

# The Middle East. Its History and Future

The **Middle East** is a historical and political region of Afro-Eurasia with no clear boundaries. The term "Middle East" was popularized around 1900 in Britain; it has a loose definition traditionally encompassing countries or regions in Western Asia and parts of North Africa. The corresponding adjective to Middle East is Middle-Eastern and the derived noun is Middle-Easterner. Right at the heart of the Middle East, at the very centre of the earth, is Israel, the Land of the Bible.

The history of the Middle East dates back to ancient times, and throughout its history the Middle East has been a major center of world affairs. The Middle East is also the geographic origin of three of the world's great religions - Christianity, Islam, Judaism. The Middle East generally has an arid and hot climate, with several major rivers providing for irrigation to support agriculture in limited areas. Many countries located around the Persian Gulf have large quantities of crude oil. In modern times, the Middle East remains a strategically, economically, politically, culturally, and religiously sensitive region.

Most Christians today are deeply engrossed in the "here and now". The secular materialistic type of Gospel which is widely preached, is one concerning the individual person, their present salvation especially as it relates to their present material circumstances, well being and prosperity. Little thought or emphasis is directed towards the future and the earthly establishment of God's glorious Kingdom. This is something that must definitely change lest the manifestation of that Kingdom should take us unawares.

## **Why should Christians be interested in the Middle East?**

The creation of mankind and its early history happened there.

It is the land of the Bible. All the prophets lived there throughout Israel's history.

The birthplace of three major religions. Life of Abraham unfolded there.

The area in which Jesus spent His entire life including death and resurrection.

The area around which Bible prophecy revolves

The land to which Messiah will return.

The land from which the whole world will be governed.

**Bible prophecy is anchored in the Middle East and we need to understand what is prophesied to yet happen there. Whether you realize it or not, or understand it or not, events unfolding there are destined to affect the lives of every person on earth. It is imperative that every Christian should think deeply about this area of our world upon which the future destiny of all nations will unfold.**

Let me ask you a question. Where were you on Sept. 11, 2001? If you're like most people, the horrifying images and emotions of that day are permanently etched into your mind. Who can forget the sight of a giant airliner slamming into the World Trade Center, the trapped men and women plunging to their deaths, the collapse of the towers and the cloud of pulverized concrete and debris that covered Manhattan?

The awful events of that day changed our modern world forever. At the beginning of a new century, it heralded a new age of mass terrorism directed at civilians. America's sense of security—that it could never happen on its shores—was forever shattered. Other nations quickly realized that similar catastrophes could strike their cities. Ever since, terrorism has become a very real threat for countless millions around the globe. It's possible effect on the destiny of all mankind occupies the thoughts of millions of people.

That day's horror also catapulted the Middle East to the forefront on news programs around the world. Suddenly, what was happening thousands of miles away could affect people regardless of where they lived. A region that, to many, had seemed irrelevant now became the focus of attention as nations everywhere awakened to the reality of how the Middle East impacts us all.

The reality quickly came home that problems thousands of miles away can have a greater impact on us than decisions made by our own local or national governments. The fall of the Twin Towers had an immediate effect on the American economy far greater than any decision made on nearby Wall Street, with an estimated \$100 billion loss in direct damages and \$2 trillion in short-term stock market losses.

### **The Middle East affects us all**

But Sept. 11 was not the start of terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism or conflict in the Middle East. It is part of a historic continuum. It was simply the date on which

the accumulated problems of thousands of years finally reached America's shores.

Considering how much the Middle East now dominates the news, it's hard to believe that at the beginning of the last century, the Middle East "was of only marginal concern" to the Western world. The region had become a political backwater. "Few Europeans of Churchill's generation knew or cared what went on in the languid empires of the Ottoman Sultan or the Persian Shah".

A century later, however, nations all around the world are all vitally affected by what happens in this volatile region. The global economy runs on oil, most of which lies under the sand of Middle Eastern deserts. Oil is the lifeblood of Western economies and affluence, and a plentiful and cheap supply is essential to continued Western prosperity. This dependence on oil has fundamentally altered the Western nations' relationship with the region, transforming it into a strategically vital part of the world.

A second fundamental change has taken place in the Middle East in the last 100 years—the creation of many new nations, which has vastly complicated the politics of the area. The establishment of one country in particular has led to a cycle of violence and upheaval that is seemingly without end. Yet, surprisingly, the Bible prophesied the establishment of this nation thousands of years ago and predicted the growing conflict that would follow its rebirth.

### **A Peace To End All Peace**

World War I was often called "the war to end all wars." At the close of the peace conference following the worst conflict in history, an officer who served with the British Army in Palestine, prophetically declared, "After 'the war to end all war' they seem to have been pretty successful in Paris at making a 'Peace to end all Peace'"

Before World War I the Middle East was dominated by the Ottoman Empire, the empire of the Turks who ruled over all the lands whose names are now so familiar to us. The countries that are now Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, Israel and others were all ruled by a declining empire that had once also presided over vast lands in both North Africa and southeastern Europe. Within this empire different peoples lived in relative harmony. About 40 percent of the people were Turks and 40 percent Arabs, with the remainder a mixture of

different ethnic groups—Armenians and Jews being the most numerous of these.

### **The Biblical Origins of the Arab Peoples**

**Why is there so much unrest in the Middle East? Why is there constant strife between the Israelis and Palestinians? The answers to these questions didn't begin with the formation of the state of Israel in 1948. The history of these conflicts goes back 4,000 years and is recorded in a place many people would never think to look—the Bible!**

Until recently many Westerners envisioned the Middle East as an exotic, far-away mixture of the ancient past and the modern world. This area of conflict between Arab and Jew is the land of the Bible, of Moses and Jesus, of the prophets bringing messages of God's wrath and apostles proclaiming God's love.

The United States and Australia have been politically, economically and sometimes militarily involved in the Middle East for decades. The United States and Australia supported the United Nations' creation of the state of Israel in 1948, and U.S. dollars and military hardware has enabled Israel to win its numerous wars with Arab neighbors.

### **The Biblical Origins Of Middle East Conflict**

The World Trade Center attacks raised our consciousness of the age-old conflicts of the Middle East. Westerners are still trying to understand the reasons for the hatred between Jew and Arab and why it has spilled over into the Western world.

For students of biblical prophecy these events aren't a surprise. The Middle East is the focal point of biblical prophecy. Jerusalem is where Jesus the Messiah delivered the gospel of the Kingdom of God and it is where He promises to return to set up that Kingdom. The Bible also contains a great deal of information concerning the roots of the bad blood between Israeli and Arab. The Arab peoples comprise numerous clans and tribes. Many historians trace the peoples of the southern Arabian Peninsula to Joktan,\* who is mentioned in the Bible.

\*JOKTAN Second named of the two sons of Eber, a descendant of Shem. His brother was Peleg <Gen. 10:25-26,29; 1 Chr. 1:19-20,23>.

Other Arab peoples are descendants of Abraham's nephew Lot, who fled Sodom and the sons of Keturah. (Genesis 25:1-4) But to really understand the history of the Arab peoples, we must carefully study the life of Abraham.

## **Abraham and Sarah**

We begin our search almost 4,000 years ago in the city of Ur, a thriving metropolis on the eastern curve of the Fertile Crescent. It was in this crescent-shaped strip stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Egyptian Nile that the first great civilizations appeared. It was in Ur that the Creator appeared to a man named Abram who would become a central figure in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. God's relationship with Abram starts in Genesis 12:1-3: "Now the LORD had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation...'"

Genesis 16 contains the fascinating, but ultimately tragic story of Abram's and Sarai's attempt to bring about God's promise through human means. Since it seemed that it was physically impossible for Sarai to bear children, she gave an Egyptian servant girl named Hagar to Abram as a surrogate mother. The child of this union was named Ishmael which means God (El) shall hear him. For 13 years Ishmael was probably told that he was the son of promise, the recipient of God's promises to Abram.

God appeared again to Abram as we read in Genesis 17:1-2: "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.'"

God made an amazing promise to Abraham, -that his descendants would be a special people for God's purposes for all generations. God previously told Abraham that in him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. The promise also included the land of Canaan (Genesis 17:8).

Genesis 17:8 I am also giving this land where you are living—all of Canaan—to you and your descendants as your permanent possession. And I will be your God."  
9 God also said to Abraham, "You and your descendants in generations to come are to be faithful to my promise.

Canaan is the geographically diverse strip of land running along the eastern Mediterranean Sea that is the center of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict today. God reestablished His covenant with Abraham, but there was another stipulation that would come as a shock to this man to whom God had promised so much.

"Then God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife...I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her'" (Genesis 17:15-16).

God's statements seemed incredible. Not only had Sarah been barren all her life, but she was now well past normal child-bearing age. What God was promising could only happen through divine intervention. Besides, Abraham already had a son, whom he loved dearly. In Genesis 17:18 Abraham says to God, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!"

Abraham believed for many years that Ishmael was the son of promise, but God informed him that the Sovereign Lord of history had other plans. It was always God's plan for the son of promise to come from Abraham and Sarah. The use of Hagar as a surrogate was of their devising, not God's.

What an important lesson. How many times do we proceed with our own ideas of God's will, while in reality He has totally different plans? Abraham and Sarah tried to fulfill God's promise by human means on a human timetable. What happened next shaped the history of many generations.

