "princes of men" or "principal men." In this passage, Messiah (verse 2) will be the source of peace to Israel, when the Assyrians who oppose Israel attempt to rise up in opposition. The seeming victory of the unbelieving hordes will be short-lived; in the battle of Armageddon, Messiah will fight for the children of Israel; and he will use "seven shepherds and eight principal men" to lead the remnant of Israel into the fray. It would seem speculative to note more than the simple fact that men of distinction are appointed to the leadership of Israel on earth at that time. In conjunction with the more direct statement of Isaiah, that these leaders are "restored" from before, our confidence in the idea that these are indeed the resurrected "heroes of faith" begins to grow.

Zechariah 14:3, which also refers to the same battle, may be referring to these earthly leaders restored to their familiar roles when he fights for Israel "as in the day of battle." Then he raised up such deliverers as Joshua, Samson, and Deborah to lead the campaign. This may imply that these same leaders may help in this future deliverance of Israel.

God's Promises to the Heroes

Turning from the prophetic testimony concerning men of ancient distinction restored on earth to a prominent role in the Messianic kingdom, we now consider the actual promises by God to the Old Testament saints. What was promised? What were they expecting?

Abraham was promised, with an oath, that he would inherit the land of Israel. This is what he expected. (Gen. 24:7)

Isaac and Jacob likewise expected to live in Israel one day. (Gen. 28:4)

Moses (Deut. 34:4) and Joshua (24:13,18) and many others centered their hopes around God's "promised land."

Because God fulfills his promises, it would seem certain beyond reasonable doubt that the "times of restitution" (Acts 3:19-21) which Peter foretold, would include the fulfillment of God's promises to the patriarchs and faithful men of old. Only a restoration of human life, on the land promised to Abraham and his children, could fulfill these explicit promises of God.

The Perfecting of their Faith

How, then, will the faith of these heroes be perfected? We answer that the blood of Jesus Christ—which perfects our faith—will, when applied on behalf of Abraham, Isaac, and the others, accomplish the same work in their hearts that it is doing for us. As representatives of the Messianic kingdom among men, they will have ample opportunity to confront entrenched evil in the characters of men. They will be "just men . . . made perfect" in the same way the church is: by obedience to the laws of God in the context of the precious blood of Christ which cleanses us from all sin.

In the grand scene of Hebrews 12:23, it would seem that these "heroes of faith" described in this article could fulfill the latter part of this verse: "JUST men, made perfect." The heroes of faith are just—they were justified by faith in God, and receive of the "better resurrection" reserved for the "just" (Heb. 11:35). But though just, these MEN are in the kingdom picture here described as being "made perfect."

Two Roles in a Future Drama

And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.—Jeremiah 3:15

Michael Brann

If we were to think of God's divine plan of the ages as a theatrical play, we would place events which are to shortly come to pass as some of the final scenes in the last act. That last act is the complete establishment of God's kingdom, including both heavenly and earthly aspects. Two very important roles within that last act are played by the patriarchs of old and the nation of Israel.

A great deal of proper planning and organizing will be necessary for God's kingdom to not only resuscitate all the dead of mankind, but to organize, educate, inspire, and evaluate each of the conservatively estimated 20 billion people then inhabiting the planet. In early developmental and functional stages, God's kingdom on earth may operate much like the organizational and structural framework upon which earthly governments do today. God may use leaders who are of proper authority to organize, lead, guide, counsel, and direct them in the ways pleasing to him and in harmony with the divine rule of that day, namely, love and justice towards all.

Just as there are presidents, prime ministers, and other top ranking officers of government, so there must be those who will be chief rulers then too. We need not worry about such power being concentrated in the hands of a few individuals as we need to today, for that power will not lead to gross misuse or abuse, nor to a greedy spirit nor to one of despotic control over the people. One major difference between governmental leaders of today and those of God's kingdom will be the character of these individuals. Those leaders in God's kingdom will have been tried and tested by the Lord. These will not be elected by a majority vote from amongst mankind, nor will they inherit any such office handed down from family members. No, these special individual government officials will have been individually hand picked by the Lord!