### **Ishmael's fate**

God had promised a son to Abraham through his wife Sarah, but what about Ishmael? Abraham asked God if Ishmael could be the son of promise. God's answer is recorded in

Genesis 17:19-20. *"Then God said: 'No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.'"*

As God promised, Sarah became pregnant and gave birth to Isaac. The hurt and anger of the teenage Ishmael towards this half brother Isaac led Abraham to send him and his mother Hagar into the wilderness. The young man, told since childhood that he was the son of promise, found himself an outcast from his father. This set the stage for generations of strife between him and Abraham's other son, Isaac. Ishmael went on to become the father of many Arab nations.

### **A New Generation Of Strife**

The biblical story doesn't end with Ishmael and Isaac. One generation later there was further competition between the sons of Isaac, Jacob and Esau. Genesis records how the eldest, Esau, sold his birthright to his twin Jacob.

In Genesis 27 we find the oft-told story of how, when Isaac was old and blind, he was tricked by Jacob into giving him the birthright blessing. It would be through Jacob's lineage that God would fulfill His covenant with Abraham. God assured Jacob that this was His will, but Esau's hatred for what he perceived as a theft of his birthright drove him to plot Jacob's murder. Jacob fled for his life, living estranged from his family for many years.

The story of Esau and Jacob is predicated upon the principle of the elder son serving the younger.

*Gen 25:23 And the LORD said to her: "Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger." (NKJ)*

Two children are in her womb, the parents of two nations, differing in their dispositions and destinies. The one is to be stronger than the other. The order of nature is to be reversed in them; for the older will serve the younger. Their struggles in the womb are a prelude to their future history.

The descendants of Jacob would become known as the Israelites. Esau became the father of the people the Bible calls the Edomites. The relationship between these two peoples has at times been peaceful and at other times bordered on genocide.

### **The Arabs and Islam**

By A.D. 610 the Arab peoples of the Middle East were divided into numerous tribes. All the tribes were steeped in the various pagan practices of the Middle East. It was in that year, that Muhammad received the first in a series of what he proclaimed were divine revelations. These revelations eventually became the basis of the Muslim holy book-the Koran.

The Koran contains alternative stories of such biblical notables as Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Job, Jonah, Saul, David, Solomon, Mary and Jesus. Muhammad claimed that Islam was a return to the religion of Abraham while Judaism and Christianity were corruptions of this true religion. In Islam's interpretation of God's plan, Ishmael takes on the role of the son of promise.

The Koran presents radical differences from the Bible concerning God's interaction with mankind. These differences are most apparent in the Koran's explanation of the nature of Jesus Christ. Christians believe that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, the Messiah foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures, who would come to save humanity. While some in Judaism may accept the first century Jesus of Nazareth as a special rabbi, and Muslims accept Him as a great prophet, Christians ascribe to Jesus the remarkable status of divinity in a personal relationship with the Father. To many devout Muslims, this is polytheism.

Where Jews believe that Palestine was promised to them through God's covenant with Abraham and Isaac, and Muslims believe that Allah promised it to them through Abraham and Ishmael. European Christians of the Middle Ages believed that Palestine belonged to them because of God's fulfillment of His promise to Abraham in the person of Jesus. They claimed that God's promise to bless all nations through Abraham was a prophecy about Jesus.

In 1095 Christian Europe organized an army for a crusade to wrest Jerusalem from Turkish Muslims. After terrible fighting, Jerusalem fell to the Crusaders in 1099. The Muslims continued to battle for Palestine and a second crusade was launched in 1147. Finally, in 1291 the Muslims drove the Europeans from the region. Further crusades failed to recapture the city.

One of the saddest incidents in history took place with the Children's Crusade. Thousands of children from France and Germany began the difficult journey from Europe to Palestine to take Jerusalem. Many died from disease and starvation; the rest were captured and sold as slaves.

The area around Jerusalem remained in Muslim hands until the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I when it came under British jurisdiction. In 1948 the United Nations founded the modern state of Israel and hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Nazi concentration camps fled to their new home. Many Arabs felt betrayed by Europe and the United States. The last half of the 20th century experienced rocky relations between the Arab world and the West.

### **The Middle East in prophecy**

During the Jewish Babylonian captivity of the sixth century B.C., God revealed a historical outline of prophecy to a prophet named Daniel. In Daniel 2 the prophet records a vision concerning four great empires that would interact with the land of Palestine: the Babylonian, Persian, Greco-Macedonian and Roman. Later, God shows Daniel details concerning these empires. The first 14 verses of Daniel 8 chronicle Daniel's vision of a ram and a goat. Daniel writes of a two-horned ram attacked by a male goat, arriving from the west, with a large horn between his eyes.

There have been numerous attempts to explain these passages. An important rule of Bible study is to let the Bible interpret itself. In this same chapter an angel appears to Daniel and tells him the meaning of the vision. Daniel writes what the angel says in verses 19-22: "Look, I am making known to you what shall happen in the latter time of the indignation; for at the appointed time the end shall be. The ram which you saw, having the two horns-they are the kings of Media and Persia. And the male goat is the kingdom of Greece. The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king. As for the broken horn and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power."

This incredible prophetic passage concerns events that occurred in the centuries immediately after the time of Daniel. The Babylonian Empire of Daniel's day was overthrown by the Medo-Persian Empire. Centuries after Daniel received this vision, the Greeks, under Alexander the Great, would invade and conquer Persia. The "large horn" of the male goat is this "first king" of the Grecian Empire. At the height of his power Alexander suddenly died and his empire was divided among four generals, fulfilling the prophecies of Daniel 8.

But there's more, as we see in the very long prophecy of Daniel 11. By this time Babylon has been conquered by the Persians and Daniel now serves under the Medo-Persian king Darius. Daniel is once again visited by an angel from God who explains future events.

Notice Daniel 11:2-4: *"And now I will tell you the truth: Behold, three more kings will arise in Persia, and the fourth shall be far richer than them all; by his strength, and through his riches, he shall stir up all against the realm of Greece. Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. And when he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken up and divided toward the four winds of heaven, but not among his posterity nor according to his dominion with which he ruled; for his kingdom shall be uprooted, even for others besides these."*

After Daniel's time there would be numerous Persian kings, but these three would be prominent in the history of the empire. A fourth king would undertake a war with Greece. The Persian Empire would prosper, but it would eventually fall to a Grecian monarch whose kingdom would be divided into four parts.

It is important to understand that most biblical prophecy is in relationship to Jerusalem. Daniel 11:5-39 records prophecies concerning the "king of the South" and "king of the North." History shows that these prophecies were fulfilled in the generations of two Greek families, the Ptolemies (who ruled from Egypt as the kings of the South) and the Seleucids (who ruled from Syria as the kings of the North). These two families marched across Palestine in numerous wars for control of the Middle East until the Maccabees led the Jews to independence in the 160s B.C.

This brings us to an important part of the prophecy in Daniel 11:40-45: *"At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through. He shall also enter the Glorious Land, and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon."* He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape. He shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt; also the Libyans and Ethiopians shall follow at his heels. But news from the east and the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many. And he

shall plant the tents of his palace between the seas and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and no one will help him."

When does this invasion by Egypt and much of the Arab world, the king of the South, and the "Glorious Land" of Israel by the king of the North take place? In Revelation 11:1-2 the apostle John is inspired to write that at the time just before the return of the Messiah the "holy city," Jerusalem, will be occupied by outside forces for 42 months or three and a half years.

At the end of that three and a half years, the stage is set for the greatest battle in human history as armies of the prophesied "beast" power and hordes from the East gather in the Valley of Megiddo.

### **Watch!**

Some Islamic leaders claim that a descendant of Muhammad will come and unite the Muslim world in preparation for God's final judgment. Jews wait for the coming of the Messiah to restore their birthright. Many Christians await the return of Jesus as the Christ to rule from Jerusalem. The irony is that many Muslims, Jews and Christians won't recognize the Messiah when He does come to establish God's Kingdom.

We are to watch events in the Middle East, for this is the focal point of biblical prophecy.

It might have continued this way were it not for World War I. At the onset of war, it was not clear which side the Ottoman Empire would support. Both the British and the Germans courted the Turks. Finally the sultan opted to support the German Kaiser, a fatal decision that ultimately led to the end of the Ottoman Empire and the birth of many new nations—and wars seemingly without end. One of the nations that eventually came into being was the Jewish state of Israel, complicating the geopolitical situation in the region and destined to affect all nations on earth.

What few realize is this one crucial fact: After 1,900 years, the restoration of a Jewish homeland in the Middle East was necessary to fulfill ancient prophecies you can find in the Bible. This region, once a "political backwater" of little or no interest to the Western powers, is destined to become the center of the final

global crisis that will usher in cataclysmic events leading humanity to the brink of extinction—and ultimately change our world forever.

*Matt 24:22 "And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened. (NKJ)*

In the following pages you'll learn the astounding story of the past, present and future of this crucial region that was laid out thousands of years ago—the story of the Middle East in Bible prophecy.

### **The Middle East: Worlds in Collision**

You need to understand what is prophesied to yet happen in the Middle East. Whether you realize it or not, or understand it or not, events there are destined to affect the lives of every person on earth.

Why does the Middle East dominate the headlines so often? One obvious answer is oil, the lifeblood of modern economies. Without oil to run factories, heat homes, fuel transportation and provide energy and raw materials for thousands of uses, the economies of many nations would grind to a halt. The crucial importance of oil alone ensures that the Middle East will remain in the headlines for years.

But there's more that keeps the Middle East in the news. It is the birthplace of the world's three great monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Too often it has not been just their birthplace, but their battlefield, with adherents warring against each other for control of territory they consider holy.

Nowhere are these conflicts more obvious than in Israel, and specifically in Jerusalem. If you've never been to Jerusalem, it's hard to imagine how so much history, religion and culture can collide and stand in literal heaps. Nowhere is this more evident than at the Temple Mount, flash point for many a conflict over the centuries.

The site first came to the attention of Israel's King David, who bought a threshing floor and built an altar on it, intending it for the site of the temple (1 Chronicles 21-22).

*1 Chronicles 21:18 The LORD's Messenger told Gad to tell David to go and set up an altar for the LORD at Ornan the Jebusite's threshing floor.*

*19 David went as Gad had told him in the LORD's name.*

*20 Now, Ornan had turned around and seen the Messenger. Ornan's four sons who were with him hid, but Ornan kept on threshing the wheat.*

*21 When David arrived, Ornan looked up and saw him. So he left the threshing floor and bowed down with his face touching the ground in front of David.*

*22 David said to Ornan, "Let me have the land this threshing floor is on. I'll build an altar for the LORD on it. Sell it to me for the full price. Then the plague on the people will stop."*

*23 Ornan said to David, "Take it, Your Majesty, and do whatever you think is right. I'll give you oxen for the burnt offering, threshers for firewood, and wheat for the grain offering. I'll give you everything."*

*24 "No," King David told Ornan, "I insist on buying it for the full price. I won't take what is yours for the LORD and offer burnt sacrifices that cost me nothing."*

*25 So David gave Ornan 15 pounds of gold for that place.*

*26 David built an altar for the LORD there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. He called on the LORD, and the LORD answered him by {sending} fire from heaven on the altar for burnt offerings.*

The Temple Mount is so named because it is the location of the temple built by David's son Solomon (destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.) and its replacement built by Zerubbabel and later enlarged by Herod the Great (ultimately razed by the Roman general Titus in A.D. 70).

Here Jesus of Nazareth worshiped, taught and confronted the money changers, scribes, Pharisees and other religious authorities. After His death and resurrection, Christianity was born in the temple's shadow. His followers continued to worship and teach there for several more decades until the legions of Rome crushed a Jewish rebellion and carted away most of the Jewish population they hadn't killed. A later Jewish rebellion, in 132-135, led to a Roman decree that no Jew was to set foot in Jerusalem, on pain of death.

Centuries later, in 638, Muslim Arabs took the city. In 691 Muslims built the Dome of the Rock on that same Temple Mount, enclosing the spot from which, Muslims believe, Muhammad ascended to heaven. Today Muslims consider it the third-holiest site in Islam, after Mecca, where Muhammad was born, and Medina, where he found refuge and died.

Several more centuries passed before the Crusaders captured Jerusalem, slaughtered Muslim and Jew alike and converted the Dome of the Rock into a church. Their hold on the city lasted less than a century before Muslims recaptured it. Jerusalem changed hands three more times before Muslims took control of the city and held it from 1244 until 1917, when the Ottoman Empire lost its hold in World War I and the city came under British administration.

In 1948 the modern state of Israel was born, and in the 1967 war the Israelis gained control of all of Jerusalem, though leaving the Temple Mount under Islamic authority.

Today one can watch Muslims praying at the Dome of the Rock atop the Temple Mount, Jews praying at the Western Wall barely a stone's throw below and Christians praying along the Via Dolorosa and at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher a few hundred yards to the north and west. And all around one sees the rubble of the centuries of conflict over this holy place.

Who will write the next chapter in the history of this troubled city? Believe it or not, the final chapters are already written—prophesied centuries ago in the pages of the Bible. Ominously, they mesh remarkably well with today's headlines. In the following pages we provide you with an overview of the past and the headlines of tomorrow.

### **The Sons of Abraham**

It's impossible to understand the present Middle East without a knowledge of the three great religions that emanate from the area—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These three faiths all trace their spiritual roots back to the same individual, Abraham. The towering historical figures behind these three religions—Moses, Jesus Christ and Muhammad—were all direct descendants of Abraham.

Abraham, born in the Mesopotamian city of Ur, was the son of Terah, a descendant of Shem, a son of Noah. Born almost 4,000 years ago, Abraham's impact on the Middle East is still with us to this day. As a descendant of Noah's son Shem, Abraham and his descendants were a Semitic people. In Genesis 11 we see that Shem's great-grandson Eber (verse 14-16) was a direct ancestor of Abraham, and it is from Eber that the term Hebrew comes.

Called "the father of the faithful" (compare Romans 4:11),

Romans 4:11 *Abraham's faith was regarded as God's approval while he was still uncircumcised. The mark of circumcision is the seal of that approval. Therefore, he is the father of every believer who is not circumcised, and their faith, too, is regarded as God's approval of them.*

Abraham obeyed God's instruction to leave his native Ur and move to Haran. As Stephen, the devout first martyr of the Christian era, put it: "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you'" (Acts 7:2-3).

Acts 7:2, 3. *Stephen answered, "Brothers and fathers, listen to me. The God who reveals his glory appeared to our ancestor Abraham in Mesopotamia. This happened before Abraham lived in Haran.*

*<sup>3</sup> God told him, 'Leave your land and your relatives. Go to the land that I will show you.'*

Both Ur and Haran were cities in Mesopotamia, which refers to the area between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. Haran was a natural stopping-off point for Abraham and Sarah, who were about to be sent by God to a new land, a significant turning point in the history of the region.

We read of this move in Genesis 12:1-4, following the death of Abraham's father, Terah.

Genesis 12:1-3. *The LORD said to Abram, "Leave your land, your relatives, and your father's home. Go to the land that I will show you.*

*<sup>2</sup> I will make you a great nation, I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.*

*<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you, I will curse. Through you every family on earth will be blessed."*

The LORD'S Second Promise to Abram

Genesis 12:4 *So Abram left, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran.*

Again, notice his example of unquestioning obedience: "Now the LORD had said to Abram [this being his original name, which was later expanded to Abraham]: 'Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's

house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing ...' So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him ..." Hebrews 11:8 adds: "And he went out, not knowing where he was going."

God was working with Abraham to establish him and his descendants in the land of Canaan (later called the Promised Land and often referred to as the Holy Land). At the crossroads of Asia, Africa and Europe, this area was ideal for God's chosen people, who were to be an example to the rest of the world (Deuteronomy 4:5-8).

*Deuteronomy 4:5-8 I have taught you laws and rules as the LORD my God commanded me. You must obey them when you've entered the land and taken possession of it.*

*<sup>6</sup> Faithfully obey these laws. This will show the people of the world your wisdom and insight. When they hear about all these laws, they will say, "What wise and insightful people there are in this great nation!"*

*<sup>7</sup> What great nation ever had their gods as near to them as the LORD our God is near to us whenever we pray to him?*

*<sup>8</sup> Or what other great nation has such fair laws and rules as all these teachings I am giving you today?*

On arriving in the new land, God promised Abraham that He would give the land to his descendants (Genesis 12:7).

*Genesis 12:7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I'm going to give this land to your descendants." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.*

*Genesis 13: 14 After Lot left, the LORD said to Abram, "Look north, south, east, and west of where you are.*

*<sup>15</sup> I will give all the land you see to you and to your descendants for an indefinite (unending) period of time.*

*<sup>16</sup> I will also give you as many descendants as the dust of the earth. If anyone could count the dust of the earth, then he could also count your descendants.*

*<sup>17</sup> Go! Walk back and forth across the entire land because I will give it to you."*

Significantly, God later changed Abram's name to Abraham (Genesis 17:5). His earlier name meant "high (exalted) father." God renamed him "father of a

multitude," saying, "I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make (many) nations of you, and kings shall come from you" (verse 6).

At the time these prophecies must have seemed ironic to Abraham, for his wife Sarah was barren. Her infertility was to be very significant in the development of the modern Middle East.

God promised Abraham in Genesis 15:4 that he would have an heir: "one who will come from your own body." Impatient, Sarah told Abraham to take her Egyptian handmaid Hagar and to produce a child by her. This took place "after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan" (Genesis 16:1-3).

*Genesis 16:1-3 Sarai, Abram's wife, was not able to have children. She owned an Egyptian slave named Hagar.*

*<sup>2</sup> So Sarai said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Why don't you sleep with my slave? Maybe I can build a family through her." Abram agreed with Sarai.*

*<sup>3</sup> After Abram had lived in Canaan for ten years, Abram's wife Sarai took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife.*

### **Abraham's First Son Is Born**

*"So he (Abraham) went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes" (Genesis 16:4). The relationship between Sarah and Hagar quickly deteriorated and Hagar fled.*

But a divine message was given to Hagar, telling her to return to Sarah. It also reassured her that her son would have many descendants—but descendants with traits that would be evident throughout their history:

*"I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count ... You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael ['God hears'], for the LORD has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers" (verses 10-12, New International Version).*

This description of Hagar's descendants is significant because many of today's Arabs are Ishmaelites—descendants of this same Ishmael, whose father was Abraham. Muhammad, the founder and prophet of Islam, was descended from Kedar, one of the 12 sons of Ishmael (Ismail in Arabic). Today 22 nations in the Middle East and North Africa are Arabic nations, most of whose people are adherents of Islam. An additional 35 countries are members of the Islamic Conference, most of them with Islamic governments, but whose people are of different descent.