Let us examine the scriptures on the patriarchs and prophets of old, often styled "Ancient Worthies," and the nation of Israel, to see what roles each will play in the drama of God's plan as it is about to unfold on the world's stage.

The Role of the Ancient Worthies

According to our understanding, at the closing scenes of Armageddon, just after the completion of the church and when the nation of Israel is about to face total annihilation, their prayers of desperation will be answered by the Lord (Heb. 11:39-40; Zech. 12:9-10; Ezek. 38, 39). Their prayers will be answered in the form of several of these faithful men of old returning from their graves to lead Israel out of her distress and into victory over her enemies. A partial list of these patriarchs and prophets are listed for us found in

Hebrews 11. The list includes Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Rahab, Joseph, David, and Samuel. These men and women will serve as the Lord's representatives upon the earth and will serve as a link between the heavenly phase and the earthly phase of the kingdom.

In Isaiah 1:26, these worthies are described as "judges" and "counselors." "And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counselors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city."

These judges will govern in three distinct ways. First, they will communicate to mankind the exact requirements the heavenly ruler specifies. This will be only fair that all know the rules and regulations, such as Isaiah 65:25 states: "none shall hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain." This lesson is pictured for us in the book of Ezra at the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity when Ezra was given this divine commission, "And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not" (Ezra 7:25).

Second, they will judge or give decisions when certain controversies may arise. Their decisions will be perfect and in accord with the lines of love, justice, and wisdom. Just as Moses, as Israel's lawgiver, was to decide the most difficult of controversies if the elders could not render a decision, so these tried and tested judges will be completely qualified to render correct and wise judgments for the most difficult kind of quarrels or controversies as they may arise (Deut. 1:9-17).

Third, they will execute the judgments given. As opposed to verdicts and judicial decisions in our society today, which often go unheeded, these ancient worthies will have the divine power behind their decisions, which will enable them to see that any decisions are properly adhered to from the least to the greatest of mankind. Anyone found not in accordance to the Lord's will, will be punished accordingly. Jeremiah 30:20, 21 states this by saying, "Their children also shall be as aforetime, and their congregation shall be established before me, and I will punish all that oppress them. And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me."

The prophet Zechariah gives another aspect of the role played by these ancient worthies. In chapter 12:6, he says, "In that day [when 'all nations are gathered together' against Israel] will I make the governors of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left: and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem." As before mentioned, this scene appears to take place at the time of the closing scenes of Armageddon when Israel is on the precipice of total destruction. Imagine these faithful "men of old" arising on the scene at the last moment to save the day for Israel! Israel's enemies will be destroyed like a fire would consume a dry sheaf (Obad. 18). They will quickly turn the tide from destruction to victory! This picture suggests that these ancient worthies will serve as protectors of those whom the Lord

holds dear to himself. At first this will apply especially to Israel, but most likely will be true for any nation or people who in the future place themselves willingly under the jurisdiction of this special class of people.

Micah 5:5-8 gives us a further glimpse into the kingdom work associated with the ancient worthies. "And this [manner] shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land: and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds, and eight principal men. And they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof: thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian, when he cometh into our land, and when he treadeth within our borders. 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. And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep: who, if he go through, both treadeth down, and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver."

The "seven shepherds" are, we believe, a reference to the church, while the "eight principal men" may be a reference to the ancient worthies. The seven shepherds are then ruling from heaven beyond the veil, while the eight principal men are God's special representatives serving on the earth and visible to mankind. The number eight is not to be taken literally, just as the seven is not literal. Seven suggests a spiritually complete or perfect number. Eight suggests a new beginning, a fresh start of another cycle; in this case, the beginning of a new development in the earth having to do with the Lord's kingdom.