Even before Ishmael's descendants arrived in the area, the term Arab was used to denote the peoples of the Arabian peninsula. With the spread of Islam, Arabs and the Arabic language today encompass a vast region.

The divinely prophetic words spoken to Hagar are still of great significance today. The prophecy that Ishmael "will be a wild donkey of a man" is not meant as an insult. The wild donkey was the aristocrat of the wild beasts of the desert, the preferred prey of hunters. The prophecy is a reference to how Ishmael's descendants would emulate the lifestyle of the wild donkey, leading a free and noble existence in the desert.

"His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand against him" similarly refers to this independent lifestyle. Ishmael's descendants have always resisted foreign domination. "He will live in hostility towards all his brothers" is a reference to the enmity that has historically existed among the Arabs and between the Arabs and the other sons of Abraham.

### **Abraham's Second Son**

Fourteen years after the birth of Ishmael, God blessed Abraham with another son, this time by his wife Sarah. He told them to name their son Isaac (meaning "laughter" for the incredulous reaction they had when told they would have a son at their advanced age as well as the joy that he would later bring to his parents, Genesis 17:17, 19; 18:10-15; 21:5-6). Isaac in turn fathered Jacob, also named Israel, the father of the Israelites. Ishmael's and Isaac's descendants are therefore cousins.

"So the child [Isaac] grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing. Therefore she said to

Abraham, 'Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac'" (Genesis 21:8-10).

This displeased Abraham, who had grown to love Ishmael. "But God said to Abraham, '... Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called" (verse 12). God further reassured Abraham: "Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman [Ishmael], because he is your seed" (verse 13). "So God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness ..." (verse 20).

It cannot be said that Ishmael hated Isaac. But after 14 years as an only child, Isaac's arrival fundamentally changed Ishmael's relationship with his father Abraham. Afterward, Ishmael felt envy and rivalry toward his half-brother, feelings that tribally have survived down through the centuries and which affect the politics of the Middle East today.

### **Isaac's Two Sons**

Further family complications were ahead. Isaac in turn had two sons, Jacob and Esau, twins by his wife Rebekah. Even before they were born, "the children struggled together within her" (Genesis 25:22). God explained: "Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger" (verse 23). Both brothers were to father great nations, a blessing from God to Abraham's grandsons.

Normally the firstborn would receive the birthright, but here it was to be different. The Bible records that Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of lentil stew (verses 29-34), showing how little it meant to him. Sometime later, Jacob tricked his father into giving him the birthright blessing (chapter 27). For this, "Esau hated Jacob" (verse 41).

Again, the consequences of this are with us to this day. The descendants of Esau (also called Edom, Genesis 25:30) intermarried with Ishmael's descendants, their bitterness and resentment against Jacob's descendants intensifying through the centuries. Esau's grandson Amalek (Genesis 36:12) was the father of the Amalekites, who became bitter foes of the descendants of Jacob, the 12 tribes of Israel. A prophecy about Amalek foretold endless war between them "from

generation to generation" (Exodus 17:16). Some scholars believe that many of today's Palestinians are largely the descendants of the Amalekites.

Let's now turn to the remarkable story of the tribes of Israel—their prophesied rise and fall.

### **The Rise and Fall of Ancient Israel**

One of God's most remarkable claims is found in Isaiah 46:9-10: "For I am God, and there is no other; I am God and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand ...'" (emphasis added throughout).

Here God not only says that He can reveal the future; He also claims the power to bring it to pass!

Nowhere is this more evident than in the remarkable prophecies of what would happen to Abraham's descendants through Jacob's offspring, the 12 tribes of Israel.

God's promises to Abraham, while astounding in their magnitude, nevertheless started small—with the promise of a son, Isaac, to be born to him and Sarah (Genesis 17:19-21; 21:1-3). Isaac in turn had two sons, Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:19-26). Jacob had 12 sons, from whom the 12 tribes of Israel are descended.

### **The Prophesied Birth Of A Nation**

But long before this, before Abraham even had a son at all, God had revealed to Abraham the fact that his descendants would go through one of the most remarkable "birth processes" a people could go through—they would be enslaved in a foreign land before emerging as a nation.

We find this prophesied in Genesis 15:13-14: "*Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.*"

This is referring, of course, to the Exodus. The remarkable chain of circumstances leading to the fulfillment of this prophecy is spelled out in Genesis 37-50 and Exodus 1-14.

While the Exodus itself is one of the Bible's best-known stories, the events that led up to it aren't so well understood. In brief, Jacob's favorite of his 12 sons, Joseph, was sold as a slave by his jealous brothers and ended up in Egypt (Genesis 37). There, through a series of events and God's blessings, Joseph thrived and amazingly rose to the highest position in the Egyptian government under the pharaoh (chapters 39-41).

When a famine struck the region, Joseph's family migrated to Egypt, which, thanks to Joseph's foresight, had stored enough grain to survive the famine (chapters 42-47). Joseph recognized that God had been behind all these events and that things had worked out this way so that his family would be spared and God's prophecies fulfilled (Genesis 50:19-20).

The 12 sons of Jacob—progenitors of the tribes of Israel—thrived in Egypt (Exodus 1:1-7). But then "there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph" (verse 8). The new pharaoh, feeling threatened by the growing number of Israelites, enslaved them and "made their lives bitter with hard bondage" (verse 14).

God called the son of two of these Hebrew slaves, Moses, who through miraculous circumstances had himself been a prince of Egypt but was later a fugitive, to lead Israel out of their enslavement. "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," He announced to Moses (Exodus 3:6).

God then followed with a remarkable prophecy of what He intended to do with Moses and his countrymen: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey ... Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (verses 7-10).

What God proposed to do was stunning—to deliver a people from enslavement at the hands of the greatest superpower of their day! The following chapters—covering the 10 plagues and the awesome parting of the Red Sea—show how God indeed miraculously delivered the Israelites, even down to the

detail of fulfilling His promise to Abraham that "they shall come out with great possessions" (Genesis 15:14; compare Exodus 11:2; 12:35-36).

### **Israelites in the Promised Land**

Following Israel's miraculous deliverance from Egypt came the periods of the 40 years in the wilderness, the conquest of the Promised Land and the period of the Israelite judges. Many specific minor prophecies were given and fulfilled during this time as recorded in the biblical books of Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua and Judges.

When we come to the establishment of the Israelite monarchy, we find that the dynasty of Israel's most famous king, David, had been prophesied to arise from the tribe of Judah centuries before, while the Israelites were still in Egypt (Genesis 49:8, 10).

*Genesis 49:8 You, Judah, your brothers will praise you: Your fingers on your enemies' throat, while your brothers honor you.*

*9 You're a lion's cub, Judah, home fresh from the kill, my son. Look at him, crouched like a lion, king of beasts; who dares mess with him?*

*10 The scepter shall not leave Judah; he'll keep a firm grip on the command staff until the ultimate ruler comes and the nations obey him.*

Like many prophecies, this was capable of dual fulfillment—meaning it had more than one intended meaning or fulfillment—in that it also foretold that the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, would come from the tribe of Judah (compare Hebrews 7:14).

*Hebrews 7:14 Everyone knows that our Lord came from the tribe of Judah. Moses never said anything about priests coming from that tribe.*

After righteous King David's passing, his son Solomon ascended the throne. Solomon had it all—a powerful kingdom he inherited from his father, humility, and wisdom and wealth granted to him by God (1 Kings 3:11-13). Under his reign the kingdom of the combined tribes of Israel grew even more powerful, dominating the region and known as The Golden Age in Jewish history.

But, regrettably, while Solomon knew what he should do, he lacked the personal character and conviction to carry it out. His heart was turned from serving the

one true God to serving the pagan gods and idols of the lands around him (1 Kings 11:4-8).

### **The Kingdom Divides**

Solomon's ill-chosen path set the kingdom on a road from which there would be no recovery. Because of Solomon's sins, God announced that He would tear the kingdom away from him and give it to one of Solomon's subjects (verses 11-13).

*1 kings 11:11 The LORD told Solomon, "Because this is your attitude and you have no respect for my promises or my laws that I commanded you to keep, I will certainly tear the kingdom away from you. I will give it to one of your servants.*

*12 But I will not do it in your lifetime because of your father David. I will tear it away from the hands of your son.*

*13 However, I will not tear the whole kingdom away from you. I will give your son one tribe for my servant David's sake and for the sake of Jerusalem, {the city} that I chose."*

Indeed, most of the kingdom would divide to follow a rival; only a minority would remain to follow Solomon's son and the kings of David's line.

This prophecy was fulfilled a few years later at Solomon's death when most of the tribes broke away to follow Jeroboam, leader of the northern kingdom, Israel. The rest remained with Solomon's successor, Rehoboam, leader of the southern kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 12; 2 Chronicles 10-11). The two kingdoms would become rivals—and sometimes enemies—for the next two centuries.

Most people assume that the Jews and Israelites are one and the same. But this is clearly not true. A look at history and these relevant Bible chapters shows they were two separate kingdoms, the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah (from which the term Jew is derived). As an interesting historical note, the first time the word Jews appears in the Bible, it is in 2 Kings 16:5-6 (King James Version) where Israel is allied with another king and at war with the Jews.

Israel's first king, Jeroboam, quickly established a pattern of idolatry and syncretism (mixing elements of true and false worship) from which the northern kingdom would never depart (1 Kings 12:26-33). God sent many prophets to warn the Israelite kings of the destruction that would come their way if they didn't return to Him.

The first of these was Ahijah, who gave this warning to Jeroboam's wife: "For the LORD will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the River ..." (1 Kings 14:15).

This was a clear pronouncement of the northern kingdom's fate if they wouldn't repent—they would be taken captive "beyond the River" (the Euphrates) at the hands of the coming Assyrian Empire.

Many other prophets followed, repeating God's warnings to the Israelites and their kings, pleading with them to repent lest they suffer that awful fate. Among these prophets were Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah, whose messages are recorded for us in the biblical books that bear their names.

But the messages of these prophets went unheeded. Finally, in 722 B.C., after a series of attacks, invasions and deportations, the northern kingdom was crushed and its people carried away into captivity at the hands of the Assyrians—"beyond the River" as God had warned their first king two centuries earlier.

### **Judah follows in Israel's footsteps**

The story of Judah, the southern kingdom, is somewhat different though equally tragic. Both kingdoms quickly abandoned the true God and sank into moral and spiritual depravity. While the northern kingdom never once had a righteous king, Judah at least had a handful who turned to God and instituted religious reforms aimed at turning the people to proper worship of the true God.

These righteous kings were somewhat successful, at least for a while. As a result, the kingdom of Judah outlasted its northern neighbor by more than a century. Yet eventually those in Judah, too, would pay a heavy price for rejecting their Creator.

They should have learned a lesson from the captivity of the 10 northern tribes, especially since some of the same Assyrian invasions devastated much of Judah. In Hezekiah's day virtually all of Judah except for its capital, Jerusalem, was conquered by the Assyrians—and Jerusalem, too, would have fallen had God not supernaturally delivered the city (2 Kings 18-19).

The prophet Isaiah, speaking to Hezekiah, was the first to reveal the specific enemy that would subjugate Judah if they, too, refused to change: "... 'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the LORD. 'And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon'" (2 Kings 20:16-18).

God sent many other prophets—including Micah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk and Jeremiah—to warn Judah, but to no avail. As the Assyrians vanquished the Israelites in several waves of invasions and deportations, so the Babylonians took away the Jews in several deportations before and after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Many details of the biblical accounts of the downfalls of Israel and Judah are confirmed by Assyrian and Babylonian records from the time, demonstrating again the accuracy of the biblical record.

### **Judah's Exile And Return**

The outcome of Judah's exile, however, was far different from that of the northern kingdom. Israel was deported to the far reaches of the Assyrian Empire and its people lost their national and ethnic identity. But God gave Judah an encouraging promise through this prophecy from Jeremiah:

"For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity ..." (Jeremiah 29:10-14).

Here, too, we find a remarkable prophecy that was fulfilled to the letter. This 70-year period appears to have begun with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of Solomon's temple—the center of Jewish worship—in 586 B.C. and to have concluded with the completion of a new Jerusalem temple in 516 B.C. The biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah record the return of many of the Jewish exiles from Babylon.

## **The Four Empires of Daniel's Prophecies**

Among the Jewish captives taken from Judah and exiled to Babylon was a young man whose Hebrew name was Daniel, renamed Belteshazzar by the Babylonians (Daniel 1:1-7). Daniel lived in the remarkable times of the downfall of the kingdoms of both Judah and Babylon. He served as a high official in both the Babylonian government and that of its successor, the Medo-Persian Empire.

Daniel's book prophesied events fulfilled many centuries ago as well as major events yet to come. It reveals a history of the region, written in advance, from Daniel's time right up to the return of Jesus Christ.

Yet at the end of the book God instructed Daniel to "shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase" (Daniel 12:4). This indicates that certain major prophecies that previously wouldn't have made no sense will be understandable as the end approaches.

The prophecies of Daniel provide proof of the accuracy of the Bible. Many of his prophecies are so detailed and specific that they have long confounded Bible critics.

In fact, some skeptics have not challenged the content of Daniel's prophetic accuracy. Rather than admit that his words are indeed inspired, they have simply labeled his book a fraud. They claim that it was not written by Daniel in the sixth century B.C.—timing which is evident by events written of in the book—but that it was penned by an unknown author in the 160s B.C., long after many of the events prophesied in the book came to pass. This, the critics allege, is the real reason for the book's startling prophetic accuracy!

Daniel's testimony challenges the critics. But let's first consider the nature of the critics' approach. They dispute Daniel's authorship because he refers to himself in the early chapters in the third person, as if writing about someone else. However, as *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* points out, this "was the custom among ancient authors of historical memoirs ..." (1985, Vol. 7, p. 4). In relating some of his experiences Daniel did write in the first person (Daniel 7:15; 8:15; 9:2; 10:2).

The identity of Daniel's critics is significant as well. The first person to question the authenticity of Daniel's authorship was the Greek scholar and historian Porphyry,

who lived A.D. 233-304. He is labeled by historians as a Neoplatonist, which means he subscribed to the doctrines of the Greek philosopher Plato rather than the Bible. "Porphyry is well known as a violent opponent of Christianity and defender of Paganism" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition, Vol. 22, p. 104, "Porphyry").

Since Porphyry was an enemy of Christianity, his objectivity is open to question. He had no factual basis for his opinion, and his view contradicted the testimony of Jesus Christ, who referred to Daniel as the author of the book (Matthew 24:15).

The biblical scholar Jerome (A.D. 340-420) refuted Porphyry's contention. Thereafter no one took Porphyry's remarks seriously again until many centuries later. "... He was more or less dismissed by Christian scholarship as a mere pagan detractor who had allowed a naturalistic bias to warp his judgment. But during the time of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, all supernatural elements in Scripture came under suspicion ..." (*Expositor's*, p. 13).

### **Phenomenal prophecy and fulfillment**

The accuracy of Daniel's prophecies of remotely distant events is spectacular. For example, in the "70 weeks" prophecy recorded in Daniel 9:24-27,

<sup>24</sup> "Seventy sets of seven time periods have been assigned for your people and your holy city. These time periods will serve to bring an end to rebellion, to stop sin, to forgive wrongs, to usher in everlasting righteousness, to put a seal on a prophet's vision, and to anoint the Most Holy One.

<sup>25</sup> Learn, then, and understand that from the time the command is given to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the anointed prince comes, seven sets of seven time periods and sixty-two sets of seven time periods will pass. Jerusalem will be restored and rebuilt with a city square and a moat during the troubles of those times.

<sup>26</sup> But after the sixty-two sets of seven time periods, the Anointed One will be cut off and have nothing. The city and the holy place will be destroyed with the prince who is to come. His end will come with a flood until the end of the destructive war that has been determined.

<sup>27</sup> He will confirm his promise with many for one set of seven time periods. In the middle of the seven time periods, he will stop the sacrifices and food offerings. This will happen along with disgusting things that cause destruction until {those

time periods} come to an end. It has been determined that this will happen to those who destroy {the city}."

"Daniel predicts the precise year of Christ's appearance and the beginning of his ministry in A.D. 27" (*Expositor's*, p. 9).

Another amazing prophecy recorded by Daniel is his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2. In the second year of his reign the Babylonian king had a troubling dream that none of his counselors could explain. Babylonian culture placed considerable emphasis on dreams, and Nebuchadnezzar was convinced that this one was of great importance (Daniel 2:1-3).

Daniel 2:1,2 During the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, he had some dreams. He was troubled, but he stayed asleep.

<sup>2</sup> The king sent for the magicians, psychics, sorcerers, and astrologers so that they could tell him what he had dreamed. So they came to the king.

His dream gives us a "disclosure of God's plan for the ages till the final triumph of Christ" and "presents the foreordained succession of world powers that are to dominate the Near East till the final victory of the Messiah in the last days" (*Expositor's*, pp. 39, 46).

Without prior knowledge of its content, Daniel explained the details of the dream to Nebuchadnezzar: "You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay" (Daniel 2:31-33).

Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that his Babylonian Empire was represented by the head of gold (verses 37-38). The silver, bronze and iron components of the image, or statue, represented three powerful empires that were to follow mighty Babylon (verses 39-40).

This interpretation provided an astounding preview of history. Nebuchadnezzar's dream occurred and was interpreted by Daniel about 600 B.C. The image represented, in symbolic form, the sequence of great empires that would dominate the region's political scene for centuries.

"The silver empire was to be Medo- Persia, which began with Cyrus the Great, who conquered Babylon in 539 ... This silver empire was supreme in the Near and Middle East for about two centuries" (*Expositor's*, p. 47).