The Fenton translation reads "eight who shall organize men." This brings forth the concept that one obvious need for the billions of mankind roaming the earth will be the need for organization. Otherwise, chaos and anarchy would ensue, much as it does now wherever there is no leadership or structure. Throughout the Scriptures we have examples of the necessity for large groups of people to be arranged into smaller groups in order to accomplish certain tasks or be dealt with effectively. (See Exod. 18:21; 1 Sam. 8:12; Luke 9:14.) The ancient worthies will be given this herculean task of arranging mankind into proper groups in order to facilitate and advance the individual and collective goals of God's kingdom. Some may have special needs which require special assistance. Certain educational facilities could be set up where various kinds of problems could be dealt with in a more focused manner. Organization may be necessary to use those who have unique talents such as teaching, training, sympathizing, caring, etc.

Although verses seven and eight may have more to do with the blessing which the nation of Israel will be amongst the masses of resurrected mankind, it would not be incorrect to think that the very leaders of that nation will have these same characteristics as here specified. "Dew" and "showers on the grass" are forms of water (representing truth) coming early in the millennial morning after the night of sin and death is passing away. This water is designed to assist and bless the willing and obedient of mankind in their growth and development of character pleasing to the Lord. As for those who are disobedient in that day, the "remnant of Israel" with their "princes" shall be their enemy,

as "a lion among the beasts." Their word and judgments will be the final authority in matters of any rebellion or disobedience whenever it may occur. Since God himself is and always will be an enemy of sin and disobedience, so too will be his earthly representatives.

The Role of the Nation of Israel

Oftentimes, the question arises as to the scope and nature which the nation of Israel will have in God's earthly kingdom. Although there may be a "purging" of rebellious elements (Ezek. 20:33-38; Amos 9:9, 10), the Bible clearly indicates that Israel will play a very prominent role in the kingdom.

One of the earliest promises recorded in the Scriptures relates to the nation of Israel—before it was even a nation! It specifies that they will be a "blessing" to the remainder of all mankind. This promise is found in Genesis 12:2, 3. It was first given to Abram, then to his immediate posterity, Isaac and Jacob. "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel by the LORD, fathered twelve sons who came to be the progenitors of the nation of Israel. This nation is to serve as special agents of the Lord, his instruments to "bless all the families of the earth."

Other scriptures in support of Israel's future role to bless mankind are as follows:

Zechariah 10:6-9. Here, after discussing their regathering, we are told that the LORD will "sow them among the people: and they shall remember me in far countries; and they shall live with their children, and turn again." The Lord will use them as seed to teach and instruct the people of the nations in the ways of the Lord. This is indeed quite a privilege of "blessing" all the families of the earth.

A comparison of **Amos 9:11, 12 and Acts 15:14-17** also agree that Israel will play an important role in this kingdom, that of being an example and leader of the gentile nations. One way in which they may lead as perhaps suggested in these texts is that they will be able to show how faith in the Lord and in his promises will lead any who choose to likewise be "raised up" from their own personal and private "ruins." What an example Israel will be unto all who likewise put their faith and trust in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel)!

Zechariah 8:13. "And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong." The prophet makes a proportional comparison which is telling us that to the extent that Israel has been cursed, vilified, and mistreated amongst the nations they have been scattered into (see Jer. 24:9), so shall they be a blessing! To the degree in which they have been accursed (worldwide), so shall be their degree of blessing (worldwide). This opportunity to bless all the nations is thus shown to have a very large scope, because the history of the Jews is alarmingly full of documented details

verifying mistreatment by their host countries. Everywhere the Jew has gone he has suffered. So, the Lord says through Zechariah that the Jews, once they are enlightened, will themselves be a light of blessing to all nations.

Isaiah 49:6 supports this conclusion—"I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." Zephaniah 3:20 adds: "At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD."

Isaiah 19:24, 25. "In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance."

Question Box

And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD.—Isaiah 66:21

Who are the Priests and Levites of Isaiah 66:21?

It might seem reasonable that, just as Israel of old had priests and Levites for the temple service, in the thousand-year kingdom of Christ some would be chosen for religious service.

Yet the priests and Levites were to have no inheritance in the land (Num. 18:20-24; Deut. 14:27-29). Moreover, sacrifice, teaching, and blessing were the special work of the priesthood. This was also to be the work of the church in the coming age on a grand worldwide scale (Gal. 3:8, 29; 1 Peter 2:9; Num. 14:21). Thus, while this first view is not unreasonable, we may yet look for a better meaning.

The context has sketched the unworthiness of this world (vs. 15, 16), while from verse 18 his message is rescue. From the middle of verse 18 to the middle of verse 24 the pronoun "they" seems to refer only to gentiles. Verse 21 says, "And of them also . . ." suggesting that, while most certainly some Israelites by birth would become part of the heavenly little flock and great multitude, yet of the gentiles also some would be called and faithful. As Paul in Galatians 3:8, 16, and 29 says, "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the gentiles by faith, preached beforehand the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all the nations be blessed. . . . And to thy seed, which is Christ . . . And if ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise [covenant.]"

Thus a paraphrase may be suggested for the meaning: "And of the gentiles also (as well as of the Jews) I will develop priests [the 144,000 member body of Christ, Rev. 7:2-8] and additionally Levites [the great multitude, Rev. 7:9, 13-17], saith the LORD." And they will join with Jesus to offer his blood on behalf of the whole rest of the world to raise all the families of the earth from the dead; to reeducate mankind in righteousness; and then proceed to bless them forever—as God swore originally to Abraham.

James Parkinson

The time setting of the text seems to be given in verse 18 as being when God gathers all nations to show them his glory. This is linked in numerous other texts to the final battle of Israel described in Ezekiel 38 and 39.

This identification becomes stronger in verse 19 when the prophet describes certain ones who escape from that battle returning to the countries from whence they came. Several of the countries' names are also given in the Ezekiel reference.

The effect of their return is two-fold. First they declare God's glory among the nations. They will have been firsthand witnesses of God fighting for Israel as he fought in the days of old. Their testimony may be along the lines, "If you had seen what I saw . . ."

The second effect is to release those Israelis who have not yet returned to the holy land. These returning refugees would be carried in all manner of conveyances.

The pronoun "them" in verse 21 appears to apply to these returnees. These, however, will not be part of the church, for Paul informs us that "blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in" (Rom. 11:25).

Seemingly, therefore, the term "priests" and "Levites" must be taken in an accommodated form. They will do an activity similar to that of priests and Levites. Priests were intermediaries between God and man. Levites were teachers.

Possibly those who have offended Israel during their Diaspora will have to come to the Jew and make amends. This is suggested in the last chapter of Job, where that patriarch performs a priestly function in sacrificing the animals brought by his three erstwhile comforters.

As Levites, they may be teachers in the new dispensation, spreading God's word to a world of listening ears.

Carl Hagensick

Apparently speaking of Israel, God says through the prophet, "And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites."

It appears likely that the Hebrew expression used in this verse does not mean "priest AND Levites," but rather, "Levitical priests." The expression is first used in Deuteronomy 17:9: "the priests the Levites." Some translations render it "the Levitical priests." It is a reference to the chosen priests under the Levitical arrangement. This phrase seems to be a more precise way of emphasizing who is meant—that is, not just any priests and not the Levites as a tribe, but precisely those Levitical priests who were in office and charged with the highest duties. Deuteronomy 17:9 speaks of the education and judgment responsibilities of these priests and other passages refer to their role in bearing the Ark of the Covenant. [Other passages which use this phrase are Joshua 3:3; 8:31; 2 Chronicles 30:27; Nehemiah 11:20; Jeremiah 33:21; and Ezekiel 44:15.]

Since the Isaiah text under consideration seems to be referring to natural Israel, we suggest that God will choose people from among Israel who will fulfill the earthly duties of the Levitical priesthood (Ex. 19:6). It could be a reference to the "ancient worthies" themselves, or it may include those Jews who most quickly imbibe the spirit of the new dispensation. But the duties they perform will be the menial or earthly service of the spiritual kingdom, as symbolized by carrying the Ark; and teaching the people and

judging them, as described in Deuteronomy 17:9ff (a role apparently identical to that mentioned in Isaiah 1:26).

The Levitical priesthood as an operating entity ended at the time of the destruction of the second temple in A.D. 70. But the incoming kingdom will have need for those servants whose roles in teaching and service (not sin atonement) were prefigured by the Levitical priests.