"The bronze empire was the Greco-Macedonian Empire established by Alexander the Great ... The bronze kingdom lasted for about 260 or 300 years before it was supplanted by the fourth kingdom" (*ibid.*).

"Iron connotes toughness and ruthlessness and describes the Roman Empire that reached its widest extent under the reign of Trajan" (*ibid.*). Trajan reigned as emperor A.D. 98-117, and the Roman Empire itself ruled for many centuries.

The fourth empire was depicted as having 10 toes. The feet and toes were composed partly of iron and partly of clay, as verse 41 explains. "Verse 41 deals with a later phase or outgrowth of this fourth empire, symbolized by the feet and ten toes—made up of iron and earthenware, a fragile base for the huge monument. The text clearly implies that this final phase will be marked by some sort of federation rather than by a powerful single realm" (*ibid.*).

### **Another dream adds important details**

Additional aspects of this succession of world-ruling empires were revealed to Daniel in a later dream. This time the four empires were represented by four beasts: a lion (Babylonian Empire), a bear (Medo-Persian Empire), a leopard (Greco-Macedonian Empire) and a fourth beast described as "terrible" and unlike the other three (Daniel 7:1-7).

<sup>1</sup> Daniel 7:1 In Belshazzar's first year as king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream. He saw a vision while he was asleep. He wrote down the main parts of the dream.

<sup>2</sup> In my visions at night I, Daniel, saw the four winds of heaven stirring up the Mediterranean Sea.

<sup>3</sup> Four large animals, each one different from the others, came out of the sea.

<sup>4</sup> The first animal was like a lion, but it had wings like an eagle. I watched until its wings were plucked off and it was lifted off the ground. It was made to stand on two feet like a human and was given a human mind.

<sup>5</sup> I saw a second animal. It looked like a bear. It was raised on one side and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, "Get up, and eat as much meat as you want."

<sup>6</sup> After this, I saw another animal. It looked like a leopard. On its back it had four

wings, like the wings of a bird. The animal also had four heads. It was given power to rule.

7 After this, I saw a fourth animal in my vision during the night. It was terrifying, dreadful, extraordinarily strong, and had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed its victims and trampled whatever was left. It acted differently from all the other animals that I had seen before. It had ten horns.

Notice what verse 7 says about this fourth creature: "After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth [paralleling the iron legs of the prior dream]; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns."

What does this description mean? It too is a reference to the great power of Rome, which crushed all who opposed it. "Thus the superior power of the colossus of Rome ... is emphasized in the symbolism of this terrible fourth beast" (*Expositor's*, p. 87).

Verse 8 of Daniel 7 elaborates on the 10 horns: "I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots." Later in the chapter we see that this little horn exalts himself to the position of an internationally powerful religious leader (verses 24-25), even commanding a false religious system that persecutes the true followers of God.

Daniel 7:9-14 takes us right through to Christ's establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth: **"Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed."** So this Roman system, through its periodic revivals down through history, continues right to the time of the end when Jesus Christ returns to rule the earth.

Revelation 17 also helps us in understanding this end-time power. In this chapter it is again depicted as a beast, but now we see that its final manifestation includes 10 "kings"—leaders of nations or groups of nations—who "receive authority for one hour" with the ruler of this end-time superpower, an individual the Bible refers to as "the beast" (Revelation 17:12-13). This final revival of the

Roman Empire leads into Christ's return as they "make war with the Lamb" (verse 14).

All of this concurs with Daniel 2:44, which obviously indicates that the second coming of Christ will occur in a time during which vestiges of the fourth beast or kingdom (the Roman Empire) still exist: "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."

The greater part of these prophetic events, as detailed by the two dreams, has already been fulfilled. Their detailed completion affirms the divine inspiration of the Bible. The odds of any person foreseeing this on his own defy credibility. "... There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days" (Daniel 2:28).

## **The Coming of Islam**

The descendants of Ishmael lived in relative obscurity throughout the period of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman Empires. They mostly kept to themselves in the Arabian Peninsula where desert life was hard, frequently fighting among themselves. But this changed early in the seventh century, less than 600 years after the time of Jesus Christ, when the most famous of Ishmael's descendants came on the scene.

Until the early 600s the Arabs were idol worshipers. The great temple in Mecca had 365 idols (one for each day of the year) and was a source of considerable revenue for local merchants who relied on pilgrims visiting the site for their income.

This religious landscape was to change dramatically with the prophet Muhammad and the religion he founded, Islam.

Muhammad (sometimes spelled Mohammed or Mahomet) was of the Hashemite family (in Arabic, Beni Hashim) of the powerful Koreish (or Quraish)

tribe, which controlled the pagan temple in Mecca. According to Islamic belief, it was near Mecca, at Mt. Hira, that the archangel Gabriel first appeared to Muhammad in A.D. 610, revealing wisdom from God. This and subsequent revelations form the Koran (or Quran), the holy scriptures of Islam, a book roughly the length of the New Testament.

Muhammad, whose name means "highly praised," became a courageous and determined preacher of monotheism, the belief in one God, a belief that threatened the commercial prosperity of other members of his tribe. Their attempts to have him killed failed, and in a short time Muhammad brought an end to the polytheistic idolatry of the area, replacing it with Islam (literally meaning "surrender" or "submission" to the one true God, Allah).

Muhammad's preaching achieved something that had eluded Ishmael's descendants from the beginning—unity, thereby enabling them to become a great nation that could spread out and influence other nations.

From these lowly beginnings in the desert of the Arabian Peninsula, Islam has spread throughout the world. Today 57 countries are in the Islamic Conference, comprising more than a quarter of all the nations on earth.

Although 22 of them are Arab nations, many of which are populated with descendants of Ishmael, another 35 nations also are either exclusively or significantly Islamic. These range geographically from West Africa across the center of the world to Indonesia, a wide belt of nations that identify with each other as followers of Islam.

In addition, millions more Muslims, followers of Islam, live in North America and Western Europe. The religion continues to expand rapidly due to a high birth rate and aggressive proselytizing.

Today Islam (pronounced Is-LAM, with the emphasis on the second syllable) has around 1.3 billion followers. They all worship Al-LAH (similar emphasis on the second syllable), whom they consider to be the one true God. They worship in mosques, with Friday as their chosen day of worship, though it is also permissible for adherents to work on that day.

Their one-sentence creed, called the shahadah ("testimony") is only eight words in Arabic—meaning in English "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His

Prophet." A solemn and sincere recitation of these words is the sole requirement for being a Muslim. The word Muslim (or Moslem) means "one who submits (to Allah)."

Muhammad died on June 8, A.D. 632, leaving no male heir and no designated successor. The result was chaos and confusion throughout the Islamic Empire, which after only a decade had already grown to one third the size of the present 48 continental United States.

### **Rapid expansion of the Islamic Empire**

To cries of Allahu Akbar ("God is Great!"), the Islamic call to arms, the camel- and horse-mounted Arab warriors were formidable opponents, defeating all the forces that were sent against them. Not since the days of Alexander the Great had there been such a force, conquering all before it so quickly. A century of conquest lay before them. Syria and the Holy Land were taken in 635-6; the area of Iraq, the following year; Egypt and Persia, four years later.

Jerusalem was their greatest prize, captured in 638. Called Al-Kuds in Arabic, meaning "the Holy," Jerusalem remains the third-holiest city of Islam, after Mecca and Medina. Muslims believe that Muhammad ascended to heaven on his winged steed Burak from the rock that is visible inside the Dome of the Rock, built in the late seventh century and one of the most architecturally magnificent buildings on earth.

Muslims also believe this is where Abraham came to sacrifice his son—the son, however, being Ishmael rather than Isaac as the Bible attests (Genesis 22:1-14). Built on the great platform of the Temple Mount constructed centuries earlier by Herod the Great, the Dome of the Rock and the surrounding area is today the most bitterly contested piece of real estate on earth.

Within a century after the death of Muhammad, the Arab Empire stretched from the Middle East across North Africa to Spain in the west and eastward across Central Asia to India. One of their advances even reached the gates of Paris before being halted by Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours near Poitiers in 732, exactly 100 years after Muhammad's death.

Rapid Muslim expansion now halted until the 12th century, when another great expansion of Islam took place under the Sufis (Muslim mystics) who spread Islam

throughout India, Central Asia, Turkey and sub-Saharan Africa. Muslim traders helped spread the religion even further, to Indonesia, the Malay Peninsula and China.

Following the assassination of the Caliph Omar in November 644 while leading prayers in the mosque of Medina, a body of electors once again bypassed Ali when choosing a successor. The caliphate was bestowed on Othman ibn Affan, who had been an early convert to Islam and a close companion of the prophet.

During his period of rule the Koran was completed in its present form. Previously, most of its contents had simply been memorized in the heads of Muhammad's followers (Muhammad, himself illiterate, had never written them down). These were now collected by a team of men authorized to put the sacred writings together, under the leadership of the Islamic scholar Zayd ibn Thabit.

Muslims believe the Koran is the literal word of God (Kalimat Allah), not the words of Muhammad. The first words of the Koran are "In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate."

### **Islam Splits Over Succession**

Islam grew in numbers and resolve and were increasingly embittered at the dominance of the Sunni Muslims. This animosity continues to the present day.