Weaknesses of this view: (1) some manuscripts, such as the Septuagint and Vulgate, add the word "and" in this verse. (2) I know of no precedent for the reintroduction of the Levitical concept after it has been supplanted by the anti-type.

Richard Kindig

News and Views

Letters from Readers

Editor's note: the following letter was forwarded to us and we print it here because of the interest in following the witness of the truth in other lands. We do not know the date of the writing.

I would like to share some of my experiences on how I found the truth. I was raised as a Catholic and as a child I was distressed to see a lack of honesty among my family. As a result I wanted to become a nun, which made my mother very unhappy. In spite of this I became a nun and for a year I was happy there. I had a strong desire to have my own Bible but it was difficult to get. I prayed for help from the Lord. The Lord heard my prayer and one day two Jehovah's Witnesses came into the church and began talking about God. After their visit I saw a Bible they left on the chair and I hid it and began reading it every night, while others slept. They were surprised I knew so much, and then they found out that I had a Bible. They told me to throw it away, but I did not. I realized that I could serve God without closing myself in the monastery. Then they penalized me by making me lay down on a cold floor for many hours which caused much suffering. I decided to leave the monastery. I wrote to the Bishop and he turned me down. Then I wrote to Pope John Paul II. He was not in favor of my request but said they could not keep me against my will. This was a hard experience for me.

When I returned home my mother would not allow me to stay. It was December and very cold and snowing. What was I to do? I wandered around the city and begged for bread for my hunger. I became very weak and fainted and then found myself in the hospital. After a couple of days my mother came to visit me. She took me home and my life was more normal. On Sunday I went to the church and the priest made me leave the church. From that time on the people would have nothing to do with me. I prayed for guidance and soon after this I met a brother from Bialogard. At first we began to correspond and later he invited me to the meeting. The brother that invited me came with his nephew who became my husband. I began to attend more often and realized that this was what I was looking for. After attending meetings for two years I consecrated and my husband consecrated two years later. The Lord blessed us and we are happy to understand His plan. I am very grateful to the Lord for his great favor.

*-Malgorzata Sieniuc, Poland
(translated from Polish)*

Often when reading an article one feels so blessed by it that he must recognize it to the giver. Of course the true giver is our Lord and all thanks are due to Him, and that we are privileged to easily do. Nevertheless his "agents" or "tools" play a part in it all and it is in recognizing that fact that we often become careless. It involves some effort on our part to do so, and cares pressing round we "put it off" for the time being. That of course often proves fatal. The blessing of the article read dulls off, perhaps by something else equally

helpful that comes to our reading attention. But it so happens events have occurred that caused me to read most of the September/October number the second time, and it is good that I tell you so and briefly mention my reaction. The *Laying on of Hands* is very helpful and culminates in good advice for the last paragraph. The two articles, *The Resurrection of the Dead*-(one internally altered to *Eternal judgment*) are very important doctrines in a most helpful way and point out that the majority of mankind do not enjoy resurrection to a heavenly inheritance, but come back here to earth. The next number "November/December" contributed further to truth along this line. Further to Sept/Oct-Present Truth is fine as also is *Hygienic Doctrine*. Thank you for all this ministry. There is nothing in it all that is really new, but like Peter (2 Peter 1:12, 13) it is good ministry to be reminded of it all.

W.A. Smith, England

Living here (in Israel) we are permitted certain privileges such as demonstrating daily our faith in God's great Plan of the Ages to those of our acquaintance who question, ponder and fear the things coming upon them. Granted, this is not on a large scale, but we are grateful for the opportunities nonetheless. Bro. Jack often speculated upon the opening up of the land to the borders promised (Jer 50:19; Ex 23:30-31) and he felt that either their destruction or their expulsion from the land would result for those "strangers" whose iniquity would "come to the full." Cleansing of the land and driving out the enemy will occur even as Israel herself endures chastisement from the Lord for her infidelities. And perhaps Jesus will require that he be alone with his brethren as did Joseph (as the type) in Gen. 45.1, when he reveals himself. We know that there are yet features of the plan that must be executed, but have no doubt that they are taking shape daily, and that time is short for those desirous of being of the bride class. These "last days," more than at any other time in history, require that we strive to cultivate all the graces of the Spirit so as to be more than overcomers. We are yet in the enemy's country and we are surrounded by many subtle and powerful foes. Personally, we trust that the Lord, who brought us to Israel, will continue to overrule and provide for us in all ways that will benefit the New Creature. Chapters 35 and 36 of Ezekiel are promises yet to be fulfilled, but they prompt in us a deep love and reverence for our God and for his precious son. May the Lord continue to bless your service to Him.