The majority Sunnis make up about 85 percent of all Muslims, and the Shiites (or Shia) constitute the remainder. Although they agree on the fundamentals of Islam, political, theological and philosophical differences have further widened the gap between the two. Complicating things even further has been the tendency among the Shiite Muslims to break up into various sects.

Today, the Shiites are the dominant force in Iran and the biggest single religious community in Lebanon and Iraq. Remembering the fanaticism of the Iranian Revolution that overthrew the shah in 1979, many people think Shiites are inclined toward terrorism. However, most anti-Western terrorists come from the Wahhabi sect of Sunni Islam, which originated in Saudi Arabia in the 18th century.

One of the appeals of Islam is the emphasis on Ummah or community. "Though there have been many Islamic sects and movements, all followers are bound by a common faith and a sense of belonging to a single community" (ibid., p. 912). This sense of community has only been strengthened in the last 200 years during the period of Western supremacy. Achieving Arab and Islamic unity is very much a desire of Muslims in today's world.

### **Ishmael Becomes The Prophesied "Great Nation"**

As had been divinely promised to Abraham and Hagar concerning their son so many centuries earlier, Ishmael truly did become a "great nation" (Genesis 17:20; 21:18)—one of the greatest empires the world has ever known.

Like all civilizations, however, the Abbasid dynasty came to an end after falling into a slow decay and decline. During this period, as central authority waned, the unity of Islam was shattered, a problem that impedes Muslims to this day. The deathblow for the empire came when the Mongol hordes descended on Baghdad in 1258, killing the last caliph, slaughtering the city's inhabitants and ending the empire.

### **The Crusades: Battle for the Holy Land**

During the reigns of the Abbasid caliphs, a major clash occurred between Islam and Catholic Europe. With the expansion of Islam into the Iberian Peninsula and the attempt to conquer France, there had already been conflict between the two, but the wresting of Jerusalem from the forces of Islam on July 15, 1099, was the beginning of a long and protracted period of rivalry between the two religious forces.

The European Crusaders pillaged, raped, murdered and enslaved the peoples of Jerusalem in a frenzy of carnage that both Jews and Muslims remember to this day. The sacred Dome of the Rock was taken over and turned into a church, with the Christian cross replacing the Islamic crescent. Muslims were incensed and vowed to retake the city from the infidels (meaning "unbelievers," originally a Latin word used by Catholics to label Muslims).

Not until Oct. 2, 1187, were Islamic forces able to take back control of Jerusalem, under the leadership of Saladin (Salah ad-Din, meaning

"Righteousness of the Faith"), the sultan of Egypt and Syria. Saladin proclaimed jihad (holy war) to retake Palestine from the enemies of Islam.

The golden cross at the top of the Dome of the Rock was replaced by the Muslim crescent, but Saladin did not seek revenge on his opponents. Instead, he treated both enemy soldiers and the civilian population with mercy and kindness—a stark contrast to the Europeans who had slaughtered tens of thousands when they took the city.

There were to be more Crusades for another century, briefly retaking Jerusalem from 1229 to 1239 and 1243 to 1244, but the forces of the cross eventually had to leave the Holy Land to Muslims. Not until 1917, during World War I, were Western Christians again able to retake Jerusalem, and then they kept control of the city for only three decades.

### **The rise of the Ottoman Empire**

The next great power in the region was that of the Ottoman Turks, who seized control of Constantinople in 1453, finally destroying the collapsing Byzantine Empire founded by Rome more than a millennium earlier. The Turks, an Islamic but non-Arab people, took control of Jerusalem in 1517 and were to dominate the Middle East for the following four centuries.

The Ottomans expanded rapidly into southeastern Europe and on to the gates of Vienna before being pushed back toward the end of the 17th century. A period of decline followed in the 19th century with nations throughout the Balkans and North Africa breaking away from Ottoman rule.

The Arabs resented Turkish control and waited patiently for an opportunity to regain their independence and the former days of glory. Ishmael's sons would be heard from again.

### **The Jews: From the Dispersion to the Modern Israeli State**

By the time the prophet Muhammad was preaching the tenets of the new Islamic religion, the Jews had not had a state for some five centuries. They had rebelled against Roman rule in A.D. 66, a rebellion that took the

Romans four years to crush. Thereafter, the Jerusalem temple lay in ruins.

A later rebellion from 132 to 135 (the Bar-Kokhba revolt) led to the utter destruction of Jerusalem. The Romans built a new town on its ruins, renaming it Aelia Capitolina. No Jew was allowed to set foot there on pain of death. The Jewish nation-state was no more. It was not to exist again until the middle of the 20th century.

Following defeat in the two Jewish revolts, many of the surviving Jews fled Judea for other parts of the Roman Empire and beyond. From 638 to 1917 Jerusalem was under Islamic rule except for a short period during the Crusades.

Scattered throughout the nations, the Jewish people yearned to return to their homeland. Persecuted by governments and the Roman church, denied equal rights, frequently expelled from the new nations in which they had settled, the Jewish people's suffering continued down through the centuries.

Toward the end of the 19th century Jews began to return to their traditional homeland as the Zionist movement was born. Under the rule of the declining Ottoman Turks, the returning Jews joined other Jews who had remained in the area for centuries. They prospered and grew in number.

In 1917, after the defeat of the Ottoman Turks, the area came under the control of the British. In the same year, the British government announced the Balfour Declaration, named for the British foreign secretary Arthur Balfour, which promised Zionists a national homeland in Palestine. Meanwhile, encouraging Arab revolt against the Ottoman Turks who had sided with Germany in World War I, the British were making promises to the Arabs of independence, offering them their own homelands—two promises that would prove violently contradictory.

During the three decades of British rule the Jewish population in the area continued to grow—and to be increasingly seen as a threat by the native Arab population. Clashes between the two ethnic groups became more and more frequent. Jewish resistance against British rule and unmanageable civil strife led to a British withdrawal and the division of

Palestine by the United Nations. The 1947 UN-approved Resolution 181 called for partitioning the British-ruled Palestine Mandate into a Jewish state and an Arab state and for Jerusalem to be an international UN-administered city. The resolution was accepted by the Jews in Palestine, but rejected by the Arabs there and by all Arab states.

The Jewish nation of Israel was declared the evening of May 14-15, 1948, with a population of half a million. It was immediately attacked by armies from five Arab nations—Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt. Israel triumphed, but decades of violence were to follow, with additional wars in 1956, 1967, 1973 and 1982. Arab resentment at Israel's existence remains unresolved, the Jewish state still insecure in a troubled, hostile region.

The majority of the Jewish people still reside outside the land of Israel—many living in the United States, Europe and Russia.

### **Israel's Amazing Story: Fulfillment of Bible Prophecy**

**"What is it that led the Jews to place themselves, after the greatest disaster in their history [the Holocaust], in a danger zone?" The surprising truth is that Jewish rule over Jerusalem is an essential element of end-time biblical prophecy!**

Ever since the Roman siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the ultimate loss of the city for nearly two millennia beginning in A.D. 135, many generations of the Jewish people have held a deep desire to return to the Holy Land. Their almost universal cry has been, "Next year in Jerusalem!"

In the earliest books of the Bible, God had decreed that the 12 tribes of Israel should inherit the Promised Land, also called the Holy Land. The book of Joshua and the first chapter of Judges record how Israel, with God's help, conquered the area of ancient Canaan, which is primarily the land known as Israel today.

## **A Golden Age—Then Trouble**

Then, some 3,000 years ago, the monarchy of the Jewish king David and his son Solomon led Israel to the fullest expansion of the Promised Land. During that golden age, the people's condition was aptly summed up in utopian terms: "And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan as far as Beersheba [cities representing the northern and southern extent of ancient Israel], all the days of Solomon" (1 Kings 4:25).

Primarily because of blatant idolatry, these favorable conditions did not continue long. After Solomon's death, the kingdom of Israel was divided into two separate countries followed by national captivity of the northern 10 tribes some 200 years later. The two southern tribes (making up the kingdom of Judah, its people known as the Jews) followed their northern cousins in rejecting God and turning to idolatry. They soon met the same fate. The kingdom of Judah was invaded and its citizens deported 136 years after the demise of the northern kingdom of Israel.

Eventually a small percentage of Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem about 500 years before the time of Christ. A second temple was built—only to be destroyed by Titus' Roman legions in A.D. 70, helping precipitate another diaspora or dispersion of the Jewish people to other nations.

Nonetheless, massive depopulation was not immediate and the Jews remaining in Jerusalem again revolted against the Romans in A.D. 132-135, unsuccessfully, leading to another scattering. Nevertheless, a small number of Jews remained in parts of the Holy Land throughout the intervening centuries.

## **Jewry In Palestine Before Statehood**

By the mid-19th century the Jewish population had reached 10,000, including 8,000 in Jerusalem alone. Many were immigrants from Poland and Lithuania. Russian emigration became more pronounced between 1882 and 1903 with 25,000 Jews entering Palestine. In fact, the Jewish population of Jerusalem alone had reached 25,000 by 1889, compared with 14,000 Arabs.

Still, the Jews remained a minority in the Holy Land by the turn of the century. Their population, however, continued to rise as time went by. For instance, between 1933 and 1936 the Jewish presence in the Holy Land increased from about 235,000 to nearly 385,000.