-Connie Campbell, Israel

Witnessing Ideas

Editor's note: With the last issue we commenced a section presenting the various witness activities of brethren around the world. If you have unique ways of presenting God's plan for man to others, we would like to hear of them. If they are of general application, we will recognize and print them here. Anyone wishing information on any of the activities listed may write to the News and Views editor.

The following four activities are suggested by those of the Jackson, Michigan Bible Students:

1. The brethren tract with the magazine edition of *The Divine Plan of the Ages*. It is as economical as a small tract and presents the entire plan of God for about 50 cents per copy.
2. Many waiting rooms have Bibles in them. The brethren place a truth tract in the Bible so that those who read the Bible will see it and may be interested.
3. Reading material is sought by many using public rest rooms. The brethren place tracts in obvious places in the public rest rooms.
4. Leave a tract with the tip in a restaurant.

Additionally, the brethren in Jackson publish a periodic one-page newsletter which asks a provocative question, provides a brief comment, and offers a free booklet. The newsletter questions asked so far in 1996 have been, *Why Are You a Christian?*; *Church Union* offering the booklet *Church Union and the Antichrist*; *Is There a Way Out?* offering the booklet *God and Reason*.

Israel

The Swiss banking industry, legendary for its secrecy, has bowed to pressure from world Jewish organizations to establish a joint independent commission to search for funds of Holocaust victims that may have lain dormant for over half a century. Half of the members would be nominated by the Swiss Bankers Association and half by the World Jewish Restitution Organization. Mr. Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress suggested "several billion" dollars may be at stake.

-Financial Times 4/24/96

Israel has come under UN sanction in a report which questioned whether the bombardment of a UN base in Lebanon in April was an accident. Ehud Barak, Israeli foreign minister, called the conclusions "absurd." The UN scorned Israel's explanation that the bombing was the result of a wrong label on a map. The US has backed Israel's claim of accidental bombing, but the Arab states have protested. Syria called for Israeli leaders to be put on trial as war criminals, and has attacked the US for supporting Israel in trying to suppress the report. Damascus also accused the US and Israel of obstructing the work of ceasefire.

-Financial Times, 5/9/96

Palestinian leaders have criticized Israel for adding conditions to the withdrawal from Hebron. The third and final stage of Israeli-Palestinian political negotiations envisioned the two sides formally ending hostility and seeking a final peace. The final settlement talks are to tackle the most sensitive issues dividing the two sides, including the millions of Palestinian refugees still living abroad, the future of Jerusalem and the shape and organization of a future Palestinian country. However, the entire process is contingent on the outcome of the Israeli election in

-New York Times, 5/4/96

Iran

Iran has been creeping back onto the world's worry lists. For several years now, Europe has argued that isolating Iran's mullahs is tantamount to, in French President Jacques Chirac's words, cornering a cat. Iran has recently been mixing terror with trade. Iranian news services hailed the recent suicide-bombings in Israel as "divine retribution." Iran has kept a firm position of calling terrorists freedom fighters. German intelligence officials have amassed a dossier detailing how the Iranian Embassy in Bonn has helped to mastermind terrorist attacks through Europe. Germany has solid proof that the Iranian Ministry of Information and Security, headed by Ali Fallahian, has set up terrorist operations in Europe.

-Wall Street Journal, 4/28/96

The Tehran regimes' influence on and financing of Hizbollah, the Shia fundamentalist militia fighting Israeli occupation of south Lebanon has made Iran a participant in the current negotiations to get a ceasefire between Israel and Hizbollah. Iran will be able to wield influence in discussion of the longer-term security arrangements because of its influence on Hizbollah.

-Financial Times, 4/22/96

Russia

Spiritual and secular power have always been closely intertwined in Russia and the issue of religion is again emerging as a theme in the presidential elections of 1996. Last Sunday Gennady Zyuganov, the Communist party's presidential candidate, toured the Sergiev Posad monastery, the Orthodox church's holiest site and talked with religious leaders for four hours. He emphasized his spiritual beliefs, arguing that the communist ethic has a 2,000 year history stretching back to Jesus Christ. In its 74-year reign the Communist party did its best to eradicate religion in Russia, killing thousands of priests and closing all but 21 of the 1,000 monasteries that dotted the country before the 1917 revolution. Josef Stalin blew up the original Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, built in the nineteenth century, to celebrate Russia's defeat of Napoleon. It would be an extraordinary turn of the historical wheel if a communist President Gennady Zyuganov were to preside over the ceremonies celebrating the completion of the cathedral in September 1997.

-Financial Times 4/14/96

Russian and U.S. nuclear weapons scientists recently launched a fascinating collaborative project aimed at solving the problem of creating cheap fusion using a new technique drastically different from the past. The new approach involves the use of a modest amount of high explosives to convert chemical energy into an extremely intense electrical pulse. This is harnessed to produce a powerful magnetic field that is used to produce a thermonuclear explosion. What has successfully been tested so far has all the earmarks of a pure-fusion neutron bomb. It would only take one explosion from a bomb such as this, manufactured for about \$250,000, near the White house to effectively wipe out the entire administration and render most of Washington's electronic equipment inoperable.

-Wall Street Journal, 5/15 Si96

Christendom

Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia delivered an ardent defense of religious beliefs against the assaults of secular society. He proclaimed that Christians must proclaim their belief in miracles and ignore the scorn of the worldly wise. Scalia said the modern world dismisses Christians as fools for holding to their traditional beliefs. Scalia spoke to a private Southern Baptist institution. In his legal opinions, Scalia has vigorously advocated a lower wall of separation between church and state. He favors clergy-led prayer at public school graduations and voted for state funding of some religiously affiliated programs in public schools.

-Washington Post 4/10/96

The war in Angola is ending, but the economic conditions are so poor that the people are in danger of dying. A two-week cut in all water supplies was the latest inconvenience in the long-suffering capital of Luanda. The problem has been traced to a gang that stole metal supports from electricity pylons. The irons had been used to build windows and doors for homes. The water taps of the people have been dry for more than 15 days. A diplomat said "Angola has among the worst socio-economic indicators not just in Africa, but in the world." If Angola's slide gets any steeper there is a risk of political upheaval again. "The party is going to have to deliver something more than peace and security. To do nothing is akin to suicide."

-Financial Times, 4/2/96

Four years after the Earth Summit which propelled the environment to the top of the world concerns, other issues have begun crowding out the environment. Rich and poor countries alike worry about unemployment and economic decline. Several speakers at this year's summit called attention to the rapidly changing patterns of transportation and the problems these are creating between the haves and the have-nots: the explosion in car ownership in some regions of the world, unmanageable traffic and increased pollution.

-New York Times, 5/5/96

IMAGINE . . . THE LOVE OF GOD

Imagine finding something so wonderful, so magnificent, that to hold it and understand it brought the greatest joy you had ever known. Imagine your mind being allowed to hope; imagine the darkness and confusion that you did not even know you had start to clear, burning off like the mist or blowing away like pale smoke.

Then try to remember the depths of remorse you felt when someone you loved had died; try to recapture that empty, aching pain that for so long you had kept hidden, sealed away-the things you wished you had said, the uncertainty of their relationship to God, the nagging doubt as to where they are now.

Now let the light of understanding illuminate the memory of that loved one. Bring their face into focus, with the background of God's love flowing all around, swirling about them, bringing them back to you, knowing in your heart for the first time the plan-the plan of God of blessing all the families of the earth; not burning them, not somehow showing love to the few while torturing the many. Abandon all your struggles, your vain reasoning, your striving and twisting to somehow harmonize love with Hell. Know now that you can really, safely, let all of this go.