Determined Arab resistance began to slow this increase in 1937, but all future setbacks proved temporary. In the aftermath of World War II, between late summer of 1945 and late spring of 1948, perhaps 40,000 Jews entered Palestine secretly. The first half of 1946 also saw a further 10,000 Jewish immigrants enter the Holy Land by boat.

By the time statehood finally arrived on May 14, 1948, the Jewish population of the Holy Land had reached about 700,000. (We mention a smattering of these statistics because of a general false impression that there were very few Jews in Palestine before statehood.)

In spite of periodic Arab and later British efforts to limit Jewish immigration, the flow of people to the Holy Land continued off and on—especially during the first half of the 20th century.

David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel, understood the importance of having a considerable Jewish presence in the Holy Land when statehood might finally be achieved.

In early 1935, shortly before World War II broke out, Ben-Gurion observed with exceptional prophetic insight: "The disaster which has befallen German Jews is not limited to Germany alone. Hitler's regime places the entire Jewish people in danger . . . [It] cannot long survive without a war of revenge against France, Poland, Czechoslovakia . . . and against Soviet Russia . . . Who knows; perhaps only four or five years, if not less, stand between us and that awful day . . .

*"In this period we must double our numbers [in the Holy Land], for the size of the Jewish population on that day may determine our fate at the post-war settlement"* (quoted by Noah Lucas, *Modern History of Israel*, 1975, p. 148, emphasis added throughout article). The necessary groundwork had been laid years in advance of statehood for a more massive immigration in

decades to follow.

### **Theodor Herzl, Zionist pioneer**

Theodor Herzl, Paris correspondent for a prominent Viennese newspaper in the late 1800s, originally believed that Jews should solve their dilemmas by gradual assimilation into the gentile world.

Despite his Jewish roots, in 1892 Herzl had even denied the presence of French anti-Semitism, stating that "the French people remain strangers to, and without understanding of, anti-Semitism" (quoted by Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Siege*, 1986, p. 65).

Covering the Paris trial of the French military officer Alfred Dreyfus, a Jew, in 1894 radically altered Herzl's perspective. Dreyfus' trumped-up conviction and subsequent harsh imprisonment based on false evidence was a farce. But what shocked Herzl most was the ugly anti-Semitism displayed by the attendant crowds.

He quickly grasped the seriousness of the situation and immediately began thinking in terms of getting the Jews out of Europe, the sooner the better. Commented O'Brien: "The Zionists had been right about the thing that mattered most. *They had sensed that the Jews of Europe were in deadly danger . . . Herzl, when Hitler was only six, had already sensed the need for a mass exodus of European Jews*" (p. 315).

Theodor Herzl formed the World Zionist Organization with a view to establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. Noted British historian Martin Gilbert has written of Herzl: "On 3 September 1897 he wrote in his diary, 'Were I to sum up the Basle Congress [in Switzerland] in a word . . . it would be this: *At Basle I founded the Jewish State*. If I said this out loud today, I would be answered by universal laughter. Perhaps in five years, and certainly in fifty, everyone will know it" (*Israel: A History*, 1998, p. 15).

In fact, it took just over 50. Zionist Jews like Herzl and Chaim Weizmann, a chemist from Russia residing in Manchester, were also instrumental in saving a remnant of European Jews from the future Holocaust. Partially due to their efforts: "there were more than 700,000 Jews in Israel when the New

State was declared" (*The Siege*, p. 315).

### **The crucial Balfour Declaration**

Herzl died at only 44 and it was left for Weizmann to carry the baton forward. This he did effectively for several decades right up to statehood in 1948. Chaim Weizmann was instrumental in Zionist negotiations with the British government in the process of formulating the Balfour Declaration of 1917.

In brief this benchmark document stated: "His Majesty's Government view with favour *the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people*, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine . . ." (Nov. 2, 1917).

In early December of 1917, the British army in Palestine expelled Turkish forces from Jerusalem, just over a month after Balfour. Theoretically, the way was now open for the British declaration to be implemented in constructing a Jewish national home, paving the way for the Jews to leave continental Europe. Some little progress was made towards these two major goals, although accompanied by many frustrating and supremely costly setbacks as well.

Although 250,000 German Jews managed to find refuge in other nations, those who emigrated to other places in continental Europe before World War II (1939-1945) soon found themselves back in Nazi hands, as David Ben-Gurion had foreseen in early 1935. Hitler's armies had overrun Europe. Many Jews were deported to Auschwitz and other death camps.

Even though the British record is far from perfect during this troubled era, prior to the war the nation did receive 40,000 German and Austrian Jews. It also made provision for 10,000 Jewish children to escape to Britain from Hitler's clutches.

### **A Milestone In World History**

Much has been written about the near-miraculous nature of the founding, against all odds, of the modern state of Israel.

For instance, Sir Martin Gilbert observed: "Herzl's call for Jewish statehood seemed too grandiose, too fraught with the complications of local Turkish and Arab opposition, too ambitious with regard to the accepted place of the Jew in the world, to be more than an extraordinary dream, an eccentricity" (*Israel: A History*, p. 13).

In truth, the Jews achieved a modern nation-state in the Holy Land (against a fierce and determined opposition—including at times some very influential Jews) *simply because God had foretold that it would occur*. A Jewish state in the Holy Land had to exist so that certain biblical prophecies could be fulfilled.

### **The Unrealized Biblical Dimension**

Let's clearly understand that the survival of the religion and culture of this ancient biblical people defies the odds. The fact that the Jews were not assimilated into the nations to any significant degree is unprecedented.

Now, since the 1967 Six-Day War, the Jewish people are again in possession of Jerusalem. On the western side of the Temple Mount, at the retaining wall for the vast platform Herod the Great constructed to support the temple of God in Jesus' day (now known as the Western or Wailing Wall), many Jews still cry and bemoan the ancient loss of the temple and pray earnestly for its restoration.

In His final major prophecy before His crucifixion, Jesus Christ described conditions wherein the Jews would again control Jerusalem. He said that the "holy place" would be desecrated, stating: "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place . . . then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Matthew 24:15-16).

Yet Jesus Christ's prophecy makes it clear that someone or something else will defile the holy place in Jerusalem until His return.

Furthermore, even after the fledgling nation of Israel was established, it appeared that its inhabitants would never control Jerusalem because the Arab nations had pledged to prevent it. Yet during the Six-Day War of 1967 Israel took full possession of its ancient capital. Still the Temple Mount or holy place was left under Arab supervision, making any building of a temple or setting up of a "holy place" yet future. Christians should look to God to work out events so that His will may be fulfilled.

The state of Israel has a substantial role to play in the realization of key biblical prophecies. Bible prophecies reveal that in the Last Days, Israel's enemies will launch a fierce attack upon Israel and Jerusalem. (Zechariah 12:1)

Zechariah 12:1. This is the prophetic revelation, the word of the LORD about Israel. The LORD—who spread out the heavens, laid the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit in a person—says,

<sup>2</sup> "I'm going to make Jerusalem like a cup {of wine} that makes all the surrounding people stagger. They will attack Judah along with Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup> On that day I will make Jerusalem a stone too heavy for all the nations to lift. All who try to lift it will be severely injured. All the nations in the world will gather {to fight} against Jerusalem."

<sup>4</sup> The LORD declares, "On that day I will strike every horse with panic and every rider with madness. I will watch over the people of Judah, but I will strike all the horses of the nations blind.

<sup>5</sup> Then the leaders of Judah will think to themselves, 'The people who live in Jerusalem are strong because of the LORD of Armies, their God.'

<sup>6</sup> "On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like a fire on a pile of wood and like a burning torch among freshly cut straw. They will burn up all the surrounding nations to the right and to the left. But the people of Jerusalem will remain safe in Jerusalem.

<sup>7</sup> "The LORD will save Judah's tents first so that the honor of David's family and the honor of those who live in Jerusalem will not be greater than the honor of Judah.

<sup>8</sup> On that day the LORD will defend those who live in Jerusalem so that even those who stumble will be like David, and David's family will be like God, like the Messenger of the LORD ahead of them.

<sup>9</sup> "On that day I will seek to destroy all the nations who attack Jerusalem

The Appearance and Acceptance of Messiah

### **The People of Jerusalem Will Look at the One They Pierced**

<sup>10</sup> "I will pour out the Spirit of blessing and mercy on David's family and on those who live in Jerusalem. They will look at me, whom they have stabbed. Then they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only son, and they will cry bitterly for him as one cries for a firstborn son.

<sup>11</sup> On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as intense as the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo.

<sup>12</sup> The land will mourn, each family by itself: the family of David by itself, and the wives by themselves; the family of Nathan by itself, and the wives by themselves;

<sup>13</sup> the family of Levi by itself, and the wives by themselves; the family of Shimei by itself, and the wives by themselves.

<sup>14</sup> All the families that are left {will mourn}, each by itself, and the wives by themselves."

A gracious work of God to be wrought in his people, in order to the work that is to be wrought for them. When he seeks to destroy their enemies he will *pour upon them the Spirit of grace and supplication*. Note, When God intends great mercy for his people the first thing he does is to set them a praying; thus he seeks to destroy their enemies by stirring them up to seek to him that he would do it for them; because, though he has proposed it and promised it, and it is for his own glory to do it, yet he will *for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, [Eze 36:37](#)*. Ask, and it shall be given.