Imagine what it would be like to be free, really free, from the doctrine of eternal torment; of knowing beyond the shadow of a doubt that God will restore all of mankind who have ever lived-all who ever drew the breath of life, even the unborn babies who never saw the outside of their mother's womb. And what's more, all of this, every single promise and

hope, is firmly embedded in the Bible, God's Holy Word. No matter how the bright promises have been twisted, misshaped, stretched, and abused until they became a club to hold over the people, you now know what almost nobody else in the world knows -that soon all of the families of the earth will begin to be reunited in a perfect world, with eternity stretching before them like the unending universe.

Feel that mind-numbing overpowering weight of fear start to break-the pieces of it chunk off, the error of the immortal soul crash! The discovery that there is no concept of torment in the Old Testament-another crack appeals. How good it feels to peel away this clinging, cloying doctrine-to shed it as an old coat that has grown oppressive, that you never wanted to buy in the first place. Rapidly now, the passages of scripture that have been used to support this blasphemy come into clear focus, their real meaning polished and held up to the light of God's word-and they shine pure!

Then imagine that no one wants this wonderful peace. How can it be? No one wants to listen to you. Those closest to you, those who need this the most, draw away in fear. They have been beaten down for so long, like prisoners who have grown accustomed to being bound, that when the key is shown to them and all they have to do is reach out and take it, they shrink back to the old familiar confines of their creed jail, eyes crazed with wild imaginings, the terrible results of thousands of sermons on hell-the heart-wrenching emotional altar calls where the evangelist brings out his most lurid descriptions of the pit complete with remorse (too late) as they look across the gulf and see the rapture and joy of the Elect, all of them oblivious to your blinding agony. And for all eternity you can beg, you can plead, you can curse, but your raging thirst will drive you mad a million times. And when you come back into a moment of lucidity, the awfulness of your fate will overwhelm you again and your fragile mind will snap once again, to repeat the insane cycle. And this is God's justice, says the preacher, dripping sweat and wiping his brow, scanning the pew for those who seem to be hesitating, trembling maybe-("let's sing just one more verse of Just As I Am, and if nobody comes we will change the order of the service").

Now imagine holding that loved one, cradling their head in your lap, as you stroke the fevered brow; whispering to them that it is all over, the nightmare is over, that they can wake up now, and there are a lot of folks waiting to see them. The air is cool, the sun is shining, and there is that brother that they thought would surely be in hell, walking over to them with a grin the size of Texas. You can release them now, and watch them meld into the throng because you know that they know now, they understand now for the first time, that God really is love.

Editor's Note: Bro. Mark Tribble of Starksville, Mississippi, has recently become convinced that the traditional concept of a burning hell is not taught in the Bible. This recent unsolicited testimony reflects the emotional feelings which accompanied this discovery.

Book Review

Reflections on Violence, by John Keane, 200 pages.

Bible Students have generally believed that period of anarchy (no government rule) would precede the inauguration of God's kingdom and the blessing of all the earth. The second chapter of Joel has generally been cited as the beginning of the forces that collect in the earth to display dissatisfaction and disrupt the social and economic forces of the world. One might also interpret that the "army" of global warriors, the common people, become unhappy with governments' inability to provide security and safety for their constituents. In this book Keane lends some credence to this viewpoint. He chronicles in gruesome detail the past century of violence. The horror is as sickening today as half a century ago. From Hitler to mass executions of Bosnian Moslems; from gulags to first-hand accounts of the slaughter of civilians like animals in Rwanda. "The place was red. Blood flowing like water. I could see babies suckling the breasts of their dead mothers" Keane shows the presence of violence everywhere, from families to nations to inter-continental superpower rivalries. The book is not easy to read. It is dense and difficult. However, the words give way to grapple with one of the greatest of human predicaments-how to curb natural impulses to violence, incivility and destruction. The book is worth noting for those who believe that man's inhumanity to man will continue at record pace until God says it is enough.